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# EFL TO ESL: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH L2 STUDENTS IN TRANSITION

Michael W. Schwartz

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**EFL TO ESL: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL  
ENGLISH L2 STUDENTS IN TRANSITION**

BY

**Michael W. Schwartz**

B.A., English, Fort Lewis College, 1985  
M.A., TESL, University of Central Missouri, 1989

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy  
Educational Linguistics**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**July 2012**

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and my father, my two biggest supporters and cheerleaders. Even though mom did not see the end result, she has been with me in my heart and mind always. I know she is proud of me. I love you mom! And to dad, who understood, when others did not, what was required of me to finish. I would not be writing this dedication today if it were not for his unwavering support and guidance. Thank you dad. I love you!

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the person who has made the greatest sacrifice of all, my daughter, Myles Schwartz. At 6 years old, you had to learn how to use a telephone and how to nurture a father-daughter relationship from 1,000 miles away. You were asked to grow up faster than most children your age. You handled this challenge with grace, dignity, compassion, and courage. Your love, support, and understanding have been my strength throughout. I am blessed to have you as my daughter. Thank you and I love you!

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**ABSTRACT**

This is a case study of four international English L2 students transitioning from their home countries into the academic context of a US university. It investigates the intersections of identity and investment as English L2 students interact with English resources, and how proficiency may or may not mitigate the type and quality of access to English resources. Furthermore, the study proposes a learner as agent framework for understanding the processes of gaining access to English resources. Finally, the study argues that proficiency is a complex issue that needs to be analyzed and defined locally rather than globally and that decontextualized proficiency assessments only provide a partial account of an L2 learner's language skills.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The English language, originally evolving out of various Germanic dialects, became a language in its own right only 1,500 years ago (Baugh & Cable, 1978). Over the centuries, like all languages, it has undergone significant structural, lexical, and phonological changes to the point where the English of the 5<sup>th</sup> century is virtually incomprehensible to the speakers of English today. Yet, these internal changes, it can be argued, dwarf the global influences English has had since. Today, English has become the *lingua franca* of global commerce, science, technology, and tourism.

Because of these increasing global influences, many countries around the world require school age children to begin learning English in middle or elementary school, with some even introducing it as a subject of study as early as kindergarten or first grade. In effect, this has resulted in a world population that speaks English as a second or additional language that out numbers first language (L1) learners of English by nearly 2 to 1 (Saville-Troike, 2006). In fact, the influence is so pronounced that the world has been demarcated according to three contexts: inner circle countries, outer circle countries, and expanding circle countries. Inner circle countries included countries where English is the native language, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Outer circle countries are post-colonial countries, such as South Africa, the Philippines, India, and Pakistan where English is one of the official languages of the country. Expanding circle countries include countries where English is studied as a foreign language but is not an official language of the country, such as China, Mexico, Japan, and Russia

(Kachru & Nelson, 1996). In short, the demand for English, particularly from expanding circle countries, has never been greater.

Much of the research on second language acquisition over the past several decades has focused on cognitive processing, effective teaching strategies, and the effects of age, attitude, and personality on second language (L2) learning. Even so, we still have relatively few definitive answers about the L2 learning process. For example, we still cannot say with certainty what qualities produce good language learners, what components comprise the optimal language learning context, or whether explicit language instruction is helpful or not. Furthermore, we know even less about the effects of learning an L2 on an individual, particularly the emotional and psychological effects involved when adults learn a second language. What we do know is that people increasingly come from around the world to the United States, and other inner circle countries, with the hopes and dreams of becoming more proficient users of English, of pursuing academic degrees, and/or of finding romance.

The following dissertation describes the stories of four adult speaker/learners of English as an additional language from vastly different countries and different linguistic and cultural backgrounds as they adjust to living and studying at a university in the United States. It filets the issues of identity construction, investment, gaining access to English resources, and L2 proficiency through expanding circle and inner circle lenses. It openly presents these issues as significant challenges and barriers for adult learners of English. In this sense, the study *EFL to ESL: A Case Study of University International English L2 Students in Transition* takes a unique approach to addressing the following research questions.

## Research Questions

1. In what ways do identity, motivation, and access intersect with the second language learning process?
2. What effect does emigrating from a home or foreign country to the United States into a university academic environment have on identity, motivation, and access for second language learners of English?
3. What is the role of L2 proficiency in identity, motivation, and access, and how is L2 proficiency defined or determined?
4. How much agency do L2 learners have, in what contexts, and in what ways does agency intersect with the variables of identity, motivation, access, and L2 proficiency?

A review of the literature over the past several decades reveals a somewhat simplistic dichotomy of emphasis in research. Studies focusing on sociolinguistic factors in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), particularly issues of identity, language attrition, social interaction, and pedagogy, have tended to be directed toward school-aged children. English (2009), Miller (2003), Olsen (1997), Talmy (2010), Valdés (2001), and Wong-Fillmore (1989a, 1989b, 1989c; 1991a, 1991b, 2000), for example, have contributed significantly to our understanding of the social and emotional challenges that children of immigrant families face as they strive to learn English, establish peer relationships, and succeed academically in school in their adopted countries. Conversely, studies of adult learners of English or other second languages have tended to concentrate on individual cognitive processing skills and mechanisms during the L2 learning process (Doughty, 1991; Long, 1985; Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998; MacWhinney, 1989, 2005; Pica, 1994; Pienemann, 2001; Swain, 2005). There

are, of course, exceptions to this dichotomy. Pienemann's processability theory, for example, is not limited to adult second language education. Rather, it is intended to be a theory of L2 skill acquisition based on linguistic readiness, which applies to any age, not just adults.

There are researchers, however, working within a sociocultural framework. These scholars situate L2 learning within a local, social, interpersonal context, demonstrating that L2 learning is co-constructed, not an individual endeavor. Young's (2000, 2011) interactional competence incorporates emotional and pragmatic knowledge into adult L2 learning theories. Finally Block (2007), Kinginger (2011a, 2011b), and Norton (2000) provide the most notable descriptions of identity construction and investment in adult learners of an L2 within the contexts of short and long term immigration.

It is only possible to speculate on the reasons for the dichotomy in research agendas for child and adult second language; however, it is possible to point to the work of such noted psychologists as Piaget (1955) and Vygotsky (1972) for possible explanations. Both scholars attempt to explain language development in relation to thought and maturational watersheds in children. Neither scholar concerns himself with language development beyond the teenage years. The implication is that once a person grows into adulthood, language and thought are firmly established, thus, investigations into the sociopsychological development of adults do not reveal anything of significance. Following this logic, it can be postulated that, in general, it is believed people have learned to control their emotions, have learned how to communicate and interact in society, and have a firmly established identity by the time they reach adulthood. In short, adults do not require coddling. They should know how to conduct themselves, and, therefore, should know and be able to do whatever is required to achieve their goals. I would argue that this perception of adulthood is grounded in an

essentialist interpretation of identity in which identity is perceived as a static construct, established early in life, and which individuals have very little agency over.

This dissertation, therefore, fills an important gap in the literature on adult second language acquisition. It differs from Norton's (2000) and Block's (2007) studies in that it draws attention to the sociolinguistic and sociocultural challenges that adult L2 speakers of English are confronted with when transitioning from their home countries into an academic context in the United States. Furthermore, this dissertation demonstrates that the construction of identity is not magically completed upon entering adulthood. Rather, it is dynamic, ongoing, and may very well be central in the L2 learning journey.

Why and how is this study relevant? Beyond what has already been outlined above, this study touches everyone. SLA scholars, ESL teachers, L2 learners, administrators, instructors, classmates, roommates, partners, and employers can benefit from this study. It seeks to show how each contributes to and is affected by the English L2 learning process..

According to the Open Doors 2010/2011 (*Open Doors*, 2011) fact sheet, the total number of international students coming to the United States to study in an institution of higher education increased 5% from the 2009/2010 academic year to 723,277 students for 2010/2011. New international student enrollment for 2010/2011 was 214,490, an increase of 5.7%. Overall, international students studying at tertiary institutions in the United States comprise 3.5% of the overall total student population. At the institution where the case study, *EFL to ESL: A Case Study of International University Students in Transition*, was conducted, the numbers reflect the national trend. In 2010, the total percentage of international students enrolled at the university was 3.18% of the entire university student

population, with .77% enrolled in undergraduate programs and 8.40% enrolled in graduate programs.

The economic impact of international student education is staggering. According to the Open Doors 2010/2011 report,

International students contribute over \$21 billion to the U.S. economy, through their expenditures on tuition and living expenses, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. Higher education is among the United States' top service sector exports, as international students provide revenue to the U.S. economy and individual host states for living expenses, including room and board, books and supplies, transportation, health insurance, support for accompanying family members, and other miscellaneous items (<http://iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/Special-Reports/Economic-Impact-of-International-Students>).

Likewise, in the state where this study was conducted, the Open Doors 2010/2011 report estimates that international students contributed \$55 million to the local economy.

Considering the global demand for English and the economic benefit that international students bring to the United States, the upward trend in international student enrollment in U.S. universities and colleges is certain to continue. At the University of Washington, for example, 18% of its 2011/2012 freshman class comes from overseas (Lewin, 2012). Of course, not all of the international students coming to the United States for higher education are L2 learners of English. However, according to the Open Doors 2010/2011 fact sheet, of the top 25 countries sending students to the United States, only five are from inner or outer circle countries. The other 20 countries would be considered members in the expanding circle according to Kachru and Nelson's (1996) classification, with China sending the most students to the United States. Furthermore, these numbers do not reflect U.S. citizens who have English as a second language, another rapidly growing

population. The point is that the face of U.S. higher education is increasingly multilingual and culturally diverse (Hall, 2009).

As such, faculty, administrators, and fellow monolingual English speaking students will have international English L2 students in their classes, offering the potential for cross-cultural learning opportunities. Yet, to open the doors for the sharing of perspectives and for learning from one another, the native English speaking population, SLA scholars included, need to more fully understand the sociolinguistic and sociocultural challenges that even the most proficient of English language learners face on a daily basis. In other words, it is important to begin looking beyond the surface level features of language and to consider the affective dynamics of living and studying in an inner circle context. To this end, the dissertation is organized as follows.

*Chapter 2: Literature Review* provides the scholarly background for the present study. It begins by describing the trajectory of SLA research, showing how it has evolved from a purely cognitive endeavor to one that has begun to embrace a more holistic view of the L2 learning process by incorporating social context and social interaction as integral. It grounds the study not only in SLA theory, but also highlights the significant role of communities, particularly the native speaker community. Additionally, the literature review defines identity, access, investment, and L2 proficiency as they are conceptualized in this study and situates the researcher's perspective regarding these constructs.

*Chapter 3: Methodology* details how the study was conducted. It defines qualitative case study and demonstrates why qualitative case study was the most appropriate methodology for investigating identity, access, and investment. It describes how the case study participants were selected. The chapter also describes the data collection process and

the various sources of data. Furthermore, chapter 3 describes how ethnomethodological conversation analysis, discourse analysis, and interactional competence were used to assess L2 proficiency. The chapter also describes the use of language logs as a method for capturing patterns of language use on a U.S. university campus.

*Chapter 4: Controlled and Uncontrolled Access* challenges traditional views of the classroom and natural language learning contexts. It begins by dissecting the concept of access as it relates to L2 learning in foreign and second language contexts. Further, it delineates the type and quality of access through learner agency rather than through learning context. By framing access to L2 resources through the lens of learner agency, the contexts of EFL and ESL take on new relevance. For some L2 learners of English, the barriers to English language resources may be fewer in an EFL context than in an ESL context.. Furthermore, the access in an EFL context may not be laden with the same harsh criticisms experienced in an ESL context, thus influencing learner's identity construction.

*Chapter 5: The Participants* humanizes the participants by providing a thick description of their lives, past and present. It begins by tracing the familial, educational, professional, and linguistic biographies of the case study participants in their home countries and follows them through to their arrival in the United States and their subsequent first year. Furthermore, chapter 5 provides the participants' educational backgrounds, their personalities, and their evolving relationship with English. The intent is two fold. First, I hope the characterizations breathe life into the participant profiles so that they come to be viewed as people with emotions and aspirations for the future, rather than faceless data points. Second, these characterizations contextualize the learning of English within a sociocultural framework, demonstrating that no two trajectories, purposes, or reasons for



learning English are the same, thus making broad generalizations about L2 learning must always be accepted with cautious optimism.

*Chapter 6: L2 proficiency* is perhaps the most controversial chapter in this dissertation. It challenges entrenched beliefs about quantitative assessment instruments that claim to accurately measure an L2 learner's English skills. The chapter begins by presenting a quantitative analysis of the participants' English language L2 proficiency as defined by the standardized English language proficiency exams of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and/or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Next, the chapter calculates the case study participants' grammatical development using instruments developed by SLA researchers in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. These quantitative instruments are then compared to the TOEFL and/or IELTS proficiency scores of the case study participants.

Following the discussion of the quantitative assessments, two qualitative perspectives are presented: a native English speaker view and the case study participant lens. These qualitative perspectives complicate the reliance on standardized L2 proficiency assessments as accurate and reliable measures of L2 proficiency. The native English speakers' and the case study participants' perspectives shift the L2 proficiency paradigm from a deficit model to a contextualized, local, usage-based framework that centers L2 proficiency in what L2 learners *can* do as opposed to what they cannot do. The case study participants further complicate traditional L2 proficiency measurements. They readily and openly acknowledge the necessity of grammar, phonology, and vocabulary. For them, understanding and using the structure of the L2 accurately is a given, but knowledge of and producing the structure of the L2 is only circumstantial. For the case study participants, interactional and pragmatic

functions of communication trump structural accuracy. Finally, I present my perspective, as researcher, of the case study participants' L2 proficiency using the principles of ethnomethodological conversational analysis (Seedhouse, 2004) and interactional competence (Young, 2000, 2011). Drawing on the work of Long (1981, 1983, 1985), Pica (1987), and Swain and Lapkin (1998), an analysis of conversational repair in talk-in-interaction provides support for re-conceptualizing L2 proficiency as a locally and contextually defined paradigm that foregrounds the importance of negotiation. In so doing, I demonstrate the need for the design of L2 proficiency instruments that merge quantitative and qualitative methods and that highlight the processes underlying the co-construction of meaning.

*Chapter 7: Access, Investment, and Identity* is an analysis of the case study participants' lives as they are lived out in the United States in a university academic setting. It first maps out the patterns of L1 and L2 use by the case study participants. The chapter demonstrates that even though international English L2 students may be surrounded by opportunities to interact with native speakers of English, they may encounter barriers. These barriers may be self-imposed or community constructed. It also shows the obstacles must be negotiated if L2 learners are to gain access to L2 resources. The claim that living in a context where the L2 is the dominant language of the community is the best way to learn an L2 remains intact as sound theoretical advice. However, sociocultural and sociopolitical issues make it evident that osmosis plays only a minor a role. In other words, L2 learners must make the effort to assert themselves as legitimate members of their L2 communities if they are to gain and sustain consistent supportive contact with the L2. In so doing, the case

study participants are confronted with resistance from the L2 speaking community, particularly in the content area classroom context.

Ultimately the process of gaining access and confronting resistance challenges the case study participants' identities as they struggle to define themselves as members of a new culture and speakers of the L2. Expressions of frustration over being judged on their L2 skills rather than their intellect, talents, and skills reveal that many L2 speakers live with feelings of inadequacy, questioning their legitimate right to participate.

Given these daily physical and emotional challenges, the concept of investment (Norton Pierce, 1995) becomes a powerful and salient second language acquisition framework. As Norton states, L2 learners understand that learning the L2 is an investment in themselves. This study contributes to this notion of investment, as it is apparent that motivation alone is not enough to overcome the realities of rejection and criticism that many of the case study participants face. Furthermore, a sense of investment empowers the case study participants to deflect feelings of inadequacy while embracing positive notions, confirming what they know about themselves: that they are capable humans with skills and talents to offer who are struggling with learning how to do so in a second language and new culture.

*Chapter 8: Conclusion* extends the study into the realm of application and implications. The chapter explores various ways in which U.S. universities might develop programs that will facilitate L2 learning, while acknowledging the intellect, skills, and talents of international English L2 students. Offering specifically designated ESL sections of composition and/or speech communication classes, which provide international English L2 learners a safe environment where they can continue to experiment with and develop their

English skills while learning more about the culture of the U.S. and the university is just one of many applications that is explored. Other ideas, such as the development of cross-cultural classes in which international English L2 students and domestic, native speakers of English can learn from each other are explicated. Furthermore, the development of a series of professional workshops for faculty and students that are designed to inform and be a place for open discussion is considered.

Ultimately, *EFL to ESL: A Case Study of International English L2 Students in Transition* is a study that affects a large and diverse audience. It challenges scholarly theory. It demonstrates the emotional, linguistic, and cultural challenges that L2 learners of English face on a daily basis. It displays the insensitivities, often unconscious acts, of native speakers as they interact with L2 learners of English in academic contexts. It identifies the inadequacies and inequities of university admission policies based on decontextualized, standardized English L2 proficiency exams. Finally, the study calls for changes in the status quo and demonstrates that universities and native speakers of English have a moral, if not academic, responsibility to support the ever increasing number of international English L2 students on U.S. university campuses.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

Language learning is quintessentially human. As such, language learning and the study of language acquisition, first languages (L1) or second languages (L2), are fraught with all the complexities and variations that define human behavior. Behaviorism was the predominate research paradigm for the study of language acquisition during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and, even though Behaviorism has been replaced by subsequent epistemologies over the last 100 years, many of its influences can still be observed in classroom practices. Since the introduction of Nativism in 1959 (Chomsky, 1959), however, the systematic approach to studying language and language acquisition has traditionally been dominated by a particular research paradigm: cognitivism. Central to cognitive research in language acquisition is the question: How do external linguistic resources become internalized? In other words, what are the cognitive processes that individuals rely on to learn and use the phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, and pragmatics of a language? Within the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the question focuses on the same process of internalization, only for learning a second or additional language. Because SLA is interested in how individuals learn and develop fluency in a second language, the central question of internalization requires, among other things, the investigation of the interaction between the first language (L1) and the second language (L2). This has produced a robust research agenda and has led to myriad sub-questions, some of which include the effects of age on the learning process, L1 and L2 linguistic similarities and/or differences, the effects of the learning environment, and the effects of learner personality, aptitude, and motivation. Each

of these sub-questions, consequently, has produced its own active research programs. Common to both language acquisition and SLA cognitive research is the underlying assumption that the study of language, if it is to be regarded as a pure science worthy of investigation, must adhere to the rigors of Cartesian principles. Research must separate the mind from the body. The mind is believed to operate like a mathematical instrument. Cognition is a form of consciousness (Atkinson, 2011a, p. 7). Embracing Descartes, Chomsky separated language from human behavior by claiming that language could be divided into two aspects: a) what people know about language, and b) what they do with language (i.e. competence versus performance). With this division, Chomsky was able to propose that the study of language as a science could only be successful if language were removed from the environment in which it is used, effectively divorcing language from human behavior and culture. With this, linguists were given license to analyze language in an “idealized” form and “idealized” setting, spawning a tradition of language acquisition research (L1 and L2) steeped in scientific “cognitivist” reductionism that is still prevalent today (Atkinson, 2011, p. 9).

The field of language acquisition, L1 or L2, owes a great deal to the cognitivist “revolution” (Atkinson, 2011). For instance, we know that children, regardless of language, tend to develop language skills along similar, predictable paths. We know that certain structures and lexical items tend to be acquired before others. We know that error is a natural part of the process and that children will correct their errors over time. We know that there are some “errors” that children do not make when acquiring their first language. Yet many of the hypotheses that have been generated through a reductionist approach to language acquisition, such as Universal Grammar, the existence of a Language Acquisition Device, the

Critical Period Hypothesis, The Input Hypothesis, the Output Hypothesis, and the belief that learning two or more languages from birth will cause delays in child language development have not stood up to critical analysis. For example, Snow (1993) and Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978) have demonstrated convincingly that adults, who are well beyond the so-called Critical Period, can and do learn second languages, suggesting that the difficulties adults experience may be due to external, environmental influences rather than cognitive factors.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the reason cognitive approaches have not yielded definitive answers regarding the acquisition of second languages is that language is quintessentially human. “The individualistic aspects of the cognitive focus characteristic of most theories of learning thus only seem to concentrate on the person. Painting a picture of the person as a primarily ‘cognitive’ entity tends to promote a nonpersonal view of knowledge, skills, tasks, activities, and learning” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 52). Thus, to divorce language from the context in which it is used, including culture, behavior, attitudes, beliefs, history, purpose, etc. is artificial and will lead, necessarily, to incomplete and often misguided conclusions about language, specifically about language acquisition (L1 and L2).

Fortunately, with the advent of postmodernism, research designs that embrace complexity and variation, that view outliers as significant and worthy of interrogation in their own right, and that allow linguists to study language in use and language acquisition (L1 and L2) holistically, have proliferated in recent decades. Furthermore, these alternative approaches consider such variables as age, gender, learning environment, purpose, and motivation collectively and interactively, rather than separately and independently. For L2 acquisition specifically, these “alternative” research approaches (Atkinson, 2011) have revealed that adults can learn an additional language, and that children who are exposed to

two or more languages from birth often outperform their monolingual peers academically. Furthermore, we now know that both input and output are necessary for learning, but that extenuating circumstances, such as perceived need, attitude, type and quality of input, and motivation, from both the learner and the native speaking community, are all mitigating factors in the L2 acquisition process. In short, postmodernism insists the study of language in use and language acquisition must be contextualized if the process is to be fully understood.

The case study that has resulted in this dissertation, *EFL to ESL: A Case Study of University International English L2 Students in Transition*, comes out of the insistence that language and culture are inextricable. I will demonstrate that such overlooked human behaviors as identity construction and motivation directly influence the type and quality of input and output experience and that access to the L2, in turn, influences identity construction and motivation. Furthermore, this case study examines the effects of immigrating from a home country environment, where English is studied as a foreign language, to an academic context in the United States, where English is studied as a second language. Specifically, this case study examines the processes of identity construction, motivation, and access to English and how these variables intersect with L2 acquisition. Finally, even though proficiency in the L2 is integral to gaining access to L2 resources, I argue that L2 proficiency itself is not static and that measurements of L2 proficiency based on an “ideal native speaker” norm are artificial and inadequate. Rather, L2 proficiency is dynamic and needs to be measured holistically based on learners’ needs and desires.

The literature review that follows provides the necessary theoretical background on second language acquisition. I will define key terms and contextualize the major themes of



identity, motivation, access, and L2 proficiency as they have been and are currently understood within the field of SLA. Because the literature review is largely guided by my overarching research questions, they are presented here.

### **Research Questions**

1. In what ways do identity, motivation, and access intersect with the second language learning process?
2. What effect does emigrating from a home or foreign country to the United States into a university academic environment have on identity, motivation, and access for second language learners of English?
3. What is the role of L2 proficiency in identity, motivation, and access and how is L2 proficiency defined or determined?
4. How much agency do L2 learners have, in what contexts, and in what ways does agency intersect with the variables of identity, motivation, access, and L2 proficiency?

It should be noted that embedded in these questions are several themes or concepts that may not be apparent, but that emerge as significant frameworks or explanatory instruments for delineating the overarching questions.

### **Identity**

Language learning engages the identities of learners because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols; it is also a complex social practice in which the value and meaning ascribed to an utterance are determined in part by the value and meaning ascribed to the person who speaks (Norton & Toohey, 2002, p. 113)

Because identity is central to this case study, it seems only appropriate to begin by reviewing the evolution of thought regarding identity and its role in the study of language

and SLA. As Norton and Toohey indicate, language is far more complex than its constituent parts, largely because language is a social practice, which inherently invokes the identities of the participants. Identities are constructed, expressed, and exposed through language. As people engage in social practices, these identities are shaped and re-shaped continuously. This postmodern view of identity, however, is only a relatively recent development.

There are two other interpretations of identity that require explanation. The first is the essentialist view, which provides the foundation for a traditional conception of identity, and it is the view that the postmodern perspective categorically rejects. Thus, in order to understand the postmodern perspective, it is necessary to be familiar with tenets of essentialist views of identity. The third view of identity, which is an extension of the postmodern view, is that of identity constructed through imagined communities (Anderson, 1991). Each of these perspectives will be described briefly.

The construct of identity essentially addresses the question “Who am I?” This question, however, is not singular, dependent only on one’s self-perception. Rather, identity is multiply constructed through our perception of who we are, how others perceive us, and how these perceptions change over time. The construction of identity, it might be said, lies at the intersection of self and others. Identity, therefore, is grounded in the “social, cultural, and historical context” of individuals and communities (Tatum, 1997). It is co-constructed as the community projects its perceptions of the individual onto the person while the person embodies, rejects, and builds on the community’s perceptions in an effort to shape his/her identity.

In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way

in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them” (Erikson, cited in Tatum, 1997, p. 19).

Arbitrary demographic categories, such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, country of origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status are often used as means to categorize people into like groups for the purpose of research, census data, polling, etc. to determine group trends in spending, voting, education, entertainment, health services, etc. Traditionally, these demographic categories have been viewed as static and definitive, and therefore reliable predictors of group behavior. I, for example, never feel conflicted when filling out such demographic information on an application. In my mind, I am clearly a white, middle aged, monolingual male, and a U.S. citizen. However, these categories are not so clearly demarcated for many people. Someone raised in a bilingual home, whose parents come from different countries and/or ethnicities, typically have difficulty filling in the ethnicity question or native/first language question on applications.

These demographic categories feed an essentialist perspective of identity that claims identity to be static, and therefore, predictable. Furthermore, these categories assume a monolingual, monocultural norm. For example, a person who comes from a home where the father is Hispanic and the mother is Native American and who was raised as a bilingual speaker of Spanish and English, may experience significant difficulty in choosing between the categories of Hispanic-Latino/a or Native American, or between English or Spanish as the first/native language, since neither demographic “box” fully and completely captures the historical and social essence of the individual. Additionally, an essentialist perspective also assumes a lack of agency, meaning that people are powerless to change their identities. People can, of course, adjust their behaviors so that they might be perceived favorably by a

group they wish to be associated with, but their identity remains stable and unchanging. As Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) state, "...individuals create the patterns for their linguistic behavior so as to resemble those of the group or groups with which from time to time they wish to be identified..." (p. 18). Thus, individuals have the power to adapt to their surroundings so as to participate in the community they are surrounded by, but in the end, the essentialist perspective of identity claims that individuals cannot escape or change the socially and historically constructed stereotypes associated with such fixed demographic labels as those mentioned above.

A postmodernist perspective of identity affords individuals greater agency in the construction of identity, recognizing that identity is historical and social, but that these shift in relevance from situation to situation throughout the day. A very simplistic example may help to clarify this historical and social construction of identity. For example, a graduate teaching assistant may embrace the identity of college instructor in her morning composition class and her students may contribute to the instructor identity. Later, in the day, the graduate student may be taking an advanced seminar on rhetoric and technical writing. In this seminar, she is a student and thus her identity as a graduate student is reinforced and co-constructed by her, her classmates, and her professor. Later yet, she may be in a coffee shop studying for her comprehensive exams. While in the coffee shop, she may see one of her students from her morning freshman composition class. The student may in fact be a waiter in the coffee shop. The interaction between the graduate student and the undergraduate student/waiter may invoke a social identity that includes instructor, student, and customer. Thus, the graduate student has been perceived as an instructor, student, and customer over the course of one day. The construction is historical because the roles and behaviors of

instructor and student have been established culturally over several centuries. It is social because the construction is a blend of how the person perceives and assumes the roles and behaviors of instructor and student but also how others perceive these social positions.

Lave and Wenger (1991) state that the construction of identity cannot be separated from the social practices of the communities in which an individual participates, even tangentially. “We conceive of identities as long term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice. Thus identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another” (p. 53). Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) summarize the theoretical shift from a static understanding of identity to one that is more dynamic.

While early studies of language and identity privileged a single aspect of identity – most commonly ethnicity or gender – at the expense of others, poststructuralist inquiry highlights the fact that identities are constructed at the interstices of multiple axes, such as age, race, class, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexual orientation, geopolitical locale, institutional affiliation, and social status, whereby each aspect of identity redefines and modifies all others. Since individuals often shift and adjust ways in which they identify and position themselves in distinct contexts, identities are best understood when approached in their entirety, rather than through consideration of a single aspect or subject position (p. 16).

Wenger (1998), summarizing the concept of identity, states, “Identity is not some primordial core of personality that already exists. Nor is it something we acquire at some point in the same way that, at a certain age, we grow a set of teeth” (p. 154). For Wenger, identity is a “work in progress” (p. 154), evolving with each new experience. According to Hamers and Blanc (cited in Li, 2007), the construction of identity is founded upon such dynamic factors as “ancestry, territoriality, institutions, values, norms, and language” (p. 262).

Given that cultures are constantly in flux, changing and adapting to the needs of the individuals co-constructing the cultures in which they live and work (Rogoff, 2003) and that languages are also forever changing (Trask, 1996), conceptualizing identity as an organic entity that also is continuously in a state of flux is a natural extension. A dynamic interpretation of identity and its intimate relationship with culture and language allows us to investigate community interactions through a discursive lens, in which we can show how our identities affect and are affected by the context. Regardless of the type and quality of interaction, we can and do question our actions and ourselves. These questions of selfhood ultimately shape how we perceive ourselves and how our community perceives us (Phan, 2008; Tatum, 1997; Wenger, 1998).

Certainly, people have certain material characteristics, such as gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, race, sexual orientation, and religious affiliations and these have been the categories that essentialists have presented as static and reified by social conventions and/or stereotypes. Gee (1999) claims these material characteristics may contribute to a *core identity*, “whatever continuous and relatively (but only relatively) ‘fixed’ sense of self underlies our contextually shifting multiple identities,” but acknowledges that these material characteristics shift from context to context. Instead, he calls for the use of the term, *situated identity*, “...the multiple identities we take on in different practices and contexts” (p. 34), which captures the dynamic view of identity, as it is understood through a postmodern lens.

A more inclusive and dynamic interpretation of identity, however, argues that the one-to-one correlation between language and identity is too simplistic. “Despite the entrenched belief in the one language equals one culture equation, individuals assume several collective identities that are likely not only to change over time in dialogue with others, but

are liable to be in conflict with one another” (Kramsch, 1998). While the material categories serve to group people in highly general terms, they fail to consider the complexity of individual human behavior. The essentialist categories of gender, age, ethnicity, and race are only static in the sense that these physical attributes do not change from situation to situation or from one day to the next. Identity is undoubtedly tied up in these material attributes, but identity, as stated earlier is “a work in progress,” evolving and shifting depending on the context, each new experience adding to our identity matrix.

An identity, then, is the layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other. As we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others, these layers build upon each other to produce our identity as a very complex interweaving of participative experience and reificative projections (Wenger, 1998, p. 151).

In other words, as individuals participate in their communities, their identity is crafted through these communities’ perceptions of the individual. These perceptions, then, are reinforced or challenged through actions and language use of both the individual and the community.

These opposing views of identity, the essentialist versus the dynamic, socially situated, basically hinge on how much credit one gives to the external context. The essentialist view assumes a neutral context, in which all of the participants have equal status and differences in age, gender, race, etc. are purely circumstantial. The dynamic, socially situated view of identity recognizes that the external context is not neutral, but rather significantly influences the social interaction, i.e. participation, of the individuals involved in the activity. The context and the participants involved dictate who can participate, when, and for what purposes. Inherent, then, in this more dynamic, socially situated definition of identity is the concept of agency or subjectivity.

For example, if we believe ourselves to have full membership within a specific community, and if the community also perceives us to be legitimate members, then we may feel more empowered to speak and participate actively. However, if our membership is more peripheral (Lave & Wegner, 1991; Wegner, 1998), then our opportunities to speak and participate may be more limited and contingent upon the community's acceptance of our active participation.

Looking more specifically at second language learners of English, full membership into an English speaking community is contingent on many factors, such as context – classroom or public venue, a multilingual or monolingual environment, native or non-native interlocutors, home country where another language is the majority language or a country where English is the dominant language. Each of the micro and macro situations may serve to empower and/or silence a second language learner, depending on the agency that the learner commands and that the community permits. For example, a person studying English as a second language (ESL) may feel free and confident to speak, experimenting with new structures and lexical items, in an ESL classroom where everyone is learning the language. However, that same person in a classroom filled with native English speakers may not believe he/she has the agency to participate in class discussion, feeling intimidated by the presence of multiple native speakers of English.

This dissertation will provide evidence of these dynamics and demonstrate how shifting contexts influence learners' identities and how various contexts can influence the ESL learners' access to English as well as their right to claim that access. Furthermore, I will provide evidence for the construction of identities through the framework of imagined communities and how these serve as sources of motivation for learning English. First,



however, it is necessary to define imagined communities and describe how imagined communities can facilitate the construction of identity.

The concept of imagined communities is a useful construct for understanding an L2 learner's motivations and actions. Anderson (1991) is credited with the use of imagined communities in his description of people's notions of nation-states. He claims that nation-states are really nothing more than imagined communities, since "...the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). In other words, we have come to believe that we belong to a nation, such as the United States, China, Mexico, etc. and may feel a sense of kinship with other citizens claiming membership within a nation even if we have never met, talked to, or seen that individual. It is entirely possible and highly probable that we do not share equally the same values and beliefs as other members of the nation, but we may still feel as if we belong to the same community, the imagined nation-state.

Extending the notion of imagined community to the construction of identity, it is possible to conceive of our participation in a community that we wish to enter some day. Kanno and Norton (2003) demonstrate through separate studies (Kanno, 2000; Norton, 2000) that the desire to enter into a particular community in the future can serve as a source for investing in the L2.

The notion of imagined communities enables us to relate learners' visions of the future to their prevailing actions and identities. It is a way of affirming that what has not yet happened in the future can be a reason and motivation for what learners do in the present (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 248).

International L2 English students leaving their home countries, where they are likely insiders in several different communities of practice, face myriad linguistic and cultural challenges as they enter the English dominant context of a university in the United States. They must learn to negotiate their identities within existing communities, while also working toward their goal of becoming active members in their imagined communities. In other words, international English L2 students face the challenge of integrating into previously established English dominant communities where the members already understand their roles, such as being a student in an American university classroom. Furthermore, the international English L2 students must also work toward integrating into a community in which they imagine themselves to be active participants, such as becoming a pharmacist, a teacher, or an accountant in the United States.

Language serves as a powerful bonding agent and is used as a way of indicating group membership, or not (Canagarajah, 1999; Clemente & Higgins, 2008; Fishman, 1979; Gumperz, 1979; Labov, 1979). “People identify themselves and are identified through the language they use in expressing their cultural background, their affiliations, their attitudes and values” (Li, 2007, p. 262). If language plays such a significant role in the co-construction of identity, then learning an L2 necessarily contributes to a redefinition of identity, as well as multiplying the layers through which identity is constructed and perceived (Norton, 2000; Olsen, 1997; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; Snow, 1993). Therefore, accessing English resources may be linked to how well adult ESL learners deal with their multiple identities in shifting contexts, how they react to variable power structures, and what their purpose for learning English is.

***Communities of practice.*** Humans are social beings. As such, all belong to multiple communities, be they work, academic, religious, familial, or extracurricular. Some communities are large with characteristics and boundaries that are difficult to define, such as belonging to a nation or a community of English speakers, whereas others are smaller with very clear and specified boundaries, such as family or membership in the local chapter of a labor union. The extent to which we belong to various communities depends largely on our participation and the community's acceptance of our participation. Wenger (1998) specifies several layers, or "trajectories," of community membership, which he claims influence and are influenced by our social identities. Wegner's identity trajectories are listed below.

1. **Peripheral:** *May never lead to full participation for whatever reason, but contributes to the formation of identity.*
2. **Inbound:** *In the process of becoming a member. Identities are vested in future membership.*
3. **Insider:** *Identities are continuing to evolve through membership.*
4. **Boundary:** *Maintaining membership in multiple communities and in turn linking communities.*
5. **Outbound:** *Leaving a community and learning to view experience from a different perspective (pp. 154-155).*

To be on a peripheral trajectory means that an individual is a member of the community but may be marginalized for whatever reason. Even so, this peripheral membership contributes to the co-construction of our identity, i.e. how we perceive our membership, and how that community perceives our membership. Someone on the periphery of a community, therefore, may not possess the agency to speak, and if that person does speak, his/her words

may not be acknowledged or at least as respected as someone who is perceived to be an insider in the community. For example, as a writing instructor, I may know a great deal about teaching writing at the university level. Even so, for me to assert myself and suggest to the law school how and what they should be teaching their students in preparation for a career in the legal world may not receive the same attention as someone who is a lawyer, has practiced law, and has published in professional journals. The law professor who teaches writing would have aspired to an insider position and can speak from that position, with authority, about the writing needs of students in law school. I, on the other hand, may not receive the same amount of attention or respect since I cannot address as intimately the specific needs of law students. Thus, my identity as a writing teacher may be well grounded, but my identity as a writing consultant to the law school would possibly be met with skepticism.

The above example assumes that the law school professors, the law students, and I all speak the same language, English in this case. Thus, on a macro level, we all belong to the community of English language speakers, some of whom are presumably second language learners of English, yet members all the same. However, for those law students and professors who have English as a second language, their trajectories, whether they be peripheral, inbound, or insider, are quite possibly compounded by the fact that they are L2 learners of English in an English dominant setting. This is precisely what Norton (2000) found in her study of five immigrant women in Canada. Upon immigrating to Canada with no or very limited English skills, they were marginalized by the native speaking community and placed in jobs where they did not have to interact with native speakers of English and where they had only limited access to English. Some of the women maintained this

marginalization for various reasons, such as a dislike for Canadian culture or a desire to maintain their role as mother rather than family provider. Others, however, did not like being marginalized; and therefore, worked to establish themselves as legitimate members of their communities of practice, where their identities as immigrants and English language learners would be appreciated and respected. The point is that entering and maintaining membership in a community of practice is difficult, even when everyone shares the same language and culture, but penetrating the different layers of membership in a community, while negotiating one's identity with the community when different languages are involved, particularly when one language holds greater prestige than others, may be a monumental task.

### **Motivation**

To understand investment in relation to L2 learning (Norton Pierce, 1995), it is first necessary to describe motivation and how scholars have employed motivation as an explanatory tool in SLA.

Lambert and Gardner (1972) identified two types of motivation for explaining why some people become proficient in a second language whereas others struggle to achieve full fluency. Lambert and Gardner identified these motivation types as “instrumental” and “integrative.” Instrumental motivation is primarily driven by external factors such as taking a foreign language class to meet an academic requirement or for job promotion. The whole purpose of learning the L2 is to achieve a goal that advances the person's economic or social capital (Bourdieu, 1982), i.e. allowing the learner access to community resources that would otherwise not be available and that offer opportunities for upward mobility. Instrumental motivation can lead to high levels of L2 proficiency, but may also result in anomie, leaving the learner feeling alienated and disconnected with the L2 speaking community.

Integrative motivation, on the other hand, is essentially internally determined. Reasons for learning the L2 may result from romance, from religion, or even a desire to (re)connect with the family's heritage. The L2 learner has an emotional attachment to the L2 and the culture. This attachment serves as the mechanism for wanting to integrate fully into the L2 speaking community. This, too, though, can lead to anomie if the learner's motivation is so great that the learner desires discarding the "old" language and culture for the new. Theoretically, integrative motivation appears to be more desirable for second language learning. The individual is, by definition, personally invested in the learning process, and, therefore, should achieve a higher level of "native like" fluency in the L2. Spolsky (2000), however, observed a different phenomenon among adult learners of Hebrew as an L2 in Israel. He discovered that even though the adults were passionate about learning Hebrew, many did not develop native like fluency. Spolsky's observations suggest that the instrumental/integrative dichotomy is too simplistic, not taking into account the myriad sociocultural factors influencing the L2 learning process.

Using the instrumental/integrative motivation dichotomy, Schumann (1976; 1978) developed the influential Acculturation Model, in which he postulated that the closer an individual is psychologically and socially to the L2 culture, the more likely the learner will achieve native like fluency.

Implied in Schumann's claim is the need for the L2 learner to close the acculturation gap by participating in the social institutions of the native speaking community, such as becoming involved in local politics, civic organizations, and schools, and to shop in the local stores and attend religious institutions that use the L2. By surrounding oneself with members of the L2 culture and participating in the native speaking community, the learner is not only

exposed to the L2, but also the culture, values, and beliefs of the native speaking community, thus providing a shared social foundation the learner can use to interact with established members of the community. Involvement in the native speaking community, theoretically, facilitates a transition from a peripheral trajectory to an insider position, in which membership in the community is fully embraced by the L2 learner and the native speaking community. In many respects the Acculturation Model supports a Nativist framework of second language acquisition – exposure to and immersion in the L2 results in acquisition – as well as a Social Interactionist framework that claims languages are learned through meaningful interactive experiences with the language and the culture. The Acculturation Model attempts to include in a cognitivist perspective of language acquisition, the role of the larger, sociocultural context. It falls short in that it does not consider the dynamic roles of shifting identities and power structures that mitigate participation. This view of motivation, though a useful construct, is limited as it is relatively inflexible and perceives L2 learners as fixed entities, lacking the ability to change and shift according to contextual factors. Thus, I will be using a more contemporary notion of motivation. This notion of motivation is more flexible, and describes a learner as having a complex identity with complex needs and reasons for learning or not learning the L2. This notion of motivation has been characterized by Norton Pierce (1995) as investment and is described in detail in the next section.

### **Investment**

Theories of the good language learner have been developed on the premise that language learners can choose under what conditions they will interact with members of the target language community and that the language learner's access to the target language community is a function of the learner's motivation (Norton Pierce, 1995).

In her seminal article, Norton Pierce (1995) claims that motivation, like identity, is not static and should not be conceptualized as dichotomous, noting that motivation, like other human behaviors, is variable. On any given day, a person's motivation may peak and dip depending on experiences that lead to successes and/or challenges and the obstacles within each. Observing the volatile nature of motivation, Norton (2012) suggests that motivation be re-conceptualized as *investment*, since investment captures “the complex relationship between learner identity and language learning commitment” (p.17). In this sense, investment acknowledges the volatility of L2 learning, recognizing the difficulties L2 learners face and the perseverance they must exercise to gain access to sympathetic L2 resources when institutions and social dynamics erect barriers to linguistic resources.

The notion [investment] presupposes that when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus, an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's social identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space (pp. 17-18).

Norton and McKinney (2011) elaborate on the concept of investment, in which they state “...if learners ‘invest’ in the target language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital and social power” (p. 75). For example, an L2 learner may not like the activities of the L2 classroom, and thus may disengage from the class. From a motivational perspective, a teacher may claim that the L2 learner is not motivated, thereby projecting responsibility on to the student. An investment perspective allows for an analysis of not only the learner's behavior, but also an analysis of the context, i.e. the classroom activities, classmates, and teacher. From this perspective, the L2 learner may be invested in



learning the L2, but may seek out alternative sources or activities, which they believe will be more beneficial for learning and provide a greater return on their investment. This phenomenon has been documented by recent studies of American students participating in study abroad programs where the stated purpose was to provide opportunities to enhance the L2 skills of students studying a foreign language (Block, 2007; Kinginger, 2011a, 2011b). These students may have received poor grades in their L2 language classes while abroad, but they returned to the United States with a better grasp of the L2, than many of their peers who preferred the comforts of the language class.

Motivation is still a useful construct in that it may explain day-to-day engagement with the learning process, but investment should be viewed as a long-term endeavor, susceptible to upward and downward swings depending on individual as well as social influences. This dissertation will affirm Norton's concept of investment and demonstrate its explanatory power for adult L2 acquisition. At the same time, it will interrogate and complicate how access is gained, who controls access, and in what contexts.

### **Access**

It is not uncommon to hear people claim that to truly learn a language one has to be immersed in a context in which the language is the dominant or societal language of a community and is used as the primary language in the contexts of commerce, education, politics, and social activities. Indeed, this is presumably the claim that the Acculturation Model makes: a) get involved in the community, b) create opportunities to interact in the L2, and c) develop fluency in the L2. Furthermore, having access to native speakers of the L2 in their home countries, where the language and culture are inextricable, is a fundamental goal of study abroad programs that promote L2 immersion. These immersion claims appear to be

grounded on solid academic research. Spolsky (1989) identifies the many benefits learners reap from “informal natural L2 learning” contexts:

1. Language is being used for communication.
2. The learner is surrounded by fluent speakers.
3. The context is the real outside world, open, and stimulating.
4. The language is free and normal.
5. Attention is on the meaning of the communication (p. 171).

Spolsky claims that the natural L2 language acquisition context leads to the following opportunities for the language learner.

1. *Opportunity for analysis*: Learning a language involves an opportunity to analyze it, consciously or unconsciously, into its constituent parts.
2. *Opportunity for synthesis*: Learning a language involves an opportunity to learn how its constituent parts are re-combinable grammatically into larger units.
3. *Opportunity for contextual embedding*: Learning a language involves an opportunity to learn how its elements are embedded in linguistic and nonlinguistic contexts.
4. *Opportunity for matching*: Learning a language involves an opportunity for the learner to match his or her own knowledge with that of native speakers or other targets.
5. *Opportunity for remembering*: Learning a language involves an opportunity for new items to be remembered.
6. *Opportunity for practice*: Learning a language involves an opportunity for the new skills to be practiced; the result is fluency (pp. 167-170).

For many, immersing oneself in a natural L2 acquisition context connotes living “in-country” where the learner can see, hear, read, even feel the L2 as it is used naturally in everyday situations by native speakers of the language, such as the students in the study abroad programs studied by Block (2007) and Kinginger (2011a; 2011b). Spolsky’s opportunities are founded on solid research about the types of linguistic processing required for L2 development. No one disputes the need to analyze, synthesize, or remember the structure and vocabulary of the L2. Furthermore, no one refutes the benefits of analyzing, synthesizing, and remembering the linguistic features of the L2. Being able to do these things and to automate them is fundamental to the acquisition process. However, Spolsky’s opportunities and Schumann’s Acculturation Model (1976, 1978) assume a willing and receptive host community where L2 learners have abundant opportunities to access the L2 unencumbered by social dynamics. Both Spolsky and Schumann, however, fail to acknowledge the host community’s role in the process, whereas Norton (1995, 2000) demonstrates various ways in which the host community mediates learning opportunities, and that the L2 learner’s identity as a legitimate member of the community influences the learner’s investment in the language.

Block (2007), Kinginger (2011a, 2011b), and Miller (2003; 2004) observe that simply being in a natural language acquisition context does not necessarily correlate with increased L2 proficiency. Block discovered that U.S. college students going abroad to learn or develop their “foreign language” skills were not always successful in doing so. Rather, many of the students returned to the United States after a semester or year abroad with relatively the same level of skill in the L2 as they had before they began their study abroad experience.

Likewise, Miller (2003, 2004), in her study of immigrant high school students to Australia, observed that some students, Asian students in particular, improved their academic reading and writing skills but lagged in the development of their oral/aural skills. That Block, Kinginger, and Miller found simply being “in country” did not correlate with increased proficiency in the L2 suggests that the type and quality of opportunities vary, requiring further investigation of the sociocultural factors influencing L2 acquisition in a natural L2 acquisition context.

There are significant differences between Block’s (2007) and Kinginger’s (2011a, 2011b) studies and Miller’s (2003, 2004) research. Block and Kinginger studied U.S. students who were on temporary, study abroad programs and who went with other U.S. students. In effect, these study abroad students formed their own micro-community of English speakers who could insulate themselves from the culture and language of their host countries. Furthermore, they may have unwittingly prevented members of the host community from initiating contact due to the cohesive nature of the self-created English community. In other words, the study abroad students may have created a community of practice in which they established themselves as insiders by virtue of a shared common language, English, while inadvertently situating the members of the host community on a periphery trajectory. Miller’s high school students, however, were immigrants to Australia, and though they may have had a community of L1 speakers they could interact with, felt outwardly marginalized by their native Australian peers. Finally, the fact that Block’s (2007) and Kinginger’s (2011a, 2011b) study abroad students spoke English, the perceived world *lingua franca*, they may not have been as invested in learning the language of their host country, believing that having English was good enough.

Lambert and Gardner's (1972) static motivation dichotomy, the Acculturation Model (Schumann, 1976; Schumann, 1978) and Spolsky's (1989) conditions for second language acquisition inherently assume that the L2 learner wants to learn the second language and, therefore, shoulder the responsibility of generating self-motivation to seek out opportunities to interact with the L2 in meaningful contexts. To some extent this is true, but the theories fall short of truly integrating sociocultural factors in the L2 learning process and fail to address learner agency.

*Access: Social interaction.* Even within the cognitivist camp, the notion that individuals must practice their L2 skills if they are to develop fluency is a foregone conclusion. How this is accomplished remains a contentious issue. Because of claims I make later regarding my case study participants' L2 proficiency in English, it is necessary to briefly describe the social interactionist view of SLA.

The construct of social interaction essentially emerges out of criticisms of the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985; Krashen, 1981; Krashen & Terrell, 1983) in which Krashen claims that L2 learners simply require comprehensible input in order to continue developing their L2 language skills. "Humans acquire language in only one way - by understanding messages, or by receiving 'comprehensible input'" (Krashen, 1985, p. 2). However, Gass, Pica, and MacKey (1998), Long (1981, 1985), Pica (1987), Swain (2005), and Swain and Lapkin (1998) claim that negotiation and output significantly influences L2 learners' comprehension and comprehensibility in the L2, suggesting that internalization or uptake only occurs when L2 learners produce the language as well as listen to it. As summarized by Mitchell and Myles (2004), "only second language production (i.e. output) really forces

learners to undertake complete grammatical processing, and thus drives forward most effectively the development of second language syntax and morphology” (p. 160).

There is little question that interaction in the L2 is essential for developing L2 skills. This is evidenced, not only in the work of Long, Pica, Swain, and others, but also in Spolsky’s opportunities for language learning listed previously. Thus, it may seem as if social interaction provides the most robust and complete descriptions for SLA since social interaction accounts for both input and output in the learning process. However, upon closer scrutiny, the social interaction perspective is ultimately interested in the cognitive processes of uptake and internalization of L2 features. Much of the research conducted by Long, Pica, and Swain questioned the type, quality, and quantity of interaction that was required for L2 learners’ to internalize lexical and structural features of the L2. According to Mitchell and Myles (2004) social interaction has not been able to accurately determine the long-term effects on the L2 learning process or which types of interaction are most beneficial in the L2 learning process. Thus, making definitive claims about the degree to which social interaction facilitates the L2 learning process remains elusive. As Mitchell and Myles (2004) state, social interaction research is ultimately going to need to align itself with “more comprehensive models of the learner-internal second language acquisition process itself” (p. 192).

*Access: Classroom versus Natural language learning.* The sociocultural framework is also interested in access and essentially asks the questions: a) where does L2 learning occur, and b) under what conditions does L2 learning occur? Broadly speaking, location can be delineated globally. Does L2 learning occur in a country where the L2 is the dominant language, such as in the United States, or is it offered as part of the school curriculum in a

country where the dominant language of the community is different, such as Spanish in Mexico or Japanese in Japan? Siegel (2003) outlines several different contexts for learning an L2, but only two of his distinctions apply here: Dominant L2 and External L2. For the study of English as a second language, this distinction is often referred to as an ESL or EFL context. For Siegel, Dominant L2 is roughly equivalent to an ESL context and External L2 refers to an EFL context. Thus, in the example above, a person studying English in the United States whose first language is different, would be studying in an ESL context. For a person in Mexico or Japan, who is studying English in school as part of the curriculum and whose first language is Spanish or Japanese, respectively, would be studying English in an EFL context. The differences are significant in the field of SLA in general and specifically to this dissertation. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use the term EFL to refer to Siegel's External L2 context and ESL to mean a Dominant L2 context.

Traditionally, a distinction between classroom L2 instruction and non-classroom L2 learning has been made. Spolsky (1989) calls the non-classroom context a "natural language learning" context and Lightbown and Spada (2006) use the term "natural language setting." For students of English in an EFL context, classroom instruction may likely be the first, and potentially only, exposure they have to English. Thus, classroom instruction becomes a type of access (Wong Fillmore, 1982). In such contexts, instruction may be teacher fronted or may be more student-centered. The primary focus, though, is the development of English skills but the purposes may be different. For some classroom contexts, the purpose may be on language knowledge, while for others it may be language use. Knowledge of the language may be useful in helping students perform well on English language exams, while instruction concerned with language use, may be more interested in what students are able to

do with the language communicatively. Regardless of the instructional goals, it is safe to assume that in the classroom the L2 is modified: that it is simplified in some way.

Furthermore, it can be assumed that teachers display a degree of patience with learners as they develop their L2 skills. Additionally, it can be assumed that explicit and/or implicit corrections are given. Time may or may not be allotted for students to practice their skills and the instruction may or may not be embedded in a communicative or task-based project, in which students actively use the L2 to complete a project. Finally, it can also be assumed that the content in the L2 classroom is dictated by a prescribed curriculum.

A natural language learning context, however, is typically described as any situation outside of the classroom. This might include communicative situations such as in the market place, at work, on the bus, in a restaurant, or even in a class that is focused on content, such as biology, business, or history. Furthermore, a natural language learning context assumes the presence of abundant sources of the L2 in use, such as the radio, TV, movies, newspapers, books, as well as numerous native speakers of the language. The purpose for using the L2 is for real-life communication, or as Savignon (1997) describes “a continuous process of *expression, interpretation, and negotiation* of meaning” (p. 14).

Table 2.1, adapted from Lightbown and Spada (2006, pp.110-111) displays the potential differences between the classroom learning context and the natural language learning context. It should be noted that Lightbown and Spada do not distinguish between an EFL and ESL context in their characterizations of classroom and natural language learning contexts.



**Table 2.1: Classroom Learning Context versus Natural Language Learning Context**

<b>Classroom Learning Context</b>	<b>Natural Language Learning Context</b>
Structured and ordered presentation of L2 features, such as grammar, vocabulary, and phonology.	Random exposure to a variety of grammatical structures, vocabulary, and accents.
Corrective feedback may be given and may be frequent.	Errors are not likely to be corrected
Teacher may be the only native or skilled speaker of the language.	The learner is surrounded by the L2 for several hours each day by different speakers of the L2.
Learners may only have one or two opportunities during class to use their language.	Learners belong to and participate in a variety of language events in the L2.
Learners may or may not have the opportunity to ask and respond to questions in the L2.	Learners respond to and ask questions in meaningful situations in the L2.
Modified input is probably the norm.	Modified input may be available in one-on-one situations but is not likely to occur in larger group settings.

The distinction between a classroom learning context and a natural language learning context, though helpful, assumes, among other things, a lack of L2 learner agency, and a receptive, compassionate native speaker community. Yet, as we have learned, the native speaking community may or may not be willing to exert extra energy negotiating meaning with L2 learners, and L2 learners who are invested in learning the L2 can be creative in utilizing available L2 resources for the purpose of practice. Furthermore, with a language such as English, often recognized as the *lingua franca* of international business, tourism, and scientific research, authentic and native English resources in a foreign language context may be abundant. Thus, it becomes evident that agency, how L2 learners assert themselves and how the L2 resources, i.e. the L2 teacher and/or native speaking community reacts to the

learner's assertiveness, is worthy of investigation. If agency is placed front and center, rather than context, then context can be interrogated from an emic, or learner perspective, rather than from an institutional perspective. This approach, therefore, aligns with Norton Pierce's (1995) call for SLA research to factor into the L2 learning process the effects of the community on the L2 learner, rather than placing the onus of learning squarely on the learner and his/her cognitive abilities and affective filter. By doing this, it is possible to better analyze learning contexts through a sociocultural, learner-centered, agency driven framework. This dissertation interrogates the classroom versus natural language learning contexts and suggests a new learner-centered framework that replaces the traditional context distinctions explicated here.

Zobl (1985) investigating the type of input that potentially facilitated a learner's grammatical competence, conducted experiments in which he "controlled" particular grammatical structures while not intervening with other types of structures. He discovered that learners appear to internalize features of the L2 that they were not exposed to in the study. In other words, Zobl's work reiterated the logical problem of language learning, but from an L2 perspective. It is not Zobl's findings that we are interested in so much as it is the concept of control. Extending the construct of control from that of the researcher's laboratory to a sociocultural context, permits the analysis of the effects of agency, or the lack thereof, on learner investment and identity across foreign language and second language learning contexts. The concept of control as it relates to access is a significant finding in this dissertation and will be described in greater detail in the coming chapters.

## Safe House

A discussion of gaining access to L2 resources of English would be incomplete without considering strategies that enable L2 learners to practice their language skills free of external criticisms, or that lower learners' affective filters (Krashen, 1981; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). One such strategy may be the establishment of a safe house (Canagarajah, 1997; Clemente & Higgins, 2008; Pratt, 1991). *Safe houses*, as defined by Pratt (1991), are "social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings, temporary protection from legacies of oppression" (p. 40). Pratt's article, *Arts in the Contact Zone*, makes no mention of language learning contexts. Rather she describes the need for places where artists, poets, and musicians are free to experiment with different, avant-garde forms of expression. The concept of safe house, though, can be extended to language learning contexts, in that L2 learners may find it helpful, even necessary, to establish a place where they are free from external influences to practice their L2, experiment with pronunciation, grammatical structures, and vocabulary as they gain confidence and facility in the L2. Safe houses, in this regard, might be an L2 classroom where everyone is learning the L2, a private residence, or a meeting place designated for such activity. Canagarajah (1997), in fact, describes a composition class that became a safe house for his students. The students in this class were predominantly African American and were studying at a university in Texas. The students were struggling with learning how to write for a predominantly white community, steeped in Standard Academic English. Furthermore, Canagarajah (2004) describes how safe houses can be useful places for L2 learners of English in an EFL context. He shows how students in Sri Lanka used safe houses as a way for them to resist local

language learning and usage practices. Safe houses, then are places “free from surveillance, especially by authority figures” (p. 120).

As Canagarajah (1997) rightly states, safe houses are not limited to a particular social group or demographic. Rather, what is important is what binds the group. In this sense, safe houses “share a sense of community” (p. 175). In the case of L2 learners of English, the common bond is learner of English as a second/foreign language. Furthermore, safe houses for L2 English learners can be constructed in an EFL or ESL context.

Clemente and Higgins (2008) describe how students at the *Centro de Idiomas* (The Center for Languages) in Oaxaca, Mexico, created *safe houses* (p. 4) for using their English. The *safe houses* in Oaxaca become a place for students to create and modify their own English-speaking identities while continuing to cultivate the identities they have been co-constructing within their Oaxacan communities since childhood. In other words, the students of the *Centro de Idiomas* claim they are able to safely resist the cultural influences that come with learning English, while also acquiring facility in English as their L2. In China, these places are known as English clubs and are locations where individuals can project their identities as members of an elite class of Chinese who speak English (Norton & Gao, 2008).

In the United States, a safe house for university English L2 students looks different from what Canagarajah (2004), Clemente & Higgins (2008), and Norton & Gao (2008) have described for EFL contexts. First, an ESL class at a university is usually comprised of a variety of L1 backgrounds. It is not uncommon for an intensive English program (IEP) class to have several L1s represented, such as Korean, Spanish, Arabic, Japanese, and Mandarin. The same situation may also be true in a specially designated ESL first year composition

class. Thus, the common denominators may not be that everyone shares the same L1, but that everyone is trying to learn English and trying to adapt to U.S. culture.

The ESL class in the United States is also different from those described by Canagarajah, Clemente & Higgins, and Norton & Gao, in that the ESL classes are classes. The EFL safe houses are places that are removed from a formal institutional context and are free from the bureaucratic oversight that accompanies such institutions such as testing and grading. The ESL safe house, on the other hand, is part of the institution, but it is a place where students can share their experiences with others in the class, and where they can speak freely without fear of intimidation by native English speaking peers. Furthermore, the ESL instructor frequently becomes seen as a friendly, supportive resource for cultural and pragmatic information in addition to providing instruction on discrete linguistic features and vocabulary. Thus, the ESL safe house is not constructed from a grassroots movement on behalf of the students, and it is not a place of resistance. Rather, it is a formalized classroom context and it is a place for learning how to interact with the dominant culture.

My data in the following chapters will show that access as traditionally conceived as a classroom/natural language learning context dichotomy is too simplistic and that learner agency is deemphasized through this dichotomy. Furthermore, this dissertation will also explicate how the definition of safe house can be expanded in both an EFL and ESL context and serve as avenues to L2 access.

### **Discourse Analysis**

Silberstein (2011) defines Discourse Analysis (DA) as “the interrelation between form and function in communication” (p. 274). Silberstein continues, claiming that

...contemporary approaches to discourse have at their heart a sense that language use is constrained by structural, cognitive, and contextual factors; but the complexities of all three, along with the important element of human agency, assure that language use and acquisition are never determined (p. 274).

DA as a research tool emerged through the field of sociology in the late 1960's and 1970's as a way to understand social order of human behavior (Silberstein, 2011; Wooffitt, 2005). As a response to the growing recognition that the positivist "scientific method" was, in fact, not as objective as it was once thought to be, and that it was incapable of answering complex questions involving human behavior, researchers turned their attention to methodologies that embrace variation. "The relativist approach was *methodological* (italics in original) in that it allowed sociologists to study aspects of scientific work and knowledge production which had hitherto been regarded as beyond the scope of sociological investigation" (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 14). DA offers sociologists the ability to acknowledge variation as a constant. By accepting that human behavior is variable, researchers can turn their attention toward describing social phenomenon in context rather than trying to control behaviors that appear to be disruptive or unpredictable.

About the same time DA was emerging, another sociological research tradition was emerging: conversation analysis (CA). CA is intimately tied to ethnomethodology, which has as its goal, the study of how people behave, understand, and negotiate daily social interactions in context (Seedhouse, 2004). Ethnomethodology embraces research that is grounded in emic perspectives since learning to understand social interaction from people who live and experience the interaction offers insight that a detached, isolated researcher cannot provide. Like DA, conversation analysis recognizes that there is variation in talk-in-action, but that the variation is ordered. The early work of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson

(1974) demonstrated that conversation is organized and that this organization is what permits communication via language to proceed. Conversation is constructed around utterances by interlocutors and these utterances index what is said and prepare interlocutors for next utterances that serve to contribute to the overall conversation. These utterances are called adjacency pairs with the first utterance providing the foundation for the second.

Furthermore, through turn-taking, adjacency pairs index topics, which participants choose to orient toward or not. This orienting to certain topics and not others is called preference organization (Seedhouse, 2004).

CA is a methodology for analyzing talk-in-interaction that seeks to develop empirically based accounts of the observable conversational behaviors of participants that are both minutely detailed and unmotivated by a priori, etic theories of social action. More specifically, CA aims to explicate how members orient (that is observably pay attention) to certain behavioral practices as they co-construct talk-in-interaction in real time. These practices include the sequential organization of talk, turn taking, and repair (Markee, 2005, p. 355).

That is, CA researchers wish to understand how people come to share conversational turns, how people know when it is appropriate to talk and when to be silent, how meaning is constructed across conversation, how misunderstandings are repaired, and how overlapping utterances are handled so that primarily one person speaks at a time. In short, “CA studies the organization and order of social action in interaction” (Seedhouse, 2004, p. 12).

Grice’s (1975) *Cooperative Principle* and Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson’s (1974) *A Simplest Systematics* are two early and highly influential theories of talk-in-interaction. They have contributed to our understanding of how conversations are co-constructed, held together, and how intersubjectivity is achieved. As Wooffitt states, CA is concerned with the “architecture” of talk-in-interaction. In contrast, DA considers external contexts, such as interlocutor relationships, place of interaction, and purpose important for understanding talk-

in-interaction. CA is interested in contextual influences and background information, but only when "...close analysis reveals participants' orientation to such details" (Seedhouse, 2004, p. 16).

CA is often associated with linguistic analysis of talk-in-interaction, but as Seedhouse (2004) points out ethnomethodological CA and linguistic CA seek answers to different questions. CA is particularly interested in understanding social acts whereas linguistic CA is interested primarily in language.

For discourse analysts, context is a vital piece of the language tripartite: form, function, and context. Gee (1999; 2001) notes that discourses do not occur in a vacuum. They are always situated in a larger context. Therefore, in order to understand talk-in-interaction or "language in use" (Gee, 1999, p. 7) it is necessary to situate these language events in their larger context. Gee calls this larger context "big D" Discourses.

When 'little d' discourse (language-in-use) is melded integrally with non-language 'stuff' to enact specific identities and activities, then I [Gee] say that 'big D' discourses are involved. We are all members of many, a great many, different Discourses. Discourses which often influence each other in positive and negative ways, and which sometimes breed with each other to create new hybrids ... In turn, you produce, reproduce, sustain, and transform a given 'form of life' or Discourse. All life for all of us is just a patchwork of thoughts, words, objects, events, actions, and interactions in Discourse (p. 7).

Gee's distinction between "big D" Discourse and "little d" discourse is important. He is claiming that during talk-in-interaction people display, reify, and reformulate their identities as they relate to the activities people are engaged in at the moment. In other words, with each utterance, a person displays beliefs, histories, values, and ways of thinking: individual pieces that, when taken as whole, contribute to our identity. Thus, in analyzing talk-in-interaction from a DA perspective, the larger sociocultural context is integral to



understanding and interpreting the words that are being exchanged by the interlocutors.

Cameron (2001) concurs with Gee in that discourse can be defined as “ ‘language in use’: language used to do something and mean something, language produced and interpreted in a real-world context” (p. 13).

To this end, DA for the purpose of this study is being incorporated as a method for understanding how four international English L2 students adjust to their shifting environments and negotiate their identities as they transition from an EFL context into an academic ESL context. Through the process of conducting in depth interviews in which the case study participants are asked to explore the issues of access, identity, and motivation/investment, common and recurring themes emerged (Cameron, 2001) and will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

## **L2 Proficiency**

Everything about L2 proficiency is contentious. In many ways, the debate goes to the core of the rift between the cognitivist and social camps in SLA. As Schoonen observes, language assessment research has traditionally focused on sentence level features while largely ignoring “... general communicative language ability or... performance tasks requiring conveying meaning through writing and speaking or understanding meaning through reading and listening” (p. 712).

The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1981) defines *proficient* as “Performing in a given art, skill, or branch of learning with expert correctness and facility” (p. 1045). For the purposes of assessing L2 proficiency, the key terms in the above definition include *performing*, *skill*, and *expert correctness*. Depending on one’s orientation, these central terms take on significantly different connotations. A rather narrow interpretation, and

the one adopted by early test designers, measured L2 proficiency based on the “four components of knowledge (grammar, vocabulary, phonology/graphology” (Bachman & Savignon, 1986, p. 381). Indeed, this was the prevailing view of not only test designers, but of researchers as well, who conducted studies of L2 development based on discrete linguistic features, such as Dulay and Burt’s (1974) studies of child L2 acquisition and Baily, Madden, and Krashen’s (1974) similar study of adult L2 acquisition of inflectional morphemes. Yet, as Bachman and Savignon observe, the relationship of these components to each other is not clear. This view is supported by others as well.

However, without correlations between enabling skills, detailed processes and features and major language skills in (second language) language use, it is not clear to what these analyses of short segments of language relate to everyday language use in larger discourse units (Schoonen, 2011, p. 712).

In fact, Byrnes (1987) states, “speakers increasing their proficiency level are not to be equated with speakers who steadily decrease their rates of grammatical flaws” (p. 47). This view is supported by the ability of L2 students to successfully pass from one level of language instruction to the next in school, and yet they cannot use the language to read, write, or speak (Bachman & Savignon, 1986). The issue that Bachman & Savignon, Byrnes, and Schoonen raise – associating the ability to manipulate the building blocks of language with L2 proficiency – essentially centers on competence (knowledge of language) and performance (use of language): a distinction made famous by Chomsky (1965). It is largely these discrete linguistic features, however, that continue to be used as the measuring stick for assessing L2 proficiency. Some argue that what is really being measured is an L2 learner’s grammatical “accuracy” (Byrnes, 1987; Valdes, Capitelli, & Alvarez, 2011) and not L2 proficiency. To complicate matters, the basis for which various L2 proficiency levels are

determined comes from the assumption that ultimate L2 attainment can be claimed when the L2 learner has achieved “native-like” fluency, a construct that has been shown to be both mythical and political (Rajagopalan, 1997; Widdowson, 1994). In fact, according to Valdés, Capitelli, & Alvarez (2011), only 5% of all people, children or adults, who study an additional language ever achieve “native-like” fluency.

Rather than perceiving L2 proficiency as performing with “expert correctness,” with a narrow focus on “structural accuracy,” numerous scholars demonstrate that language assessment should begin with the question, “What can learners do with the language, in what context, for what purposes? (Chalhoub-Deville & Deville, 2005; Consolo, 2006; Schoonen, 2011). This places language competence on an equal plane with language performance. As a result, the concept of language competence has undergone several transformations in which other, more socially oriented aspects of language are folded into the L2 proficiency equation. Canale (1983) and Canale and Swain (1980) broke language use out into various competencies, including sociolinguistic, grammatical, strategic, and discourse competence. Their delineation of language competencies forced the field of SLA to consider what and how people use language outside of testing contexts, thereby encouraging a more inclusive definition of what it means to be proficient in an L2.

Common knowledge posits that spoken and written language are vastly different. Recognizing that knowledge is co-constructed as opposed to being “deposited” (Freire, 1974), communicative competence is also a co-constructed activity in which interlocutors are actively engaged in the language event. Spoken, face-to-face interaction is immediately interactive, meaning that the interlocutors are physically present during the communication event, whereas in written exchanges, the interlocutors are frequently separated temporally as

well as physically from the language event (Seedhouse, 2011). Consequently, attempting to represent oral language orthographically presents many challenges, as evidenced by the elaborate conversation analysis transcription features created by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974). Yet, even with a tight CA transcription of an oral exchange, much of the communicative information is lost. The issue is not so much that of L2 proficiency but that of competence. Chomsky (1959) distinguished between competence (what a speaker knows about language) and performance (what a speaker does with the language). This dichotomy, though, is artificial and incomplete, since it does not account for the many different contexts in which language is used, for what purposes, or for its co-constructed nature. Most importantly, the performance/competence paradigm does not acknowledge the interactive nature of language, nor does it allow for important semiotic features (non-linguistic and non-verbal signs) that also contribute to the co-construction of knowledge. Thus, the act of reading, for example, does not simply include the act of looking passively at words on a page. Rather, the reader must actively engage with the writer and does so by reading, thinking, imagining, and reacting to the words on the page. The writer is responsible for presenting the ideas in a familiar structure, i.e. word order, spelling conventions, sentence and paragraph cohesion, while the reader is responsible for linking the writer's ideas and reacting to them in some way. Likewise, in oral exchanges, the interlocutors share responsibilities in producing language in a form common to everyone present and in responding in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways.

Whether it is a face-to-face interaction between two or several speakers, or the interaction between a reader and a written text, successful interaction presupposes not only a shared knowledge of the world, the reference to a common external context of communication, but also the construction of a shared internal context or “sphere of

inter-subjectivity” that is built through the collaboration efforts of the interactional partners (Kramsch, 1986, p. 367).

In recent years, what it means to “know a language, ” and, therefore, language competence, has undergone further scrutiny, culminating in the constructs of interactional competence (IC) (Kramsch, 1986; Young, 2011) and symbolic competence (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008). Young (2011) defines interactional competence in the following way:

...how those resources are employed mutually and reciprocally by all participants in a particular discursive practice. This means that IC is not the knowledge or the possession of an individual person, but is co-constructed by all participants in a discursive practice, and IC varies with the practice and with the participants (p. 428).

Interactional competence attempts to incorporate a local, rather than global perspective of language in-use. In other words, it is recognized that language use is highly contextual and that communication is co-constructed, depending as much on extra-linguistic factors, such as gesture, gaze, intonation, interaction, purpose, etc. as on the accurate production of discrete features. Young (2011) identifies seven resources that interlocutors use in any interaction.

1. Identity resources

- a. Participation framework: the identities of all participants in an interaction, present or not, official or unofficial, ratified or unratified, and their footing or identities in the interaction

2. Linguistic resources

- a. Register: the features of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar that typify a practice
- b. Modes of meaning: the ways in which participants construct interpersonal, experiential, and textual meanings in a practice

### 3. Interactional resources

- a. Speech acts: the selection of acts in a practice and their sequential organization
- b. Turn-taking: how participants select the next speaker and how participants know when to end one turn and when to begin the next.
- c. Repair: the ways in which participants respond to interactional trouble in a given practice
- d. Boundaries: the opening and closing acts of a practice that serve to distinguish a given practice from adjacent talk (pp. 429-430).

Young's resources for interactional competence are rooted in the principles of conversation identified by scholars working within the framework of ethnomethodological conversation analysis (Ethno CA) several decades ago. These Ethno CA principles include the following:

1. Indexicality: Interlocutors rely on background context for additional information, but this information must be "talked into being" for the information to be immediately relevant.
2. The Documentary Method of Interpretation: An real-world action is considered a document of a previously known pattern.
3. The Reciprocity of Perspectives: Interlocutors demonstrate agreement that they are adhering to the same norms, affiliate with the similar perspectives, and work toward achieving intersubjectivity.
4. Normative Accountability: Interlocutors create their own social actions and interpret others social actions based on immediate events.

5. Reflexivity: Interlocutors are able to interpret and produce actions or utterances because the interactional procedures are the same (Seedhouse, 2004, pp. 7-12).

As interlocutors participate in a conversation, they rely on and produce these conversational principles to co-construct meaning in an effort to establish intersubjectivity. Like the principles of conversation, Young's interactional competence resources are employed by the interlocutors in an effort to co-construct meaningful, comprehensible speech acts that each can use to further the conversation.

What should be obvious by now is that the definition of L2 proficiency, as it pertains to SLA, has evolved since the 1960's, with the emphasis being on structural accuracy. Even so, L2 proficiency exams, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language and the International English Language Testing System (described in the next section), the two most common English L2 proficiency exams used by U.S. institutions of higher education for admission purposes, continue to emphasize accuracy over interaction. Part of this is because it has proven difficult to incorporate the many features of interactional competence into a standardized format. Furthermore, any time an attempt to standardize a naturally occurring phenomenon is made, the phenomenon is no longer natural and therefore becomes static and predictable, characteristics that are antithetical to natural language use.

In closing this section, because L2 proficiency is a construct that I discuss more thoroughly in later chapters and because the case study participants had to demonstrate their English L2 proficiency on either TOEFL or IELTS, I present descriptions of these exams and how they are used as they relate to the local university context where this case study takes place. In chapter 5, in which I analyze the case study participants' L2 proficiency in depth, I will demonstrate how these exams fail to fully capture the English L2 abilities of the case

study participants, offering support for the need for more interactive assessments based on the professional and social needs of the L2 learners.

***University admission requirements.*** International students (with a few notable exceptions<sup>1</sup>) who come to the United States to study in a university or college are required to demonstrate their knowledge of English on an approved English L2 proficiency exam. International students entering the university where this case study was conducted must meet or exceed the minimum scores on one of the various exams listed below in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2: Required Minimum English L2 proficiency Exam Scores**

Exam	Educational Level	
	Undergraduate	Graduate
TOEFL-pbt	520	550
TOEFL-cbt	190	213
TOEFL-ibt	68	79-80
IELTS	6.5	7
CPE	C	C
CAE	C	C

As can be seen in Table 2.2, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) has three forms. The TOEFL-pbt (paper-based test) is the original TOEFL format, introduced in 1964 and created by Charles A. Ferguson (Yargo, 2010). It has a score range of 310 to 677. With the personal computer becoming more widely available, TOEFL created the computer-based test (TOEFL-cbt) in 1998. The top score on the TOEFL-cbt is 300. Again, with advances in Internet technologies, TOEFL introduced the Internet-based test (TOEFL-ibt) in 2005. The highest score possible on the TOEFL-ibt is 100. The TOEFL-ibt and TOEFL-pbt are still in use today. The TOEFL-cbt was discontinued in 2006 once the TOEFL-ibt went on line

<sup>1</sup> International students coming from Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa are exempt from taking an English L2 proficiency exam because English is the official language of these countries.



worldwide (RachelDale, 2010). Regardless of the form, TOEFL is based on Standard American Academic English and is an Educational Testing Service exam.

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) was created over 20 years ago in cooperation with Cambridge University (International English Language Testing System, 2011). It is based on British English. It also tests academic English, but it also has a form that assesses general English as well. The score range for the IELTS is 0-9, with 9 being considered near native-like. The University of Cambridge Examinations Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) and the Certificate of Advanced English (CAE) are also British English exams (Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2011).

If international English L2 students do not meet the minimum English L2 proficiency requirements, they can enroll in the university's intensive English program (IEP), where they can receive up to 25 contact hours of English instruction a week. Classes taken in the IEP are not credit bearing; therefore, they do not count toward degree requirements for graduation from the university. Occasionally, the IEP enrolls ESL students who do not intend to go to the university. These students are primarily exchange students who come to the United States to study English for one or two 16-week semesters.

Though the university designates the various exams as acceptable forms of assessment for determining international students' linguistic preparedness for doing university level work, only the TOEFL-pbt and IELTS are significant to this case study, since these are the only two exams my case study participants took. Therefore, I will only address the format of these two exams.

TOEFL-pbt, as stated above, was created in the 1960s, when error analysis and contrastive analysis dominated the field of SLA. Furthermore, digital technology as we

know it today did not exist, thus making paper and pencil, multiple choice items the only viable option for exam design and administration. The TOEFL-pbt is divided into three sub-sections: listening, structure and written expression, and reading. To arrive at a TOEFL score, the three sub-sections are scored separately. Then, through a statistical formula for norming, the scores are weighted and averaged, providing the overall score.

For the listening section, examinees are taken through a series of listening tasks from listening to a brief two-line exchange between two interlocutors, to a longer informal conversation involving two interlocutors, and finally longer passages in which examinees listen to academic mini-lectures. Examinees listen to the conversations and mini-lectures. They are then asked questions to which they choose the appropriate answer from four choices provided in their test book. Examinees are not allowed to take notes during the listening section.

The structure and written expression section is divided into separate parts. In the structure section, examinees are presented with sentences containing blanks and then four choices that could possibly fill the blank. Examinees are asked to choose the item that best completes each sentence. In the written expression section, examinees are presented with sentences with four parts underlined. Typical items that are tested are subject-verb agreement, plural-singular agreement, relative clause markers, determiners, and prepositions. The task is to identify which of the four underlined parts is grammatically incorrect.

For the reading section, examinees are given a series of reading passages taken from academic sources, such as literature, science, art, history, or business. Examinees read the passages and then answer questions about the reading passages. The questions test

examinees' knowledge of vocabulary and paragraph organization, as well as their ability to find information and to make inferences.

What is not present in the TOEFL-pbt are assessments of production skills, i.e. speaking and writing. Examinees' reception, analytical, and test taking savvy are essentially what is tested on the TOEFL-pbt. As alluded to earlier, the emphasis is on the individual cognitive processing skills, not co-constructed social interaction, or communicative competence.

IELTS is largely similar to TOEFL-pbt, with a few notable differences. First, IELTS has a general English form and an academic English form. TOEFL-pbt is strictly a test of academic American English. Furthermore, IELTS has a written and a speaking section. For the written section, examinees are presented with a topic, a figure, or chart, and are asked to write an essay in which they present an argument or explain the contents and significance of the chart or figure. For the speaking section, examinees participate in a one-on-one interview with a trained IELTS administrator. Following a script, the interviewer asks the examinee several questions designed to elicit information about an examinees' comprehensibility, including pronunciation and grammatical accuracy. Like the TOEFL-pbt, the composite scores for each section are calculated, weighted, and averaged to come up with a score that indicates an individual's English L2 proficiency along the IELTS' 0 to 9 language proficiency continuum.

On the whole, IELTS is more holistic than TOEFL-pbt, incorporating the productive skills of writing and speaking, yet it still fails to fully capture the interactional competence of the English learner. Specifically, the speaking portion does not allow for the natural flow of a conversation. A transcript from an IELTS sample interview

(<http://www.ielts.org/default.aspx>) shows the interviewer asking a question, the examinee answering the question, and then the interviewee going on to the next question, without following up on the examinee's response. Rather than the interview format resembling a coffee-shop conversation among friends, it is more reflective of an interrogation by a law enforcement officer.

The point in the previous analysis of the two L2 proficiency exams has been to demonstrate that they fall short in assessing the full range of competency resources that interlocutors draw on during spoken interactions. Thus, it is possible to score high enough on the TOEFL-pbt or IELTS and still not produce language that resembles true communicative ability (Bachman & Savignon, 1986). Yet, this is the assessment strategy universities employ to determine the linguistic readiness of international English L2 students for academic study through English. My dissertation will demonstrate the inadequacies of these standardized English L2 proficiency exams from both an accuracy perspective as well as an interactional competence perspective.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, though individual cognitive processing skills are, without question, important in the L2 learning process, they are not the only realms worthy, or in need, of investigation. In fact, the constructs of identity, investment, and access to L2 resources within a sociolinguistic framework reveal that learning an L2 is fraught with all the complexities of being human. Furthermore, these constructs also demonstrate the inadequacies of past and current methods for assessing an L2 learner's communicative competencies. The following chapters will build on these claims and will demonstrate that international English L2 students transitioning from their home countries into the United

States for the purpose of pursuing tertiary studies face significant challenges that reach far beyond traditional cognitive explanations of second language acquisition.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The methods one employs may be a matter of personal preference, but choice of method is also determined in large part by the questions one seeks answers to, the body of knowledge that already exists on that topic, the domain of inquiry and context, and the methods the questions lend themselves to (Duff, 2008).

Qualitative research is a distinct type of research grounded in a history quite removed from that of quantitative research, which is vested in a theory driven, empirical epistemology.

Qualitative research categorically rejects many of the tenets of quantitative research, and instead, embraces the unknown, subjective, and situational nature of human behavior.

“Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Likewise, Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research in the following way:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p. 15).

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lends itself to just such a type of inquiry, investigating the lives of four individuals as they adjust to and adapt to life in a different language and in a different culture. Immigration is and has been a social phenomenon for centuries, leaving in its wake a wonderful and complex mix of languages and cultures that are forced to change, adapt, and evolve as a result of contact. Because of this complex linguistic and cultural matrix, it only makes sense

to incorporate a methodology that is flexible enough to account for the inherent variation of such an endeavor as immigration.

Qualitative research includes but is not limited to biography (sometimes called life history), ethnography, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 1998). Each of these approaches is steeped in long traditions of research and has been found to be productive for a variety of academic disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, linguistics, business, psychology, medicine, as well as education. Because qualitative research includes such varied approaches, researchers must be judicious in determining which approach is best suited for their questions, as well as for the context in which the naturalistic inquiry occurs.

For my study, I determined that qualitative case study is the most appropriate methodology for investigating the transitional period experienced by international English L2 students as they moved from their home countries into the United States. I employ discourse analysis from a sociocultural perspective to uncover the ways in which the case study participants' construct and recognize their identities as L2 learners of English and how their communities (in their home countries and in the United States) contributed to the formation of their identity. Gee's (1999) questions for investigating the relationship between the individual and others served as a guide while I poured over the data.

Additionally, I use various quantitative and qualitative language development measurements to investigate the English language L2 proficiency of my case study participants. To assist with analyzing the types and quality of access that my case study participants have to sources of English, I use a mixed method tool, a language log, that permits descriptive statistics to map the language use patterns of my case study participants

in the United States, while also capturing the emotions they experienced during the language events. The primary sources for the discursive data were collected via face-to-face interviews, focus group sessions, and written documents.

This chapter describes the methods I used, my thought processes, and the steps I took throughout the study. The first section defines case study as it is realized within a qualitative framework and explains why it is the most appropriate methodology for the current research. I then define discourse analysis as I use it in this study. After situating the study and myself, I provide a detailed description of how I designed the study, selected the participants, and collected, coded, and analyzed data. I also provide a detailed description of my use of transcription features, and how I chose to present the data. Finally, throughout the chapter, I identify discrepancies, issues, and/or gaps I encountered and how I adapted to these challenges.

### **Case Study**

Case study at times seems to be the catchall for any type of qualitative research, when, in fact, it is a methodology that lends itself to quantitative research traditions as well. Within the qualitative tradition, case study has been used to study individuals, as well as larger communities and/or state mandated programs (Glesne, 2006). Yet qualitative case study, be it the in-depth study of one person or of a community phenomenon, is grounded on common principles. Case study is “[a]n empirical study about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a “case”), set within its real-world context—especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2011, p. 4).

Creswell (1998) states that case study “... is an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving



multiple sources of information rich in context” (p.61). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe case study as “a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (p. 196). What binds each of these definitions of case study, and others, is that the subject of focus is bounded, singular, in-depth, providing multiple perspectives, is particularized, contextualized, and interpretive (Duff, 2008). Van Lier (2005) cautions that “boundary or boundness” must not be interpreted too rigidly, so as not to “oversimplify and isolate the case” (p. 196). In other words, the boundaries must be flexible enough to allow the case study to take the researcher where it leads, rather than being constrained by preconceived parameters. Flexibility is important, as this can become the catalyst for discovery, a central tenet of qualitative research.

The focus of my case study is the phenomenon of international L2 English students transitioning from their home country contexts to a U.S. university academic context, and how this transition interacts with individuals’ multiple identities, investment in English, and access to English and English speaking communities, and the role that L2 proficiency plays in these processes. In summary, my research meets the criteria outlined below.

1. Case study analyzes a single subject or multiple subjects.
2. Case study relies on documents, archival records, interviews, observations, and physical artifacts.
3. Case study analysis includes description, themes, and assertions.
4. Case study narrative is in-depth (Creswell, 1998).

For my study, the boundaries are not so much physical as they are contextual. Obviously, participants are crossing several boundaries: country borders, academic and social communities, and linguistic boundaries. However, the context of being an L2 speaker of

English remains constant. The participants, regardless of how much, what type, and what quality of access to sources of English they have, are nevertheless L2 speakers of English. What remains to be discovered is how the label of L2 speaker of English shifts and interacts with the case study participants' identities and investment in learning English between their home countries and the native English speaking communities they engage with and/or seek to enter as post-baccalaureate and graduate students in the United States.

Learning a second language is a complex, multifaceted process that involves a great deal more than learning the grammatical structures, phonology, and lexicon of the L2. "SLA involves linguistic, cognitive, affective, and social processes. That is, it is an ongoing interplay of individual mental processes, meanings, and actions, as well as social interactions that occur within a particular time and place, and learning history" (Duff, 2008). Therefore, studies that focus only on discrete features of second language acquisition are incomplete. For example, investigating the acquisition of the English present perfect versus the past tense or the Spanish copula *ser* versus *estar* are important avenues of inquiry; however, without considering the sociocultural context of the learning environment, the reasons for learning the L2, the learner, individual learning differences, the teacher, and pedagogical approach, we are left with myriad questions that result in inexplicable variations in learner acquisition. Larsen-Freeman, in her work with complex organizing systems and SLA, notes that the "behavior of the whole emerges out of the interaction of its parts. Studying the parts in isolation one by one will tell us about each part, but not how they interact" (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, p. 143). To that end, Miller (2004) suggests that any study that concerns itself with L2 learners should include the following characteristics:

1. It must look at language in its sociocultural matrix, which shows both sensibility not just to proficiency in a second language, but to the social and cultural salience of language use.
2. It must reveal contextual features in local settings.
3. It must incorporate an *emic* perspective, the voice and subjectivities of both participant and researcher present in the writing.
4. It must allow for on going flexibility in the data collection and analysis, drawing on whatever fields prove productive for the project (p. 296).

As Diagram 3.1 demonstrates, the number of variables is multiple and complex, suggesting that even with careful analysis, generalization may not be a realistic goal.

**Diagram 3.1: *Variable Matrix***

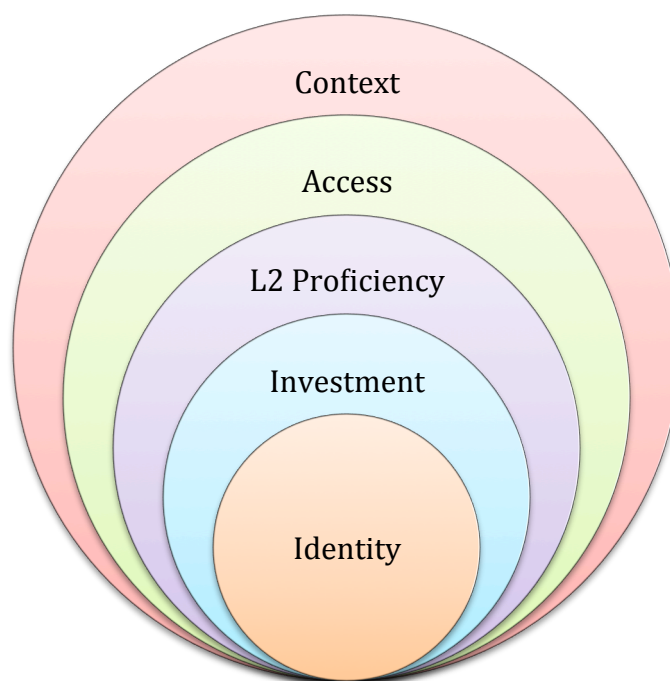


Diagram 3.1 broadly identifies the major categories of identity, investment, access, and L2 proficiency and represents their embedded relationship. The outermost circle is

context, which is broadly defined for this case study to mean either the home country context or the U.S. university context where the case study participants study and use the L2: English. As will be demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the context in which the L2 is learned and then used, influences the other L2 variables of access, investment, L2 proficiency, and identity. The next variable, access, is defined as the type and quality of English with which L2 learners have contact. Naturally, access to the L2 is essential to the learning process as access allows learners the opportunities to hear, analyze, and practice their L2 skills. In short, access is the conduit to the input-output process necessary for internalization to occur. As such, it is obvious that the context of learning and use influences the type and quality of English to which L2 learners have access.

L2 proficiency is defined as the ability for L2 learners to understand and to be understood; their ability to comprehend and their ability to be comprehensible; their ability to process input accurately, and their ability to produce the L2 accurately. To achieve proficiency in an L2, learners must develop their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills to a level that allows for native speakers of the language to actively engage with the L2 learner in meaningful communication. Furthermore, L2 proficiency also includes cultural or pragmatic knowledge about how to behave in certain contexts. Broadly speaking, different levels of L2 proficiency may be acceptable, depending on the context. For example, buying a shirt in a department store may only require basic vocabulary or chunks of language, such as *how much* or *cotton?* The context of the department store, the cashier-customer relationship, and knowledge of the pricing customs dictates the amount and type of language that is required to complete the transaction. In short, pragmatics makes the department store interaction predictable, requiring very little L2 facility. However, giving a presentation in an

economics class about the effects of clothing manufacturing on the local economy in China requires significantly more linguistic skill. The presentation is context-reduced, the activity invokes academic jargon specific to economics, and there may be assessment consequences linked to the presentation. Thus, L2 proficiency is integrally related to access and context. The next embedded circle, investment, is defined as the learners' beliefs about their learning practices and the usefulness of their L2 learning endeavor. For example, if the L2 learners believe that becoming fluent in English is important to their futures, but they do not like the classroom practices, they may seek other, outside sources of English. In this way, they can practice the L2 in a way they believe is more beneficial to their goals. Investment also describes learners' motivations for entering into opportunities to interact in the L2, or not. Investment recognizes that L2 learners' identities as legitimate members of the L2 community will increase as they participate actively in the social or academic context.

Finally, at the very center of Diagram 3.1 is identity. Identity is defined as dynamic and co-constructed by the individual and the community. It is co-constructed because as individuals we possess individual qualities, such as personality, history, language, ethnicity, and so forth, which contribute to our understanding of ourselves, yet these qualities are also available to public evaluation. As other people interact with us, they form opinions about who we are based on our actions, statements, ethnicity, language, and so on. Through this interaction of self-identity and public identity, our identities shift, grow, and are reinforced. It is my belief that as L2 learners interact with individuals in the larger context, gain access to opportunities to engage in the L2, develop greater L2 proficiency, and continue investing in themselves as learners and members of the L2 community, their identities as L2 learners and members of their community also evolve.

A post-positivist position embraces an ideology that recognizes that social reality is constructed differently according to different individuals (Duff, 2008, p. 15). Thus, the “particularization” of each case can lead to generalization, or knowledge gained from “lower-level constructs” can inform higher-level constructs” (van Lier, 2005). In other words, if various contextual differences are accounted for, then the results of a case study may be comparable to other cases or situations. According to van Lier (2005),

Among the advantages of the case study approach are the attention to context and the ability to track and document change (such as language development) over time. In addition, a case study zeros in on a particular case (an individual, a group, or a situation) in great detail, within its natural context of situation, and tries to probe into its characteristics, dynamics, and purposes (p. 195).

Ultimately, each individual has a story to tell and their story describes their realities as they experience and see them. Researchers must recognize the individuality of research, and if a uniform or general hypothesis emerges as the data is collected and analyzed, then so much the better, but if generalizations cannot be drawn, then the research is not any less valid. On the contrary, it adds yet another exemplar to the complex and highly variable system of human behavior.

In using DA to investigate the Discourses of the case study participants, their core and situated identities, their experiences with accessing the linguistic and cultural capital they desire in the United States, how the U.S. native English speaking academic community perceives the case study participants, I use as general guidelines the following questions, taken from Gee (1999).

1. How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?
2. What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact?

3. What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating?
4. How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another (pp. 11-13)?

These questions served as anchors for me during data analysis. If, after several hours of closely scrutinizing a particular transcript, I tired and began coding everything, I would refer back to these overarching questions, thus, reorienting myself to the task at hand. Of Gee's seven discourse analysis questions, the four listed above were directly relevant to my research questions of identity, investment, access, and L2 proficiency. For example, question 3 above relates to the case study participants' perspectives on why they learned English, why they immigrated to the U.S., and what they perceive as being important or valuable to them academically, socially, and professionally. Question 3 was also relevant when analyzing the native English speaker's (NES) perceptions of the international English L2 learners' English. Why did the NES's focus on grammar and pronunciation? What does an emphasis on discrete features of language say about the value that a NES places on correctness and "native-like" fluency?

Gee's theoretical framework of DA helps to illuminate the histories and identities of the case study participants as they evolved in their home countries, allowing for a thick description of the case study participants to emerge. Furthermore, DA assists in linking these histories and identities with English language interactions, providing a description of the relationship each case study participant has developed with English, both in their countries and in the United States. Discourse analysis by itself, however, proves to be inadequate in accurately assessing my case study participants' English language L2 proficiency. How I addressed this dilemma is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

## **Methodology**

*Participants.* The nature of a case study such as this necessarily means that the researcher gets to know the participants on a personal level (some more intimately than others) and thus runs the risk of coloring the descriptions with subjective comments. Furthermore, I recognize and accept that my own ethnicity – white male, middle class American – and my English monolingualism influence the lens through which I analyze the case study participants. Likewise, I have lived in Taiwan (1 year), Guam (3 years), and Mexico (5 weeks) and have studied Mandarin and Spanish. Having studied the first languages of the case study participants and having lived abroad also contributes to the perspective that I will undoubtedly cast on the analysis.

The ideal candidate for participating in the study was an international student who had English as an additional language and who had not been to the United States previously. Additionally, the international student should have had plans to stay for an extended period of time (more than a year) and to complete a degree from a specific institution of higher education in the Southwestern United States. A number between four and six participants was desired, allowing for multiple perspectives on the transitional process. Furthermore, I had decided that, since I have some familiarity with both Spanish and Mandarin, and that, since I have lived in countries where these languages are the majority language used for education, politics, commerce, and more, I would limit my study to students coming from a Spanish and/or Mandarin background. While my eventual participant pool met the language background requirement, it was necessary for me to relax the requirement of when the participants entered the United States. This was necessary because I was unable to begin soliciting participants until late November and early December 2009.



Originally, I had planned to begin selecting case study participants during the summer of 2009, a month to six weeks prior to the beginning of the Fall semester. The reasoning for this was that the Fall semester is when the largest number of new international students enters the United States to begin course work. Fall is also a time of year when U.S. universities and colleges are oriented toward welcoming new students, domestic or international, to campus. However, final approval from the university's Human Research Protections Office was not received until August 2009; thus, participant selection did not begin until late November and early December during the Fall semester.

The university's international student office assisted in making initial contact with international students admitted to the university by sending out a general announcement describing the study and requesting volunteers. Initial replies from interested participants came from those participating in one-semester study abroad programs and/or from countries that had not been targeted, neither of which met the essential criteria. Selecting participants who had not been to the United States previously also proved difficult. I can only speculate as to why more international English L2 students who were new to the United States were not motivated to participate in the study.

1. I was a stranger to the new students.
2. I did not offer any financial compensation for participating.
3. The study was being conducted in English, possibly alienating international English L2 students who are not confident in their English skills (spoken and/or written).
4. The amount of time, speaking, and writing expectations required of the participants was too much.

5. Many times, international students do not receive their visas until very late in the application process; thus, they do not know if or when they will be coming to the United States until literally the last minute.
6. The time of transitioning from their home countries to the United States is fraught with major cultural and linguistic changes; thus, agreeing to participate in a semester long study seemed overwhelming.

Ultimately I ended up with the following four case study participants from four different countries:

- |               |           |              |        |
|---------------|-----------|--------------|--------|
| 1. Belita--   | Guatemala | 3. Marcos--  | Spain  |
| 2. Dao-Ming-- | China     | 4. Melosia-- | Mexico |

Thus, participant selection did not actually occur until the week prior to the start of the Spring 2010 semester during student orientation, with the exception of Melosia and Belita.<sup>2</sup> Belita had been a student of mine in a freshman composition 101 class during the Fall 2009 semester while she was also a student in the university intensive English program (IEP). At the end of the Fall semester, I met with Belita at the IEP end of the semester awards ceremony. I was then introduced to Melosia at this meeting. The purpose of our meeting was to talk about the study and to give the potential participants a copy of the approved Human Research Protections Office Informed Consent form to take home, read, and respond to me at a later date at their convenience.

I accepted Belita into the study even though she had just completed her first semester at the university because she was still relatively new to the United States, having only arrived 6 months earlier, and since she was still enrolled part-time in the IEP. Thus, I felt as if she were still in the throes of transition and would offer a rich perspective.

For some of the same reasons, I accepted Melosia into the study. She, too, had only been in the United States for 6 months. Additionally, Melosia had yet to take a “regular” university class, having been enrolled full-time in the IEP. I considered that, since she would be transitioning into “regular” academic classes in the Spring semester, she would offer a unique and rich perspective regarding the transition process. I think the chapters that follow offer evidence in support of my decisions regarding Belita and Melosia.

Because I had not received replies from the desired population in November and December 2010, the international office and the IEP allowed me to attend their respective orientations to announce the study in person and to collect names and email addresses of students interested in learning more about the study. From these two orientations, I collected 27 possible candidates, bringing the total number of potential participants to 29. Of the 29 potential participants, 13 did not meet the language background criteria, leaving 16 candidates for the study, including Belita and Melosia. I then emailed the 14 candidates I had not met personally, asking them if they were still interested in participating, and if so, to answer a few more initial questions. Two responded that they had been in the United States for an extended period of time previously, with one having earned a Master’s degree from a U.S. university. Thus, 12 remained. Of the 12, only three responded that they were still interested in participating in the study.

Initially, I accepted into the study an individual from Brazil. Even though his first language is Portuguese, I felt that his unique perspective would add to the richness of the data. This person was employed as a teaching assistant in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. During our first meeting, he openly identified himself as homosexual. He was a

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<sup>2</sup> All of the participants are introduced in detail in Chapter 4.

doctoral student in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese with a concentration in linguistics. Unfortunately, the individual only partially participated in the study, committing only to the individual interviews.

1. He did not complete a language log.
2. He did not read any of the articles I asked participants to read.
3. He did not write about the articles or his experiences related to L2 learning.
4. He did not provide me with a native English speaker contact to interview.
5. He did not attend either of the focus group sessions.

Thus, unable to triangulate his data, I felt as if I were left with no choice but to exclude him from the study.

In the end, I selected Marcos, a male from Spain, and Dao-Ming, a female from China, as the final two participants. Both individuals met the criteria for the ideal participant.

1. They were new to the United States.
2. They planned to stay in the United States for an extended period of time.
3. Their L1s were either Spanish or Mandarin.

In summary, I ended up with four participants who met the established criteria and who were willing to participate in the study without compensation.

## **Tasks**

*Interviews.* The bulk of the data comes from extensive interviews. Figure 3.1 displays the different kinds of interviews I conducted, the number of each type of interview, with whom they were conducted, and the average length of the interview.

**Figure 3.1: Interviews**

<b>Interview Type</b>	<b>Participant Type</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Average Length</b>
One-on-one	Primary	4 each	16	1 hour each
One-on-one	Secondary	1 each	6	45 minutes each
Focus Group	Primary	2	2	90 minutes each

*Primary participant interviews.* In total, I conducted four one-on-one interviews with each case study participant, for a total of 16 interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Before the interviews began, I developed a list of questions. The questions were grouped into broad categories: *Family and Home Background, Language Learning in Home Country, Gender Issues, Travel and Language, Life at the University in the United States, and Language and Culture at the University in the United States* (see Appendix 1). Though I had prepared questions, I also felt it was important to allow the interviews to proceed as naturally as possible. Thus, where possible, I asked open-ended questions permitting the participants "...to answer from their own frame of reference" (Bourdieu, 1982). Because this study focuses on the co-construction of identity and gaining access to the L2, each participant's "personal frame of reference" is all-important.

Each of the primary participant interviews was conducted in the main library on the university campus in a student study room. I recorded each interview using standard audiocassettes and a standard cassette recorder. An external microphone was placed in the middle of the table. Before each of the interviews, in an effort to establish a relaxed environment, I offered to buy the participants coffee, tea, and/or pastries from the Starbucks in the library. Only two of the participants, Melosia and Belita, accepted my offers. Each interview was scheduled for one hour, believing that more than an hour would lead to a loss of concentration for both the participants and me. I obtained quality recordings from all of

the participants except Marcos. The first interview only recorded the first 5 minutes. I can only attribute this to poor batteries. During the fourth interview for both Marcos and Belita, the tape recorder began to malfunction. Having learned my lesson regarding the batteries and using fresh batteries for each interview, I can only assume that the tape recorder itself must have been damaged in some way. Thus, I purchased a new tape recorder/telephone answering machine for the final interviews with Melosia, Dao-Ming, secondary participants, and the focus group sessions.

*Secondary participant interviews.* In addition to the extensive case study participant one-on-one interviews, I also interviewed native English speakers with whom the primary case study participants had some sort of relationship. I asked the primary case study participants to identify friends, classmates, and/or instructors they knew who were native speakers of English and who knew them. I then asked if I could interview these individuals. In total, there were six secondary participant interviews.

**Figure 3.2: Secondary Participants**

Primary Participant	Secondary Participant	Relationship	Role
Belita	Andy	Professional	TA* - Public Speaking
	Lisa	Professional/friend	TA- Intensive English Program
Dao-Ming	Jim	Romantic	Boyfriend/husband
Marcos	Paul	Professional	Professor Emeritus Engineering
Melosia	David	Friend	Classmate
	Andrew	Professional	TA - Linguistics

\*TA= Teaching assistant

Figure 3.2 shows the names (pseudonyms), type of relationship, and the social role that the secondary participants represent. Belita and Melosia both identified two secondary participants, whereas Dao-Ming and Marcos only identified one secondary participant each.

The secondary participant interviews were not as systematic. Marcos' contact was a professor emeritus in engineering. Because of his stature and age, I did not feel it was appropriate to impose on him, so I took the interview to his office. However, I did not record our conversation. Once in his office, the professor began speaking immediately about the virtues of international education and of the contributions that international students bring to the field of engineering. During our conversation, though, it became apparent that the professor really did not know who Marcos was, as he incorrectly made reference to Marcos' South American roots.

Scheduling an interview with Dao-Ming's contact, her husband, proved challenging. He was in his final year of a three-year fellowship with the university hospital; thus, he was on call much of the time. Furthermore, scheduling an interview with him in the main campus library was also inconvenient for him. We finally agreed to meet during the late morning in early June 2010. We met in the main lobby of the children's wing of the university hospital. The location made getting a quality recording difficult. Furthermore, because of our relatively close proximity to each other (the lobby tables were small round tables), I decided that the external microphone was not necessary. This proved to be a mistake as the tape recorder began to malfunction during the interview. I can only assume that since the tape recorder was also designed to be a telephone answering machine, the recorder was operating like an answering machine, starting and stopping at timed intervals.

The secondary participant interviews for Belita and Melosia were free of problems. These secondary participant interviews were conducted in a student study room in the main campus university library. The recordings were of high quality, relatively free of background noise, and lasted approximately 45 minutes each.

***Focus group sessions.*** In addition to the extensive one-on-one interviews, participants were asked to participate in two focus group sessions in which all of the participants gathered together to discuss a pre-designated topic. Like the one-on-one interviews, the focus group sessions were held in a student study room in the main campus library. Both focus group sessions were conducted on a Sunday, as that was the only day when all the case study participants could get together. Because I asked the participants to come to campus on a Sunday and to establish a relaxed, casual environment, I provided home baked goods and offered to buy coffee or tea. Each focus group session lasted approximately ninety minutes.

The focus group as a method of collecting data has been employed in the social sciences for decades (Ho, 2006). The use of focus group sessions in the study of second language acquisition, though, is not commonplace. In fact, I was only able to find one SLA study employing focus group for data collection: Ho (2006). Ho cites that one of the benefits of focus groups is their interactional nature, claiming the social interaction allows researchers to "...explore insights that would otherwise remain hidden" (p. 05.2)<sup>3</sup>. Ho goes on to list several of the criticisms that have been leveled against focus groups:

- A. Group members might not participate equally, thus silencing valuable viewpoints.
- B. The format is unnatural because the researcher dictates the topic, even moderating responses.
- C. The data that is gathered may not be as in-depth as that collected in one-on-one interviews (pp. 05.3-05.3).

In fact, these criticisms were realized to some extent in the two focus group sessions.

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<sup>3</sup> Citations for Ho are presented as requested by the *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*.



Dao-Ming, a shy person, did not interject her opinion unless she was certain that everyone else had finished talking. Furthermore, my presence as researcher and moderator stilted the free exchange of ideas. Frequently after asking a question, the case study participants took turns individually answering my question, as if they were in a classroom setting rather than a coffee shop. Even with these limitations, though, I believe the data collected from the focus group sessions enriches the study.

Each focus group session lasted about ninety minutes. The first five to ten minutes were spent socializing. Only three of the four participants attended each session. Marcos, Belita, and Melosia, the three Spanish speakers, attended Focus Group Session 1. Dao-Ming, Marcos, and Belita participated in Focus Group Session 2. I arrived early for the focus group sessions to set up the recording equipment and to arrange the chairs so that they were evenly dispersed around the tables. When the participants arrived, I allowed them to choose where they wanted to sit. I took a seat only after the others had positioned themselves.

Before each focus group session, the participants were given an essay to read that related to immigration, identity, and the learning of English. For the Focus Group Session 1, they were given *The Classroom and the Wider Culture: Identity as a Key to Learning English Composition* by Fan Shen (1989).<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, this was the focus group session that Dao-Ming missed; thus, her perspectives as a fellow Chinese national were not heard, though in Focus Group Session 2, Dao-Ming did create an opportunity to refer back to the Shen article. For Focus Group Session 2, Dao-Ming, Belita, and Marcos attended. The case

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<sup>4</sup> This article addresses the sociocultural challenges students confront when they immigrate and how ideological differences surface via word choice, specifically personal pronoun choice, and the strategies that Shen adopted to overcome the ideological differences between the United States and China.

study participants were asked to read *My English* by Julia Alvarez (2007).<sup>5</sup> The two Spanish speakers were able to associate more with the Alvarez essay than the Shen article, claiming that even though their countries are different from the United States, the ideological shift is not as great as that between China and the United States.

To facilitate discussion, I prepared questions that specifically related to the articles, but I only referred to these questions when the conversation seemed to wane. As much as possible, I tried to remain silent and to allow the participants to guide the conversation. My presence, however, undoubtedly influenced the conversation, exemplifying the observer's paradox (Labov, 1979). When I asked a question, the participants would each take turns answering me directly. It was not until late into each session that a conversation resembling the kind of interaction one might encounter around the dinner table began to occur.

***Transcription.*** To transcribe the interviews, I used the Panasonic Standard Cassette Transcriber Model number RR-830, with a foot pedal for controlling the cassette. Having the foot pedal allowed me to keep my hands on the keyboard, thus, increasing my typing rate. All transcriptions were performed in the privacy of my home office, allowing for a quiet atmosphere. On average, it took eight hours to transcribe a one hour interview.

At times, I use the transcription conventions developed by Schegloff (2011) (see Appendix 2), but since a detailed analysis of talk-in-interaction is not the focus of this dissertation, many of the transcription symbols commonly found in CA transcribed data are not used. "The validity of an analysis is not a matter of how detailed one's transcript is. It is

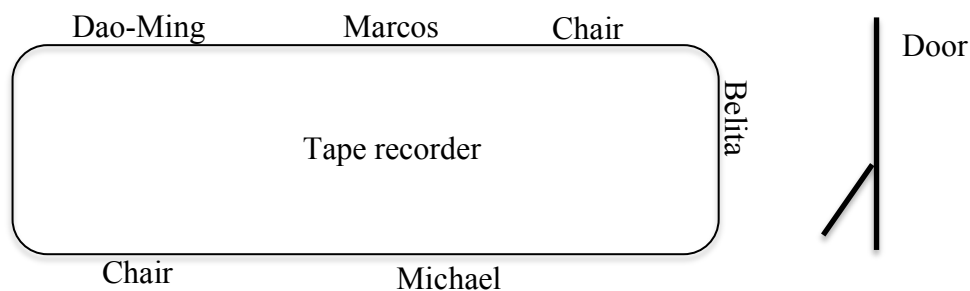
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<sup>5</sup> This essay recounts Alvarez's personal English language learning journey from childhood as a Spanish monolingual in the Dominican Republic, when English was a *secret language* shared only by her parents, to feeling like an alien in New York City, to finally achieving a level of English L2 proficiency that allowed Alvarez to embrace and express her identity as an English speaker from the Dominican Republic.

a matter of how the transcript works with the other elements of the analysis to create a ‘trustworthy’ analysis” (Gee, 1999, p. 106).

Transcribing the focus group sessions averaged 15 hours each. To transcribe the focus group sessions, rather than using a linear format as I did with the one-on-one interviews, I chose the landscape orientation in Microsoft Word. I created a table with four columns, one for each participant and myself. I then put the participants in the column that represented where they were sitting in relation to me; thus, for focus group session 2, the case study participants arranged themselves as Figure 3.3 displays.

**Figure 3.3: Focus Group Session 2 Seating**



In creating the table in Microsoft Word (Figure 3.4), Dao-Ming is listed first, indicating that she was sitting to my left. Marcos sat between Dao-Ming and Belita, so he is listed in the middle column. Belita sat to the left of Marcos and to my right; therefore, she is listed between Marcos and me in the transcript. Finally, I am listed in the far, right-hand column.

**Figure 3.4: Transcript Layout: Focus Group Session 2**

<b>Dao-Ming</b>	<b>Marcos</b>	<b>Belita</b>	<b>Michael</b>
And I used to sit in the middle but after mid-term I got a very high score so I felt more confident now I'm sitting like in the second row I guess (hh)			(hh) second row. (hh, hh)
Umh.	Actually in my case the middle is the third row so. Yes.		(hh)
	It's not.	So it's not a big lecture hall.	
	No it's really small so.		

I chose this layout for several reasons. First, I wanted to represent the conversational interactions between the participants in a way that visually depicts the “behavioral history” of each utterance (Ochs, 1979, p. 46). Figure 3.4 shows Marcos joking about the size of his classroom compared to Dao-Ming’s and also shows that I am laughing at both Dao-Ming’s comments and Marcos’. Belita, following the topic, clarifies that Marcos’ classroom is not a large lecture hall with Marco immediately responding with “no it’s really small so.” Choosing to lay out the transcript in this fashion helps to represent the interaction as it occurred during the actual focus group session. Second, I did not want to inadvertently favor one speaker over the others. By placing them in columns as they were seated in the room, I believe I have represented them as equals. Third, I placed myself in the far right column to minimize any perceptions of dominance or control (Ochs, 1979, p. 49).<sup>6</sup> I placed overlapping

<sup>6</sup> Because English is read from left to right, it has been theorized that meaning is encoded from left to right, thus privileging people and their utterances located in columns to the left of center in transcripts (Ochs, 1979, p. 49).

utterances on corresponding horizontal lines across the transcript. Thus, in Figure 3.4, Marcos says “It’s not” while Belita is also saying “So it’s not.”

In presenting participant data in subsequent chapters, it will be observed that at times long stretches of dialogue are provided, yet, at other times, the excerpt is presented in block form. Still, in other instances, a short quote is embedded in the text as any other short quote might be. In each case, the data is presented as it was recorded and transcribed. In other words, if a four or five line stretch of data is presented without interaction from another participant (Example 3.1), it means this person spoke for an extended period of time before another person contributed orally to the exchange. When a long uninterrupted utterance is provided in block form, I try to represent the actual utterance as it was produced in the interview, including restarts, repairs, and pauses. Conventional punctuation is omitted. This is done purposely so as to retain as much as possible the linguistic integrity of the speaker and the speech act (Example 3.1).

*Example 3.1 Belita (February 15, 2010)*

223 B: An the most poor people go to the public school they no practice English and then  
 224 middle class want to the went to private school like but it’s like semi-private and  
 225 we study from 8:00 to 1:00 and then the most the most rich person they go to the  
 226 most expensive /ɛskul/ (school) and they receive /bɪlɪŋəl/ (bilingual) classes and  
 227 for example in the morning Spanish and then in the afternoon there is English or  
 228 Germany or something. [BTR2INT21510]

I follow conversational analysis (CA) transcription conventions sparingly. I consistently mark overlap, variations in pronunciation when the pronunciation extends beyond the boundaries of standard American English or when the pronunciation might possibly interfere with comprehension. Line 226 above represents two such cases where Belita produces /ɛskul/ for *school* and /bɪlɪŋəl/ for *bilingual*. In both instances, Belita is

comprehensible, but the insertion of the vowel “e” before the consonant cluster [sk] and the frontal vowel /I/ instead of the diphthong /ai/ are non-standard American English representations of *school* and *bilingual*. I also consistently indicated restarts, pauses, and sounds, such as laughter. However, I do not transcribe for intonation units (Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming, & Palino, 1991) since the primary focus of this dissertation is on the Discourses of identity, investment, and access to English, and not the internal structure of talk-in-interaction.

At other times, CA transcription is followed more closely. When this occurs, it is because I believe something in the exchange warrants a closer examination of the conversational turn (Example 3.2). For example, Dao-Ming’s intonation rises in line 679 on the word *writing*. She is confirming that she understands my question in line 678. In line 681, she rephrases, but uses a declarative tone. In both lines 679 and 683, Dao-Ming pauses for 2 seconds while formulating her thoughts. Finally, in lines 688 and 690 she produces a non-standard pronunciation of *avoid* and *should read*. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols (lines 688 and 690) indicate that her pronunciation for these two words fall outside the boundaries of Standard English pronunciation.

*Example 3.2 Dao-Ming (March 10, 2010)*

- 676 M: Do you feel like your English has improved because of the IEP as well?  
 677 D: Uh yeah of course yeah.  
 678 M: Right okay in what areas?  
 679 D: Um (.02) like uh writing:  
 680 M: Umh.  
 681 D: I like writing.  
 682 M: Umh.  
 683 D: And um uh (.02) uh how do I say like uh a lot of the things I have never I was  
 684 never taught about before.  
 685 M: Umh.  
 686 D: How to write an essay what’s the correct format.

- 687 M: Okay.  
 688 D: And uh what to /Λwoid/ (avoid).  
 689 M: Okay.  
 690 D: And um m what kind of essay I /suri/ (should read) like narration exemplification  
 691 and uh.  
 692 M: Umh.  
 693 D: And uh what's important in such kind of essay.  
 694 M: Okay.  
 695 D: And uh so it's new. [DNL3INT31010]

It should be noted, however, that I did not alter the language of the participants.

Because this study is focused on access, displaying as accurately as possible the participant's actual language production is important. Thus, non-native like structures and vocabulary usage are retained in their original form. Furthermore, whenever the participant's pronunciation of a word extended beyond the boundaries of comprehensibility, I transcribed the utterance using the IPA. I acknowledge the subjectivity of this practice. I also acknowledge that my experience as an ESL teacher necessarily influences my decision making process. I also recognize that, if another person were to transcribe the data, there would be discrepancies between my phonetic transcriptions and theirs.

Finally, line numbers are provided for the block and conversation excerpts. The line numbers correlate roughly with the original transcripts. At times the numbers may not match exactly with those in the transcripts. This is because the transcripts are written in Times New Roman size 10 font; whereas, the main text of the dissertation is in Times New Roman size 12 font. In no way are my transcription decisions intended to prejudice or stereotype the participants (Jefferson, 1996). Rather, my intentions have been to represent the participants and their L2 language production as accurately and honestly as possible.

Abbreviations assigned to the different participants in the transcripts are shown in Table 3.1. When possible, I used the first initial of the participant's pseudonym, but when

there was duplication, such as Marcos, Melosia, and Michael, I used the next consonant to the right in the name.

**Table 3.1: Abbreviations**

Name		Abbreviation	Name		Abbreviation
Belita	=	B	Dao-Ming	=	D
Marcos	=	R	Melosia	=	L
David	=	V	Andrew	=	A
Jim	=	J	Lisa	=	S
Michael	=	M (interviewer)			

To summarize this section of the methodology chapter, there are variations in how researchers and scholars define discourse analysis and conversation analysis. I have come to understand that discourse analysis is concerned with how individuals perceive and understand a particular social phenomenon, whereas conversation analysis is concerned with social order and the architecture of conversation, i.e. turn-taking, repair, etc.... recognizing understanding is co-constructed through participation. In fact, I understand CA to be a sub-genre of discourse analysis that can provide useful and important information. Thus, because the emphasis for this study is on the intersections of identity, investment, access, and L2 proficiency, I have used CA and IPA symbols only sparingly.

### **L2 Proficiency Measurements**

Investigating English L2 proficiency was not an original goal of this dissertation; however, as I analyzed the data and began identifying emerging themes, I began to question what it means to be proficient in an L2 and traditional L2 proficiency assessment practices. L2 proficiency is historically a messy construct. As such, many researchers avoid contending with L2 proficiency, preferring to default to standardized test scores to describe research participants' L2 skills. It became apparent that I could not avoid L2 proficiency as a



construct since it is clearly linked with identity and gaining access to L2 resources.

Furthermore, I sensed a disconnect between the standardized L2 proficiency the case study participants had achieved and what they were able to accomplish during the interviews.

Finally, the NES participants also commented on the case study participants' facility with English and that they believed they were succeeding in their college classes.

To investigate English language L2 proficiency, relying solely on standardized English L2 proficiency tests such as TOEFL or IELTS (discussed in chapter 2) proved unsatisfactory because these standardized exams did not account for the vast discrepancies in the case study participants' English L2 that I was observing and experiencing. Therefore, I decided to assess the case study participants' L2 proficiency from multiple perspectives, quantitatively and qualitatively. Figure 3.5 shows the different perspectives I invoked. With these multiple measurements, quantitative and qualitative, a more complex and nuanced assessment of the case study participants' L2 proficiency was possible. At the same time, this process also demonstrates the necessity for integrating social context with assessments that have traditionally separated language competence from language production. Each of the measurements, with the exception of the TOEFL and IELTS standardized English language L2 proficiency exams is described below.

**Figure 3.5: L2 Proficiency Assessment Measures**

Assessment Instrument	Method
TOEFL/IELTS	Quantitative
L2 proficiency Developmental Measurements	Quantitative
Native Speaker vs Non-Native Speaker	Quantitative
Native English Speaker Assessments	Qualitative
Case study participants' Self-Assessments	Qualitative
Researcher Perspective	Quantitative/Qualitative

***L2 proficiency development measurements: Quantitative***

- Morpheme count (Bailey, Madden, & Krashen, 1974)
- Negation (Wode, 1981)
- Question formation (Pienemann, Jonston, & Brindley, 1988)
- Relative Clause Production (Doughty, 1991)
- Reference to the Past (Meisel, 1987)
- Possessive Determiners (White, 1998)

Each of the L2 proficiency development measurements identifies a particular linguistic feature or function, such as using inflectional morphemes, negating strategies, forming questions, using relative clauses, referencing past events, and using possessives. These particular linguistic features or functions were identified by their respective researchers as sites for potential assessment because it has been shown that all languages have the ability to express negation, questions, temporal relationships, etc., but that they do so differently (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Thus, the theory is that, as learners develop control over these English syntactical features, their English will become more like that of a native speaker of English. Each of the researchers identified with the respective L2 proficiency development measure claims that the acquisition of the linguistic feature under

analysis indicates a stage in development toward “native-like” proficiency. Additionally, I compared directly the oral production of a segment of each case study participant’s English with what a native English speaker might produce given the same segment, pointing out errors and non-native like constructions. I selected segments that were similar in length and which were sustained, uninterrupted utterances by the case study participants from the audiotaped interviews.

*L2 proficiency development measurements: Qualitative.* In addition to assessing the case study participants’ English L2 proficiency based on quantitative measurements, I also made assessment measurements using a qualitative lens. Dissatisfied with the results of the quantitative developmental measurements described above and with the L2 proficiency scores on the TOEFL/IELTS, I decided to investigate what other native English speakers said about my case study participants’ English language L2 proficiency. During the interviews with the case study participants, I asked them to identify NESs that I could interview. The NESs could be anyone that the case study participants felt comfortable with and who could speak knowledgeably about them. The case study participants identified classmates, teachers, friends, and/or spouses. I refer to these NESs as secondary case study participants to differentiate them from the primary L2 case study participants. During the interviews with the secondary participants, I asked these NESs to describe the English skills of the primary participants. Thus, I was able to pull from the transcripts of the secondary participants, all of whom were native speakers of English, qualitative statements about the primary participants’ English skills.

In an effort to triangulate the quantitative data generated from the language development measurements and the secondary participant NES assessments, I further

analyzed L2 proficiency through the eyes and ears of my primary case study participants. Again, I was able to do this since I had asked the primary case study participants several times and in several different settings to talk about their English skills.

Finally, using an interactional competence framework (Young, 2011), I explore the English language L2 proficiency of the case study participants from my researcher perspective. An interactional competence perspective is based on the following four aspects:

1. It is primarily observed in the context of speaking: It is discursive.
2. It includes pragmatics: It acknowledges interlocutors' abilities to recognize and respond to expectations of what to say and how to say it.
3. It is not limited to the production of an individual: It analyzes how all interlocutors utilize the resources available and how these resources are reciprocated in the interaction.
4. It is not limited to one interaction: It views interactions across time and space by including the social and historical context of the interaction (Young, 2011, pp. 427-428).

As the researcher who participated in and transcribed all of the case study participant interviews, including the focus group sessions across six months, I am in the unique position of being able to assess the case study participants' English language skills from the four aspects outlined above: discursive, pragmatic, resourceful, and historical. Thus, using the principles of Ethno CA, I present an analysis that demonstrates how my case study participants and I co-constructed meaning across conversational turns, creating intersubjectivity.

In the chapters that follow, particularly Chapter 5 in which I make claims about the participants' English L2 proficiency levels, it is important to consider the interactional competencies my interlocutors and I co-constructed over the course of the semester. In fact, these interactional competencies may actually influence my assessment of the English L2 proficiency levels of the participants. My participants and I had access to semiotic resources that the readers of this dissertation do not, such as gaze, gesture, posture, proxemics, kinesics, as well as verbal prosody, rhythm, and intonation. The written language is simply incapable of capturing all of the semiotic, pragmatic, and phonemic nuances conveyed in face-to-face interactions; thus, the English L2 proficiency levels of the participants proclaimed by me may not match those perceived by the reader.

In an effort to demonstrate the case study participants' L2 proficiency levels as I experienced them, I analyze the number and type of conversational turns taken by both the case study participants and myself. Using conversational signals (Pica, 1994) which are based on Long's (1981) conversational repair categories of comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification requests, I attempt to demonstrate quantitatively the IC of the case study participants, which I believe provides a more holistic view of the case study participants' overall L2 proficiency in English. Videotaped data would undoubtedly allow for the analysis of semiotic resources being indexed during the interaction and would provide a more complete IC assessment. Unfortunately, I did not videotape the interviews with the case study participants.

***Language logs.*** Self-reporting in the form of language journals, narratives, and/or diaries as techniques for collecting data on the emotional and linguistic processes of second language learning is common practice (Ricento, 2005). Norton (2000) and Schmidt and

Frota (1986) both invoke the power of language journals for their investigations of second language learning. Many researchers claim that the personal accounts of acquiring a second language provide a richer depth of understanding than second or third person accounts (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Likewise, Olsen (1997), as a way of visualizing local language use patterns, asked students to map the locations where they used their first and second languages. Following these traditions of self-reporting and mapping, I asked the participants to keep a language log at the beginning of the study.

Participants were asked to record their language usage for one week. Specifically, they were asked to record the date, time, and place where they used their languages (L1 and L2), the purpose of the language event, what skill(s) (speaking, listening, reading, and/or writing) they were engaged in, and which language(s) they were using. Furthermore, they were asked to record any thoughts they had regarding the language event. The participants were provided a blank language log containing ten pages in landscape orientation.

Instructions for filling out the language log were provided at the top of page one. In my oral instructions to the students, I likened the language log record keeping to that of a dietician asking a patient to document his/her eating habits for a week before prescribing a dieting plan. Diagram 3.2 is representative of the language log students were asked to complete.

**Diagram 3.2: Language Log Table: Marcos**

Date	Time	Place	Purpose	Skill*	Language	Thoughts
1/28/2010	0:700	Home	Talk to my girl friend	S,L	Spanish	
1/28/2010	9:00	Lab	Chatter with new IPA	S,L	English	My labmate is Lebanese. I can understand him almost perfectly, but he doesn't understand me that well.

S=Speaking, L= Listening, R=Reading, W=Writing

One of the issues with member checking or self-reporting is the level of participant engagement. Emerson and Pollner (1988) and Ho (2006) found that their participants were not always as invested in the research project as the principal investigator. The varying levels of participant commitment often produce artifacts that lack the uniformity one might desire. The language log activity was not immune to the pitfalls of self-reporting. Dao-Ming only completed four rows of information, using one row to describe an entire day, rather than an hour in one day. Marcos completed five days of documentation. Belita, who completed 14 days of documentation, was not entirely accurate when it came to documenting language skills. For example, she frequently listed “speaking” as the only skill, when the context suggests that both speaking and listening were required, such as when she indicates that she was talking to her mother in Spanish. Melosia completed seven days of documentation and provided the most detailed and accurate information. None of the participants consistently recorded their daily language use. For example, on the first day of documenting, Marcos recorded his language activity for 2:00 PM, but then did not record his language activity for 2:00 PM on each day thereafter. Furthermore, there were significant gaps in time. For example, Melosia wrote down her language activity for 3:00 PM on February 13, 2010, but

then did not make another entry until 6:00 PM, leaving me to wonder what her language activity had been between 3:00 and 6:00 PM. Thus, using language logs as a data collection technique requires additional participant training to increase consistency, thereby increasing reliability. Even though the data collected from the language logs during this case study are problematic, the patterns of language use are revealing, suggesting that with refinement, language logs have great potential for illuminating patterns of language use.

In order to quantify the data and to generate general patterns, I used the COUNTIF function in Microsoft Excel. This function counts or adds the number of occurrences of a designated event or action.

**Table 3.2: COUNTIF Numerical Equivalentents**

Language	#	Place	#	Purpose	#	Skill	#	
L1	1	Home	1	Family	1	Speaking	1	
L2	2	Class	2	Academic	2	Listening	2	
Both	3	Lab	3	Extracurricular	3	Reading	3	
		UNM	4	Social	4	Writing	4	
		Dining	5	Dining	5	Speaking/Listening	5	
		Off	6	Radio/TV	6	Reading/Writing	6	
		Campus						
		Business						
		Party	7	Banking/Business	7	Speaking/Listening/ Reading	7	
		Church	8	Homework	8	Speaking/Listening/ Reading/Writing	8	
				Working/computer	9	Dreaming	9	
				Thinking	10	Reading/Listening	10	
				Sleep	11			
				Worship	12			

Table 3.2 represents the coding schemata I created that allowed me to analyze the case study participants' patterns of language use. The broad categories for the language logs were Language, Place, Purpose, and Skill. Under each of these broad categories, there were



subcategories that emerged as I began coding. For example, for Place, the subcategories that emerged were home, class, lab, UNM, dining, off campus business, party, and church. Each of these subcategories was assigned a numerical equivalent, such as home 1; class 2; lab 3; etc. To determine patterns of language use, I assigned the numerical value of 1 to the participants' first language, number 2 to English, and 3 to code switching. Thus, if Belita indicated that she used English in class, the numerical value for this would be 22; with the first digit standing for language, and the second (and sometimes third) digit representing the subcategory. By coding the entries in this fashion, I was able to extrapolate patterns from the erratic entries within and across language logs.

From a qualitative perspective, the data collected from the language logs, though problematic, still provide useful information. The most fundamental question driving conversation analysis is Schegloff's "why that now" (Schegloff, Koshik, Jacoby, & Olsher, 2002, p. 213). Thus, the following questions can be asked of each participant's language log entries.

1. Why did the participants decide to document a particular speech event and not another?
2. Why did the participants use the specific language in that speech event?
3. What significance does each entry carry?
4. Why was a particular speech event not documented?
5. What generalizations can be made about each individual?
6. What generalizations can be made across the four participants?

From an ethnomethodological framework, the fact that the language log exists must be considered relevant for analysis purposes. Therefore, even though a quantitative analysis of

the language logs does not provide an accurate or statistically significant account of the daily language use of the participants over a one-week span, the documents do provide information about the participants, the language use they chose to report, their identities, and their trajectories. Because of the qualitative information that can be garnered from the language logs, they have been retained and will be analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

**Reflections.** I asked the case study participants to write two different kinds of reflections: a) response papers to the two essays that the students were asked to read in preparation for the focus group sessions; and b) a written reflection of their first year in the United States.

In the beginning of the 2011 calendar year, I asked each of the case study participants to write a reflection of their first year in the United States. In this written reflection, they were asked to address how they perceive their English skills now, their impressions of U.S. culture, their relationships with native speakers of English, their academic English skills, their identities, and any disappointments or accomplishments they had over the year. This final piece of data were collected in Spring 2011. This was seven to 12 months after the extensive one-on-one interviews, focus group sessions, and secondary participant interviews were conducted and transcribed, and after open coding had begun.

Like the language logs, collecting these written reflections proved to be problematic and inconsistent. Table 3.3 shows the written documents that I received from each of the participants. An “X” indicates that I received the written document.

**Table 3.3: Written Documents**

Name	Response essay 1: <i>The Classroom and the Wider Culture</i>	Response essay 2: <i>My English</i>	Reflection of the Year
Belita		X	X
Dao-Ming	X	X	
Marcos	X	X	X
Melosia			X

Belita wrote a response to the second essay and a reflection of her year in the United States. Belita told me that she could not relate to the first article, *The Classroom and the Wider Culture*, since she is not from China and does not perceive her home country of Guatemala as being so culturally different from the United States; therefore, she did not write a response paper for this article.

Dao-Ming wrote response papers for the two essays, even though she only attended Focus Group Session 2, in which the essay under discussion was *My English*. When I requested the reflection paper from the case study participants, Dao-Ming had already moved to another state with her husband and did not leave any forwarding information. Furthermore, she did not respond to the emails I sent, requesting this reflection and contact information. Melosia only wrote a reflection of her year in the United States.

Marcos was the only case study participant to provide the two response essays and a reflection of his first year in the United States.

Melosia did not attend Focus Group Session 1, and she did not read the essays for either focus group session. Additionally, it took several months for me to receive Melosia's reflection of her year in the United States. Melosia told me that she prefers to talk, rather than write.

To triangulate the data, the case study participant interviews, the secondary participant interviews, the focus session interviews, the language logs, and the written pieces were all broadly coded for the central themes of access, identity, and investment. Major threads and significant statements were copied on to large poster paper, which I then taped to the walls in my office. This allowed me to read, study, absorb, and cogitate about the information I had collected from each case study participant individually, as well as across the four case study participants.

The majority of the analyses and the results presented in the subsequent chapters comes from the one-on-one interviews with the case study participants and the secondary participants. This is due to the amount and richness of the data collected from the interviews, and because the interviews were the most consistent form of data collection. The language logs and written pieces serve to inform the study, but they play only a minor role in the analyses, serving to support the data gathered from the interviews.

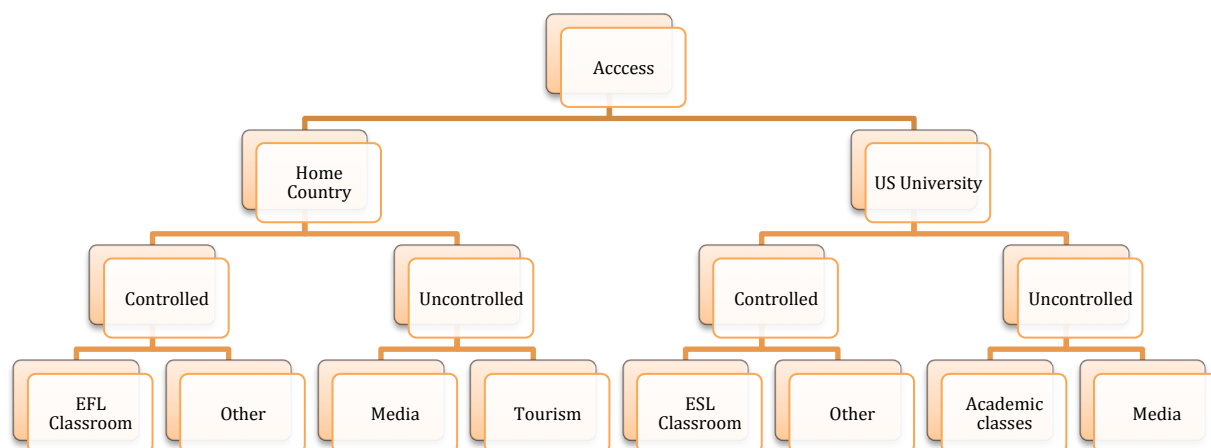
### **Coding**

After I finished conducting the oral interviews, I began transcribing. Data analysis essentially began at this stage; however, I did not begin physical coding of data until I had completed transcribing all of the interviews. “Coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data ... that are applicable to your research purpose” (Glesne, 2006, p. 152). To allow me to develop a greater sense of intimacy with each of the four primary participants, I read through the transcripts for each participant in their entirety, highlighting comments that I felt were particularly salient or revealing for that participant. During this stage of coding, I was not focused on identifying recurring themes across the four participants. Rather, my focus was on developing a greater

understanding of and connection with each participant individually. It was important for me to identify with the participants as human beings with histories, needs, and desires first, and then as subjects in a case study.

For the next stage of analysis, I began the process of open-coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998), in which I marked any statement that seemed to relate to my broad categories of identity, access, and investment. Initially, I open-coded manually, using different colored highlighters for different codes, i.e. blue for identity, orange for access, and purple for investment. Using manual codes for identity, access, and investment, I then digitally re-coded the transcripts using HyperRESEARCH 3.01. The process of manually coding and then digitally re-coding allowed me to reconsider my thought processes for each utterance I had coded, as well as for those utterances I had not originally coded. The end result is a rich analysis of the transcripts.

While broadly coding manually and then digitally, I began noticing qualitative differences within each code. This led me to axial coding (Creswell, 1998), where I began to create several sub-codes (Figure 3.6: Access). Axial coding permitted me to conceptualize the major themes of identity, access, and investment. Figure 3.6 broadly resembles the coding path that emerged for the theme of access.



**Figure 3.6: Access**

At the top of the flow chart is the major theme of access. Any statement, comment, or description that was made during the interviews that I felt remotely related to access opportunities to English, I highlighted with orange. As I began organizing the items coded for access, the large division of access to English in the home country and access to English in a U.S. university became obvious and logical; thus, I began axial coding as a way to tease out the differences between access to English in the home country and access to English in a US university context. This process led me to further define the type and quality of access with which the case study participants had contact, leading me to further define access based on context. The different kinds of access in both the home country and the U.S. university suggested that there are instances in which the L2 is presented in a controlled way (i.e. the classroom) or in which the learner has control over the L2 input and output (i.e. other: can determine the topic and time spent). At other times, the learner has no control over the L2 that is being accessed and the source (interlocutor) may or may not be taking care to “modify” the L2 (i.e. television, academic class). There is, of course, some overlap between

controlled and uncontrolled access. For example, an English language newspaper written for a native speaking audience is a source of uncontrolled English. If, however, the L2 learners are invested in learning English and are invested in being informed about local and world events, then the L2 learners can determine how much time they will spend reading the newspaper, learning vocabulary, and attending to unfamiliar or difficult syntactic structures. Thus, the open and axial coding of access across country contexts, across controlled and uncontrolled environments, also overlapped with the major themes of identity and investment. The process for analyzing and coding for identity and investment followed similar processes of open and axial coding, allowing the relationships of the sub-themes to one another to emerge naturally.

Finally, through axial coding, the theme of L2 proficiency and its multidimensional modalities emerged as salient and integral to the study. L2 proficiency is inextricably linked to the type and quality of L2 resources L2 learners have access to and learner investment. It also follows that L2 proficiency and gaining access or not intersects with identity. Thus, to ignore L2 proficiency and its relationship to the themes of access, investment, and identity would have been negligent, resulting in incomplete conclusions about the transitional process of moving from a home country into the United States for the purpose of studying at an institution of higher education. Therefore, an investigation and analysis of L2 proficiency as it relates to each of my case study participants individually became essential. As a result, my analysis not only reinforces what is known about the links between L2 proficiency, access, identity, and investment, but also exposes some of the gaps and obstacles of measuring L2 proficiency quantitatively and qualitatively.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, I chose qualitative case study as my research methodology because I am investigating a specific phenomenon, it is bounded, and it includes different sources of data. I have described why discourse analysis is the most appropriate method for analyzing the constructs of identity, investment, and access. I described how I selected the case study participants and the secondary participants. I have provided a detailed description of how I collected, transcribed, and coded the spoken and written data. I have explained how I used different L2 quantitative and qualitative proficiency measurements to demonstrate the case study participants' English L2 proficiency. Finally, I have provided transcript samples and coding processes that have led me to my overall descriptions of the case study participants and my analyses of identity, investment, and access during the process of transitioning from a home country context into a U.S. university context.

The following chapters will describe each of the case study participants (Chapter 5), and analyze and describe their L2 proficiency from multiple perspectives (Chapter 6). Furthermore, I analyze how the case study participants construct their identities as L2 speakers of English in a U.S. academic context, gain access to various sources of English, and how their investment interacts with L2 proficiency, access, and identity (Chapter 7). First, though, it is necessary to describe and redefine the construct of access as it relates to second language learning.



## Appendix 1: Interview Questions

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

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

### **FAMILY AND HOME BACKGROUND**

Can you tell me about your family?

How often do you communicate with your family and friends? What forms of communication do you use to stay in touch with your family?

Can you describe your home town/city?

Can you describe what the economy is like in your country? What sorts of opportunities are available for people? What about technology, transportation, and other “modern” conveniences?

In order for me to get to know you a little better, I’d like you to describe for me your childhood. Can you talk a little about what it was like growing up for you? friends, home life, social/sport/academic activities?

How would you describe yourself?

### **LANGUAGE LEARNING IN HOME COUNTRY**

What kind of educational experience did you have? Can you talk about what you did in school, extra activities? Did you go to a private or public school? How did you feel about that?

In school, did you have a choice of foreign languages to study? Which languages did you choose?

When did you begin studying English? Why?

Can you tell me about your English language learning experiences in your country?

What was the instruction like?

What sorts of things did you concentrate on in your English classes?

What sorts of opportunities were/are available for you to use English in your country?

Did you attend any sort of language school after regular school? Can you describe these schools?

Try, for a moment, to recall/remember your feelings when you were studying/learning English in your country.

### **GENDER ISSUES**

Being a woman in your country, can you describe what the cultural expectations are for women? Expectations from the family, from the culture. What sorts of careers are available for women?

### **TRAVEL AND LANGUAGE**

Considering English, what has and continues to be difficult for you to learn about English?

What about the culture here in the US?

May I ask your TOEFL score?

Have you traveled to other countries much? Can you describe what is like getting around in English in another country?

### **LIFE AT THE UNIVERSITY**

Why did you decide to come to the United States? Can you talk about that decision process?

What happened that made you decide that you wanted to study in the US?

When did you come to this university and why did you choose this university?

What degree are you hoping to earn?

Can you describe the process of getting admitted to this university?

Can you talk a little about your current living situation? Do you live on campus, off campus, friends, roommates, etc....

What is your social life like here? Can you talk about who your friends are, what you do for entertainment, etc.?

Can you describe your daily activities? What do you do? Where do you go? What do you eat? With whom?

Do you or have you had a relationship with an American or someone who does not speak your native language? Can you talk about how you met? Where?

Can you describe your eating habits since coming to the US?

Can you talk about your Internet habits? What kind of email provider do you use? Is this interface in your first language? What's it like to receive an email in English? How do you feel about replying to a classmate, friend, and instructor in English via email? Is this different from talking to them? How?

### **LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY**

Can you talk about your English language learning experiences here? Have you taken any classes especially for ESL students? Why and what was the subject? How did you do in these classes? Are you taking any ESL classes now? Why or why not?

What aspects of English do you feel are most difficult for you?

What aspects of the culture do you feel are most difficult for you?

How much do you use English on a daily basis? For what purposes? Can you talk about using English in the US? How do you feel?

Explain how you see your use of English.

What do you think is important in learning another language?

How do you see yourself in relation to the world?

Can you talk about the differences you see and feel between your country and the US/this community? People, culture.

Can you describe how you feel when you use English? Confident, shy, intimidated, brave, courageous, strange,

Can you describe how you feel when you are speaking your first language?

When do you find yourself using your first language here?

Can you describe how learning English has changed your worldview? Your outlook on life?

Is there anything that you can do in your first language that you can't do now in English?

What about the opposite. Is there anything you can do in English that you can't do in your first language?

Do you have other ESL students in your classes? Do you interact with each other or do you stay away? Can you talk about this more?

Can you talk about how you feel when your instructors put you into study groups? Are you the only ESL student in the group? Talk about that feeling.

Can you describe how you go about doing your homework? How long does it take you?

What sort of things do you do to help you get through your homework?

What sorts of things do you do while you are studying that help you with understanding the content of the class/homework?

*Abbreviations for Interview Participants*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>
Belita	= B	Dao-Ming	= D
Marcos	= R	Melosia	= L
David	= V	Andrew	= A
Jim	= J	Lisa	= S
Michael	= M (interviewer)		

**Appendix 2: Transcript symbols**

<b>Transcription symbols</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Keyboard*</b>
[ ]	Overlap	Regular
(0.5) (.)	Pause in 1/10 of a second (.) = <2/10ths	Regular
=	Latching (either no pause between speakers or same speaker with overlap from other speaker)	Regular
.	Falling intonation	Regular
?	Rising intonation	Regular
,	Continuing intonation	Regular
¿	Rising intonation stronger than a , but less than a ?	Symbols, normal text
:	Elongated sound	Regular
-	Cut off	Regular
<u>Word</u>	Loudness and extreme loudness	Regular
°	Softness	Symbols, normal text
_:	Rising intonation before colon- usually on the vowel	Regular
<u>: (underlined colon)</u>	Rising intonation contour beginning at the colon	Regular
↑ ↓	Sharp rise in pitch	Symbols, symbol
< >	Slower, drawn out speech	Regular
» «	Compressed or quickened speech	Symbols, normal text
<	Jump started speech	Regular
<b>h, hh</b>	Aspiration- usually in middle of utterance. The more hh's the more laughing or aspiration	Regular
(( ))	Transcriber's description of events	Regular
( word )	Indicates a likely hearing of something that is not clear.	Regular

Schegloff's transcription symbols Retrieved from

<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/schegloff/TranscriptionProject/index.html>

## Chapter 4

### Controlled and Uncontrolled Access

In Chapter 2, the different contexts for L2 learning were reviewed. These contexts have been traditionally differentiated according to setting, i.e. the classroom and a natural language learning context. Table 4.1, reprinted from Chapter 2, summarizes the differences between the two language learning contexts according to Lightbown and Spada (2006).

**Table 4.1: *Classroom Learning Context versus Natural Language Learning Context***

<b>Classroom Learning Context</b>	<b>Natural Language Learning Context</b>
Structured and ordered presentation of L2 features, such as grammar, vocabulary, and phonology.	Random exposure to a variety of grammatical structures, vocabulary, and accents.
Corrective feedback may be given and may be frequent.	Errors are not likely to be corrected
Teacher may be the only native or skilled speaker of the language.	The learner is surrounded by the L2 for several hours each day by different speakers of the L2.
Learners may only have one or two opportunities during class to use their language.	Learners belong to and participate in a variety of language events in the L2.
Learners may or may not have the opportunity to ask and respond to questions in the L2.	Learners respond to and ask questions in meaningful situations in the L2.
Modified input is probably the norm.	Modified input may be available in one-on-one situations but is not likely to occur in larger group settings.

(pp. 110-111)

As I observed in the literature review, the distinction between the classroom learning context and the natural language learning context assumes a great deal. The classroom learning context assumes a trained, empathetic native speaking L2 teacher. Furthermore, it

assumes that students will receive corrective feedback, will have opportunities to ask and respond to questions, and that the language that is presented is modified, so as to increase comprehensibility. The natural language learning context, likewise, assumes that the dominant language is readily available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, that native speakers are receptive to interacting with L2 learners, and that L2 learners interact daily in the L2, providing them with opportunities to practice, analyze, synthesize, and compare their L2 with that of native speakers. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the chart in general assumes that context is most important and does not credit L2 learners with any sense of control over their learning.

I propose that instead of framing L2 learning around context, i.e. classroom versus natural language learning, that L2 learning be re-conceptualized from the perspective of L2 learner agency. As I briefly stated in the literature review, by shifting the research lens from context to agency, then institutional practices, context, and resources can be analyzed from the emic perspective of the L2 learner. This affords the learner an active role in the L2 learning process while also permitting research to interrogate the influence that context has on the learning process.

I suggest that language learning contexts, foreign or second, be conceived of in terms of *controlled and-uncontrolled* access.

**Table 4.2: Features of Controlled and Uncontrolled Access**

	<i>Controlled Access</i>	<i>Uncontrolled Access</i>
1	May or may not be an instructional setting	Removed from an instructional setting
2	Methodic, scaffolded vocabulary and structure (modified language)	Random, varied vocabulary and structure (unmodified, naturally occurring language)
3	Predictable and controlled	Spontaneous
4	L2 learner has agency to regulate the type, quality, and/or amount of language exposure	L2 learner cannot regulate the type, quality, and/or amount of language exposure.
5	Time for adequate processing	Responses are expected immediately
6	Usually a supportive and empathetic environment	Potentially hostile and impatient environment
7	Could be task oriented or authentic communication	Authentic, real-time communication

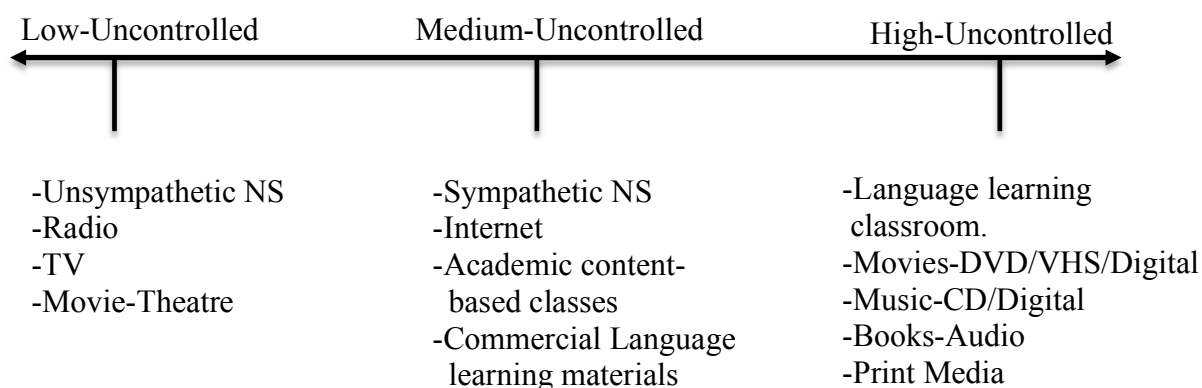
I define a controlled context as one in which the type, quality, and amount of language is dictated by an external entity, such as a teacher, or in which L2 learners can determine the type, quality, and amount of language they access. An uncontrolled context, conversely, is one in which L2 learners are relatively powerless to dictate the type, quality, and amount of language being accessed, and/or in which the L2 source is not specifically produced with L2 learners in mind. For example, one type of controlled context is the language learning classroom, where the teacher presents grammatical structures or vocabulary in a planned, scaffolded manner that will theoretically build on what the L2 learners already know and extend their knowledge and skill base in the L2. A classroom, admittedly, does not engender a great deal of agency on the learners' behalf. There are, however, contexts where L2 learners can assert greater authority over the L2 input and

output. Reading a native language newspaper is one such context. Though the newspaper may not have been written with an L2 audience in mind, L2 learners have control over the amount of time and effort they want to spend on the learning activity. The L2 learners can sit down and read an article or two, noting any vocabulary or grammatical structures that are unfamiliar. This activity allows the L2 learners the opportunity to analyze, synthesize, and compare the lexicon and grammatical structure of the L2. The L2 learners can choose to read articles on politics, entertainment, sports, business, or any other genre. The L2 learners, therefore, are in control of the type, quality, and amount of L2 input they are receiving. Furthermore, the L2 learners can take what they have learned from the articles, and possibly engage others in a conversation about the articles, or they can use the articles as a source of inspiration for journal writing or other similar writing activities. The point is that the L2 learners have some agency in the learning process and some agency in the type, quality, and amount of L2 they engage with.

Uncontrolled access, on the other hand, is a context in which L2 learners have little to no authority over the type, quality, or amount of L2 that they are coming into contact with. At first, it might be said that this is the same as a language learning classroom, but in the L2 learning classroom the language itself has been controlled, or modified for the purpose of making the content comprehensible. An example of an uncontrolled context might be an interaction between a clerk in a department store and an L2 learner. The clerk may exhibit unsympathetic behaviors, including rate of speech, pronunciation, use of slang, and other unfamiliar language structures, thus leaving the L2 learner powerless and at the mercy of the interaction itself. Norton (2000) describes several such instances of uncontrolled access, such as Eva, a Polish immigrant, who is working in a coffee shop in Canada. She feels

marginalized by the other employees because they relegate her to the many unpleasant duties in the café and criticize her openly for not knowing such iconic characters as Bart Simpson. Martina, also a Pole, is forced into a negotiation situation with her landlord when the landlord insists on collecting a whole year's rent after Martina and her family decided to move to another neighborhood. Though Martina is ultimately successful, she not only was unable to control the type, quality, and amount of English she was exposed to, she had to process and respond in real-time or risk being taken advantage of by an unscrupulous landlord.

Figure 4.1 depicts a continuum for the type, quality, and amount of access to the language that L2 learners have across controlled and uncontrolled contexts. Notice, rather than identifying specific types of access as either controlled or uncontrolled, I use the terms low-uncontrolled, medium-uncontrolled, and high-uncontrolled because, even in a tightly controlled context, such as the classroom, learners can choose to participate actively in the learning process or not. This decision to participate or not in classroom activities is accounted for in Norton's conceptualization of investment (2012).



**Figure 4.1: Access Continuum**



I list items such as unsympathetic NS – Radio, TV, Movie-Theatre – as low-uncontrolled because L2 learners have little to no authority to control the rate, amount, type, or quality of language exposure. Furthermore, the intended audience for these sources is the native speaker population. For example, L2 learners attending an English speaking movie in a movie theater have no authority to slow the movie down, or ask for sections to be replayed. Furthermore, the L2 learners cannot stop the movie to look up vocabulary, analyze grammatical structures, or ask questions. The same is true for TV, though, it may be possible for L2 learners to activate sub-titles.

A medium-uncontrolled context includes such items as commercial language learning products, such as The Rosetta Stone, Academic content-based classes, the Internet, and Sympathetic NS interactions. This is because L2 learners have some agency regarding the management of L2 input and output. For example, with the commercial language learning materials, L2 learners can decide what modules to practice, how often and how many times to repeat the module. In an academic-content class, it is possible for L2 learners to ask questions in class or to approach the instructor outside of class asking for additional help. Like commercial language learning products, the Internet serves as a source of English that can be visited and revisited numerous times. Not only informational websites, but such interactive sites as chat rooms and blogs, can be places where both input and output can be engaged and where response time is not as crucial as it is in a real-time conversation.

Finally, a high-controlled context includes, among other things, a language learning classroom, movies-DVD/VHS/Digital, Music-CD/Digital, Books-Audio, and Print Media. With the exception of the language learner classroom, these sources are produced for a native speaker market and so the language is not modified, but L2 learners have the ability to pause

the movie, music, or audiobook. The ability to control the L2 source allows the L2 learner to rewind, listen again, copy down vocabulary, study sentence structure, and even practice pronunciation. Finally, the amount of time spent on these sources is entirely learner dependent.

Conceptualizing L2 learners as agents, with varying degrees of control over L2 resources, bridges the divide between cognitive explanations of L2 learning and sociocultural explanations. The framework acknowledges the individual work L2 learners must engage in in order to internalize the L2. At the same time, the learner as agent framework acknowledges the direct influence of external context, such as the L2 classroom, access to native speakers, literacy materials, media, and technology. Furthermore, the degree of control learners have over these various L2 resources is open for critical interrogation from the sociocultural perspectives of identity and investment.

Though conceiving of access as a controllable phenomenon affords the L2 learner an agentive role in the L2 learning process, it is important to remember that these controlled and uncontrolled resources do not exist in a vacuum. These resources belong to and are part of larger macro-social structures that influence and shape the ways in which L2 learners are able to engage with these resources or not. Such variables as socio-economics, cultural-historical structures, political structures, and even gender may possibly mitigate the ability and quality of the contact L2 learners have with such controlled and uncontrolled L2 learning resources. For example, a learner who comes from an upper-middle, lower-high class family, may have the monetary resources that permit greater contact with many of the uncontrolled resources such as television, the internet, and other digital technologies. An L2 learner from a working or lower class family, however, may not have the financial resources that would permit

him/her to benefit from these costly resources, or at least may not be able to utilize these resources as frequently and consistently as other more fortunate L2 learners.

Opportunities to engage with multiple sources of controlled and uncontrolled access may lead to increased communicative competence in the L2, which in turn is linked to one's identity as a member of that community (Duff, 2007). "Embedded within language routines are messages about how to participate in ways that reflect that community's principal values and behaviors" (Peele-Eady, 2011, p. 58). Thus, it is important to recognize that even within the framework of controlled and uncontrolled access, these L2 resources are not equally available to everyone, which may have an effect on the L2 learning process.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Participants**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I introduce each of the four case study participants. The data for these descriptions are based on the case study participant one-on-one interviews, the secondary participant native English speaker (NES) interviews, and/or the focus group interviews. In each case, I strive to provide an objective and complete description of the primary case study participants while minimizing subjective commentary.

#### **Participant Overview**

As will be seen, each of the participants is unique and brings to the study individual histories, identities, and dreams for the future. It is these histories of family, education, English language learning, and immigration, though vastly different, that serve as the common bond that forms the foundation of this study. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 summarize basic demographic information and English language learning experiences of these case study participants in their home countries and in the U.S.

Table 4.1 summarizes the case study participants' demographics and family structure. It demonstrates the uniqueness of their linguistic and family histories, but also where their histories overlap.

As shown in Table 5.1, Belita, Marcos, and Melosia all come from Spanish speaking countries and have Spanish as their L1. Dao-Ming, whose L1 is Mandarin, is the only participant who comes from a non Indo-European background.

**Table 5.1: Demographics & Family Life<sup>7</sup>**

Name <sup>8</sup>	Country	L1	Age	Sex	Family	Siblings	Parents' Occupations
Belita	Guatemala	Spanish	31	F	Mother - Father, divorced. Mother remarried, lives in US. Father lives in Guatemala.	Younger brother	Father: Businessman Mother: Homemaker
Dao-Ming	China	Mandarin	30-35 <sup>9</sup>	F	Mother- Father, married, live in China.	None	Father: Teacher, retired. Mother: Teacher, retired
Marcos	Spain	Spanish	22	M	Mother - Father, married, live in Spain.	Younger sister	Father: Businessman Mother: Teacher
Melosia	Mexico	Spanish	23	F	Mother - Father, married, live in Mexico.	Younger brother Younger sister	Father: Businessman & teacher. Mother: Homemaker

Table 5.1 shows the ages, gender, and family structure for each of the case study participants. As can be seen, they come from diverse yet similar backgrounds. With the exception of Belita, all of the parents are married. Belita's parents divorced after she was grown. Similarly, the parents of all the case study participants are involved in business, teaching, and/or homemaking. All of the case study participants have siblings except Dao-Ming; however, Dao-Ming has several cousins that she claims to be close to. Finally, only Belita's mother (limited English proficient) and stepfather (NES) speak English. Two of the case study participants, Belita and Dao-Ming are in their mid to early 30's, while Marcos and

<sup>7</sup> In an effort to maintain objectivity and equity, participant information and descriptions are provided in alphabetical order.

<sup>8</sup> Pseudonyms have been used for participants to protect their identities. In choosing the pseudonyms, I tried to assign names that reflect each participant's L1 and culture.

<sup>9</sup> I did not directly ask any of the participants their age. Belita, Marcos, and Melosia volunteered this information during the interviews. Dao-Ming never mentioned her age; thus, my estimations of her age are reconstructed based on the timeline of information she and her boyfriend/husband provided regarding her education, career, and other life events.

Melosia are in their mid to early 20's. Thus, a decade separates these two groups. These age differences may influence the type and quality of controlled and uncontrolled L2 English access with which the case study participants come into contact.

Table 5.2 shows the English language learning experiences of the participants. Columns 2 and 3 indicate the type of school and the school level they were in when they began learning English. Column 4 shows the total number of years that the case study participants had formal, controlled English instruction in their countries. Columns 5 and 6 show their undergraduate majors and their post-baccalaureate occupations.

**Table 5.2: Educational Experiences in Home Country**

Name	Home Country				
	School	English Begin	# Years studying English	Undergraduate Major	Occupation
Belita	Private	Middle School	4 years	Dentistry	Dentist
Dao-Ming	Public	Middle School	15+ years	Nursing	Nurse
Marcos	Private	Elementary School	15+ years	Engineering	Graduate Student
Melosia	Private	Elementary school	15+years	Computer Science & Teacher Certification	Data entry technician & English Teacher

From Table 5.2, it can be seen that Belita had the least amount of experience with formal English language instruction in school, with only 4 years of instruction. The other three case study participants had fifteen years or more of formal English language instruction in school. Though Dao-Ming did not begin studying English until middle school, she was required to take English classes throughout her entire high school and college career, explaining why she too had a minimum of fifteen years of English language instruction at the

time the study began. Table 5.2 also shows the case study participants' undergraduate majors and occupations. It is interesting to note that all of them come from a sciences and/or applied sciences background. Finally, Belita, Dao-Ming, and Melosia held professional jobs after college and before coming to the United States. Marcos is the only case study participant who had not taken time off between degrees to work professionally. It is also noteworthy that all of the case study participants have chosen a highly technical career path: medicine, computer science, and/or engineering. Traditionally, these fields lead to higher salaries and a higher socioeconomic class. Not all of these fields require knowledge of English, but with English, the case study participants are possibly opening more career opportunities that would otherwise be closed to them.

Table 5.3 summarizes the participants' educational experiences and their educational trajectories in the United States. Column 2 shows that three of the case study participants took English language classes in the United States. Column 3 provides the case study participants' English language L2 proficiency scores for either the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) at the time the study began in January 2010. Marcos' IELTS score has also been converted to an equivalent TOEFL-pbt score.<sup>10</sup> Columns 4 and 5 list the majors and educational level for each participant when the study began. It is important to note that Belita, who had only studied English for four years in Guatemala during her teenage years, has a TOEFL score

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<sup>10</sup> For international student admission at this university, students must demonstrate English L2 proficiency. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL®), an Educational Testing Service exam, and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS®) are two internationally recognized English L2 proficiency exams that the local university accepts for admissions requirements. The TOEFL scores provided come from the institutional TOEFL-pbt (paper based test), administered by the university intensive English program. Marcos took the IELTS in Spain. A 7.5 on IELTS is roughly equivalent to a 625 on the TOEFL-pbt. *Note: This comparison is made by the ELT Centre at the University of Sheffield and does not imply recognition by IELTS or ETS Ltd.* Source: <http://study-in-ohio.nuvvo.com/lesson/11273-toefl-and-ielts-conversion-chart>. See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of the TOEFL and IELTS exams.

that is considerably higher than Melosia's, who has studied English consistently for more than 15 years and who was an English teacher in Mexico for a year. As indicated in the literature review (Chapter 2), the minimum scores for admission to graduate school at the university where this study was conducted are 550 (TOEFL-pbt) and 7 (IELTS). Only Melosia needed to increase her L2 proficiency score on TOELF-pbt for full admission into the graduate school so she could continue her studies in Bilingual Education. The other three case study participants had met the minimum English L2 proficiency requirements prior to the beginning of this study.

**Table 5.3: Educational Experiences in the United States**

Name	United States			
	English Study	TOEFL / IELTS	Major	Educational Level
Belita	Yes	590 (T)	Undecided	Post-Baccalaureate
Dao-Ming	Yes	650 (T)	Medical school	Post-Baccalaureate
Marcos	No	7.5 (I) ~ 625 (T)	Electrical Engineering	Doctoral student
Melosia	Yes	500 (T)	Bilingual Education	Graduate student

T= TOEFL, I= IELTS

Dao-Ming and Melosia were currently taking English language classes in the university's Intensive English program (IEP).<sup>11</sup> In March 2010, Dao-Ming and Melosia took the IEP administered, mid-semester TOEFL-pbt, each increasing their scores: Dao-Ming, who had been in the United States only three months scored 677 (100%), and Melosia, who had been in the United States for nine months, scored 550.

Belita and Marcos, having already achieved an acceptable English L2 proficiency score for university admissions purposes, did not take another English L2 proficiency exam

<sup>11</sup> Intensive English Programs (IEP) offer intensive courses in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and prepare ESL students to take English L2 proficiency exams such as TOEFL. IEPs are primarily found on university campuses. Most IEPs are considered self-supporting auxiliary enterprises, thus, receive no funding from the host institution. Students enrolled in IEP classes usually do not receive college credit for the courses, but do meet enrollment requirements established by the *Student and Exchange Visitor Information System* (SEVIS) for international students on F-1 or J-1 visas.



during the case study. Belita attended the university's IEP and enrolled in a freshman composition class designated for ESL students prior to the beginning of the case study. Marcos was the only participant who did not take any English language classes in the U.S. during or prior to this case study.

Belita, Dao-Ming, and Melosia held professional jobs before returning to school in the United States. Belita had a dental practice in her home country. Dao-Ming spent 5 years on an island in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI),<sup>12</sup> working as a nurse. Melosia worked as a data entry technician in an office, while studying on the weekends at a private English language training school in Mexico to earn her English teaching certification in Mexico. Upon completing her English teaching certification, she took a job as an English teacher in a private Catholic elementary school in Mexico. As stated previously, Marcos did not have any professional engineering experience.

Tables 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 demonstrate that the participants have come to this study with complex histories, varying levels of English L2 proficiency according to their standardized test scores, and different educational trajectories. Regardless of the historical differences and similarities, the one constant is that they all immigrated to the same U.S. university and were brought together by this study. Furthermore, they allowed me to pry, to varying degrees, into their histories and current lives, investigating the relationships among L2 proficiency, identity, investment, and access to English, as these are realized across EFL and ESL contexts. Table 5.4 gives statements that each case study participant made during the one-on-one interviews that, during analysis, emerged for me as representative of each

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<sup>12</sup> The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands is a string of 17 islands in the Pacific that are currently under the auspices of the United States. There are various indigenous languages in CNMI, but they have largely been replaced by English (Pacific Resources for Education and Learning).

participant’s relationship with English. These “sound-bites” are not to be read as judgmental statements of character or personality, but rather as sign-posts that lead to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship each participant has developed with the English language, and, indicators of how I see that relationship intersecting with their investment and identity as English language learners in the United States.

The claim that the case study participants have a relationship with English in and of itself speaks volumes in terms of their investment. I hope the relationship labels I have assigned are justified through the thick descriptions of the case study participants that follow. As a researcher, I did not go looking for these statements or for the relationship labels. Rather, they found me as I sorted through the matrix of data.

**Table 5.4: Relationship with English**

Name	Comments	Relationship
Belita	I never like English.	Courage
Dao-Ming	If I don’t understand English I wouldn’t be able to it ( <i>learn about Western world</i> ).	Liberation
Marcos	I got internet at home in 2000 or 1999 and so this was the break through it was like I can have English now.	Opportunity
Melosia	I didn’t like English.	Adventure

The terms courage, liberation, opportunity, and adventure encapsulate, from my perspective, the relationship each participant has developed with the English language. Courage is ascribed to Belita because, even though she never liked English and never wanted very much to do with the United States, she gave up everything she had worked for in Guatemala and moved to the United States to begin a new life in a new country. To do this meant that she had to revisit the very subject, English, that she believed she would not have to face again after graduating from high school. Dao-Ming, whose English skills are quite advanced, recognized early on in her encounters with English that the language offered her

the opportunity to learn about China from a western perspective. In doing so, she became aware that the information she was receiving from Chinese officials was often filtered and inaccurate. Thus, Dao-Ming found solace in English, where she was free to think critically and encouraged to ask questions. For these reasons, I associate Dao-Ming's relationship with English as one of liberation.

Unlike Belita or Dao-Ming whose relationships with English are rooted in turmoil, Marcos saw that English opened doors for him. Initially, English became the conduit to understanding the lyrics of American and British songs and to understanding American sports, particularly football and basketball. Yet as Marcos progressed in school, his interest in English allowed him to pursue a career in electrical engineering, which, in turn, permitted him the opportunity to come to the United States on an academic fellowship where he could work on a Ph.D. at an American university. Furthermore, Marcos understands that by having English, he is not limited in who he can meet and interact with, or where he can go as a professional or tourist; thus, opportunity is the relationship that I see existing between Marcos and English.

Adventure is the relationship I attribute to Melosia. Though Melosia experienced a dislike for English during her middle and high school years, she came to understand that by learning English, she could experience life beyond the borders of Mexico. Learning English meant she could explore new places, as well as new personalities. She learned in the United States that having a Spanish-English accent allowed her to be perceived by NES's as being an exotic Latina from Columbia, Peru, Argentina, or other Spanish speaking countries, thus permitting her to don multiple identities. For Melosia, this ability was exciting and adventuresome.

Having highlighted the general demographics of each case study participant, explicating their similarities and differences, this chapter will now turn to providing thick descriptions of each individual. Finally, the chapter will end by directly comparing the English educational experiences the case study participants had in their countries before coming to the United States.

One final note is perhaps pertinent. The English L2 proficiency of the case study participants will be immediately noticeable when reading the written presentations (the data Excerpts) of their spoken language. Because of the disconnect between their L2 proficiency scores, their English L2 production, the NES secondary case study participants' perceptions, the case study participants' emic perspectives on their English L2 proficiency, and my interactions with the case study participants as researcher, it became obvious that investigating English L2 proficiency was integral to this dissertation. The complexities of measuring and assessing L2 proficiency from multiple perspectives are addressed in detail in the chapter that follows.

### **Belita**

Belita is 31 years old and is from a large metropolitan city in Guatemala. She comes from a family of four, including her parents, a younger brother, and herself. Her father is a businessman. Her mother is a homemaker, and her brother is in medical school in Mexico. Her parents divorced in 2005. After the divorce, her father moved to another city in Guatemala for work. Her mother married a U.S. citizen and moved to a city in the Southwestern United States later in 2005. After Belita's parents divorced, Belita and her brother bought a house together and lived in it in Guatemala until they decided it was time

for a change. At the time of the study, Belita was not married, but I have learned that she married in the United States in the summer of 2011, after data collection was completed.

**Education.** Belita attended a private 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist school in Guatemala throughout her elementary and secondary school career. After graduating from high school, Belita attended a private Catholic university, where she earned her degree in dentistry. She believes her experience in the Catholic school was good because this offered her the opportunity to learn about and be challenged by a Christian denomination other than 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist.

*Excerpt 5.1 (February 15, 2010)*

105 Um I always feel like happy because I was that many children from many zones  
 106 need to change /εskulz/ (schools) every year or every 3 years and this is stressful  
 107 but I feel like being home when I start every year and I know everybody but at the  
 108 end I was exciting for being another university and meeting a lot people so it wan-  
 109 an I think this was important for me because I open my mind because in this  
 110 school I was stay the same religion things but then when I got to the university was  
 111 a Catholic university so I open my mind to another another religion and another  
 112 beliefs. [BTR2INT21510]

In Excerpt 5.1, Belita explains that she feels fortunate to have attended the same school throughout her elementary, middle, and high school career in Guatemala because this afforded her the opportunity to develop familial like relationships with her teachers and fellow classmates (line 107). She said this was not the case for all students in Guatemala, as many had to change schools from year to year, depending on which city zone they lived in (lines 105-106). At the same time, though, Belita recognizes that she benefited from attending a Catholic university, as it exposed her to different perspectives (lines 111-112).

When asked about her English education, she said that students in public schools in Guatemala are supposed to begin studying English in elementary school, but that in reality

English instruction begins in middle school (Excerpt 5.2, line 127). In her private school, she recalls beginning her English lessons in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and describes the kind of English language instruction that the teacher relied on.

*Excerpt 5.2 (February 15, 2010)*

*(B= Belita; M= Michael, interviewer)*

- 123 B: Uh supposedly that in every year they they teach English.  
 124 M: Umh.  
 125 B: But it's the real truth [(hh)].  
 126 M: [(hh)].  
 127 B: So I begin uh hear about English in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.  
 128 M: Okay.  
 129 B: But only the basic can I think that every year they teach us the same like a little  
 130 songs in English and the numbers or vocabularies but never speak in English in  
 131 the class.  
 132 M: Okay.  
 133 B: Even the teachers speak in Spanish so it was in English now.  
 134 M: Okay okay.  
 135 B: We no practice at all. [BTR2INT21510]

Thus, Belita only had four years of formal English language instruction in school, or controlled access to English. Belita's description of her English language instruction suggests that her teacher practiced primarily grammar translation with pseudo Direct Method<sup>13</sup> activities. The emphasis was on learning grammar, common phrases, or vocabulary via songs (Excerpt 5.2, lines 130-133), but there was never any emphasis on learning to speak and communicate in English. Even the teacher, as Belita states in Excerpt 5.2, did not speak in English (line 133). Furthermore, Belita claims that the content was the same every year (Excerpt 5.2, line 129). During one of the focus group interviews, Belita elaborated even more by saying there was only one English language teacher for her

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<sup>13</sup> Grammar translation methodology derives from the teaching of classical Greek or Latin in which students are required to translate passages of text from the L1 to the L2. Direct Method approaches do not practice translation, but they also do not provide explicit grammar instruction. Rather, the focus is on producing the language, often in the form of songs, and memorized dialogs, which nevertheless emphasize specific grammatical structures.

entire K-12 school. Belita's signpost statement, *I never like English*, (Table 5.3) may have been exacerbated by the kind of English language instruction she was exposed to in middle school.

Upon graduating from secondary school, Belita left English behind, believing she would never have to touch the subject again. At the university where she studied dentistry, she chose to take other classes, such as computer science, that met the school's requirements for graduation (Excerpt 5.3, line 163).

*Excerpt 5.3 (February 15, 2010)*

161 Uh these two are studying /bilɪŋəl/ (bilingual) secretary and they actually learn  
 162 English but for me I no choose that because I don't English so I choose some  
 163 computer science or something for escape of the of English again and I never I  
 164 never think live here. So I no think that I would really use learn English.

[BTR2INT21510]

In Excerpt 5.3, Belita explains that she knew two classmates who were required to take English at the university because they were studying to become bilingual secretaries (lines 161-162), but because she was majoring in dentistry, other course options were open to her. It is relevant to note that in line 163, Belita chooses the term "escape" to describe her preference for computer science over English. Her statement serves to confirm her dislike of the English language. She sincerely believed she would never have a use for the English language.

***Immigration.*** In 2009, Belita's dental clinics were burglarized and vandalized several times. Some of these incidents occurred during the middle of the day when she was present and attending to patients. Her hired office security offered no protection from the increasing violence. Her mother, having moved with her husband to the United States five years earlier, suggested Belita come live with them. Finally, after an evening of visiting with

friends and assessing her life, Belita decided to leave Guatemala and move to the United States. She cited several factors:

1. She was single.
2. She was independent and a professional woman in Guatemala; she might not ever get married.
3. She had no children.
4. The violence in her hometown was increasing.
5. To stay, she needed to increase the hired security, resulting in raising patient fees.
6. She did not feel safe.
7. Her brother was beginning medical school in Mexico, making her the only one in her immediate family still living in the city.
8. Her mother and stepfather live in the United States. She could live with them while she figured out her future.

So, she sold everything and within a month, found herself living in a new country with a new culture, coming face-to-face with a language she had not interacted with in nearly 10 years, and by her own admission, she had disliked as a schoolgirl.

In the summer of 2009, Belita enrolled in the Intensive English Program at the local university. The initial score that Belita earned on the TOEFL-pbt for placement purposes was 350, which is nearly the lowest score possible on this particular version of the TOEFL. In December of 2009, just six months after enrolling in the IEP, Belita re-took the TOEFL-pbt and scored a 590. Her 240-point increase in six months on TOEFL is remarkable. Students will typically increase their scores over the course of a 16-week semester, but to go from 350 to 590 in six months might be comparable to a child going from the holophrastic



(one-word) stage, such as *Cookie?* to speaking in complete, complex, vocabulary rich sentences, such as *Mother, may I please have a chocolate chip cookie before dinner?* in a matter of months rather than years. Belita said that during the summer 2010 semester, she devoted all of her time to learning English, "...but for me the summer was so hard. I came to my house after the classes, and I spent all the afternoon doing my homework." Thus, it was not easy for Belita, but at the same time, she also knew that she could not afford the time or the money to spend two years in the university IEP.

When I first asked what she wanted to do with her future, Belita said she was unsure. She was considering medical school, specializing in prosthetics design; however, in subsequent interviews she shifted back to dentistry, saying, "Um I really wish maybe born for be a dentist." As Excerpt 5.4 below demonstrates, being a dentist not only offers Belita the opportunity to help patients maintain healthy teeth, but to be an *armchair* psychologist, as well (lines 110-115).

*Excerpt 5.4 (March 31, 2010)*

- 103 M: Why do you enjoy it?  
 104 B: You can talk with the people.  
 105 M: Okay.  
 106 B: It's really funny.  
 107 M: Umh.  
 108 B: When the people is laying lay?=  
 109 M: Umh umh.  
 110 B: =In the dentist chair.  
 111 M: Umh.  
 112 B: I don't know why but maybe they feel like I am the /sɪkalojɪst/ (psychologist).  
 113 M: Umh [(hh)].  
 114 B: [I don't if it is] the position something but always they tell me something that I  
 115 say not something that is sad for them or something it's really nice.

[BTR3INT3310]

Though Belita's TOEFL-pbt is high enough to enter graduate school, she continues to take undergraduate classes. She is waiting for her university in Guatemala to send her certified, translated transcripts to the university in the United States because she does not want to retake chemistry, physiology, biology, etc. – courses she took in Guatemala as part of her dentistry program. Belita also needs her transcripts so that she can document her education and dental licensure in Guatemala. Being able to certify her dental license from Guatemala will allow her to sit for the Dental Boards in the state in which she now lives in the United States.

**Personality.** In addition to demonstrating Belita's passion for dentistry, Excerpt 5.4 also highlights a central piece of Belita's personality. She loves people; she loves being with people. She describes herself as an extrovert when she is speaking Spanish, but an introvert when speaking English. She also describes herself as religious, a family person, and someone who loves to entertain.

Belita, though, is not a romantic, as exemplified in Excerpt 5.5. She is not a person who wishes to live in the past (lines 458-459; 484-489). She misses Guatemala and the life she had there, but she also recognizes that her future lies in the United States. She will always hold Guatemala close to her heart, and this gives her the strength and courage to forge ahead as she strives to find her place in the United States.

*Excerpt 5.5 (April 2, 2010)*

- 443 M: Has leaving Guatemala and moving to the United States has that changed  
 444 your your view of the world?  
 445 B: H:::m yes.  
 446 M: Umh umh how?  
 447 B: Uh because in now I think that I am uh I am sure that I want more that I have  
 448 there and I am thinking in travel or know more places and more people.  
 449 M: Umh.

450 B: Because I lose the safety of of my town.  
 451 M: Right.  
 452 B: So I don't feel afraid more.  
 453 M: Have you lost the safety of your town?  
 454 B: U::h.  
 455 M: Or is it still with you?  
 456 B: U::::h no I think that I no feel the same.  
 457 M: Okay umh umh.  
 458 B: An I don't know if I need to come back there I can adjust at the same life that I  
 459 have there.  
 460 M: Umh.  
 461 B: I don't know if I can do it.  
 462 M: Okay okay the reason I ask you is because I've traveled around the world and  
 463 lived in many places but there's a part of me.  
 464 B: Umh.  
 465 M: That is still (.02) connected=  
 466 B: Umh.  
 467 M: =To my hometown.  
 468 B: Umh.  
 469 M: And it will always be my hometown and when I think of my hometown I I feel  
 470 very comfortable and get kind of nostalgic.  
 471 B: Umh.  
 472 M: And think oh I'd like to move back.  
 473 B: Always.  
 474 M: Umh.  
 475 B: For me is different.  
 476 M: Different.  
 477 B: Unha may be the reason because I think in my safety of my security of my  
 478 everything.  
 479 M: Umh.  
 480 B: About my family.  
 481 M: Umh.  
 482 B: No about the place.  
 483 M: Okay.  
 484 B: But now that all my family is in different places I don't think that Guatemala of  
 485 like oh my home or something.  
 486 M: Umh.  
 487 B: Of course that I miss Guatemala an I wanna go for vacation an see my friends an  
 488 everything but I think that the part that most affect me is that I don't have  
 489 anything more there. [BTR4INT4210]

The interaction above exemplifies Belita's courage as well as her resolve to be in the United States. At some point, Belita reconciled her differences with English and the United

States and saw that coming here and learning English represented a way out of a deteriorating situation in Guatemala. By coming to terms with what is important to her – family, not place – she has garnered the strength and courage to take on a new life, in a new country, in a new language. As I state in the exchange above, my hometown, childhood experiences, the land, and the friends that I still have there, are what ground me and guide me today. They are embedded in my identity. Belita admits that she misses her friends and would like to return for visits, but her identity is tied to her family, not to a place and not to one particular language. Learning English for Belita is a necessary evil, but if learning English means that she can have a safer life and be close to her mother, then that is all the reason she needs.

As a 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist, Belita attends services on Saturday. The church she attends, though, is predominantly Spanish speaking. The services are all in Spanish and the majority of the people who attend speak Spanish as their L1. Many of the members of the congregation have immigrated from Mexico, Central America, or South America.

Belita also has a determined, never quit personality that has helped her to overcome her animosity toward English and her indifference toward the United States. Belita said she never liked English. She reiterated her sentiments during the first focus group session. “So you you need to know now because you are living here [United States] but I survive all my life without knowing English in Guatemala.” Yet when Belita decided to move to the United States, she was determined to learn English, even after her mother explained that she didn’t need to know English to live in the United States (Excerpt 5.6, lines 754-55).

*Excerpt 5.6 (February 15, 2010)*

753 Yes but my mom always say me no because he have four four or five years here  
 754 and she no speak English so my mom I listening “no but you can find uh a  
 755 Spanish board you don’t need English we live in (state) we don’t live in (state) or  
 756 something there are many people to speak Spanish but I kn:: knew that that if I  
 757 came here I gonna learn English I don’t wanna be like this XXXX to hear that  
 758 after that she came to Guatemala and she no can say anything good in English I  
 759 don’t wanna be like. [BTR2INT21510]

In summary, Belita was a content, established professional healthcare provider in Guatemala, who believed that she would never have to study English again, much less learn it and use it as a primary language for daily communication. Growing up, she had developed, if not negative opinions of the United States and English, at least unfavorable attitudes toward them. Because of the deteriorating environment in Guatemala, including increasing violence against her personal property and the dismantling of her immediate family network, she was forced to make almost unfathomable decisions for her future. Ultimately, Belita came to the United States and faced English again, but given the realities of her situation, she felt she was left with no choice, negating any real “decision” process. Thus, it might be said that Belita’s courage, determination, and work ethic have served to guide and support her during her transition from Guatemala to the United States, from Spanish to English, and from a practicing dentist to a university student again.

**Dao-Ming<sup>14</sup>**

Dao-Ming, like Belita, is in her early to mid-30s. Dao-Ming comes from a relatively small fishing community in northeastern China. She said the city is a tourist city but it

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<sup>14</sup> Dao-Ming and her husband (Jim) moved out of state in December 2010. They did not leave any forwarding information. Furthermore, Dao-Ming disconnected her telephone number. I tried to reestablish contact unsuccessfully. The Human Research and Protection Office assured me that since Dao-Ming and Jim signed Informed Consent forms, I can include the data I collected. However, what is said here is my interpretation of Dao-Ming and her life. I have no way to verify the accuracy of my analyses beyond what is in the transcripts.

primarily attracts Chinese tourists, not international travelers. Because of China's "one-child" policy, Dao-Ming does not have any siblings, but she does have several cousins, some of whom she maintains contact with. Dao-Ming was born into a family of teachers: her mother was a math teacher and her father was an art teacher. They are both retired and, in Dao-Ming's words, "they just, they are just enjoying their life." When I asked her to describe her childhood, Dao-Ming said, "My childhood, um, uh, quite boring. Uh, I don't have siblings and my parents are very paranoid about my city, so I don't go out. I didn't get to go out much. I stay home a lot of time." She continues this behavior today, as she admits in Excerpt 5.7, line 469.

*Excerpt 5.7 (February 1, 2010)*

*(D= Dao-Ming; M=Michael, interviewer)*

469 D: So I still do I still have this kind of habit nowadays.

470 M: To stay home.

471 D: Yeah.

472 M: Um um but you're here in the United States?

473 D: Uhn.

474 M: Yeah what 8,000 miles away from (hh).

475 D: Yeah kind you have already developed this kind of habit. [DNL1INT2110]

Furthermore, Dao-Ming does not like to call attention to herself. She claimed that she would never ask a question in class, either in China, where it is not customary to ask questions, or in the United States. Her husband, Jim, confirmed Dao-Ming's shy behavior, stating that she does not like to socialize, even with other Chinese nationals.

**Education.** Dao-Ming attended public school throughout her elementary and secondary education career. She describes herself as a diligent and hard working student. In

fact, when I asked her about studying in a *bū shì bǎn*,<sup>15</sup> she was proud of the fact that she never had to rely on these schools:

*Excerpt 5.8 (February 22, 2010)*

And uh I spend a lot I spent a lot studying in my childhood because I don't want to *bū shì bǎn* and um um I mainly I mainly did it uh by myself at home I didn't do any help from my parents uh my grades were XXX from elementary to high school uh were quite good I did XXX but yet I spent a lot of time most of my time studying just grades were very important. [DNL2INT22210]

Dao-Ming began her journey with English in middle school. Dao-Ming was quick to emphasize that the English she studied in China was British English, not American English, and that she did not come into contact with American English until college, where she had access to American movies, music, and the Internet. Dao-Ming's formal introduction to controlled English in middle and high school appears to have been grounded in a type of grammar translation methodology.

*Excerpt 5.9 (February 22, 2010)*

- 170 M: Okay okay um um what was the instruction like in middle school and high school  
 171 in terms of the English what what were [what]=  
 172 D: [umh].  
 173 M: =is the focus wh- [what] kind of=  
 174 D: [Oh].  
 175 M: =activities did you do?  
 176 D: Um no activities we we I think nowadays they like a foreign teachers.  
 177 M: Umh.  
 178 D: So you can hear some real English.  
 179 M: Umh.  
 180 D: You can communicate with a a real native speaker in English but um back in my  
 181 days uh it's just uh learn the textbook and the teacher would write and read it to  
 182 you and uh uh explain the grammars and then uh the teacher herself might think  
 183 about it her English wasn't that good either so and uh we didn't listen to any  
 184 movies or or songs it's just the teacher and the textbook.

<sup>15</sup> When I lived in Taiwan in 1987-1988, I learned about *bū shì bǎn*s. A *bū shì bǎn* is a private school which, when translated, means something like "cram school." Middle and high school students will normally attend *bū shì bǎn* in the afternoons and evenings after regular school. The purpose of *bū shì bǎn*s is to prepare students for the highly competitive high school and college entrance exams. These schools cover subjects such as trigonometry, chemistry, economics, and English.

- 185 M: Just the te[acher and the textbook].  
 186 D: [and:....] and uh no activities.  
 187 M: Right.  
 188 D: And uh it's more about grammar.  
 189 M: Okay.  
 190 D: Uh vocabulary and grammar.  
 191 M: Okay now in what language is she using to explain the gram[mar and vocabulary].  
 192 D: [Oh Chinese].  
 193 M: Chinese okay Mandarin. [DNL2INT22210]

In Excerpt 5.9, Dao-Ming emphasizes her English lessons centered on the *textbook and the teacher* (line 180-184). When I probed deeper (line 191), Dao-Ming explains that English grammar and vocabulary were taught via Mandarin, suggesting a grammar translation pedagogy. Rather than becoming bored with learning English as Belita did, Dao-Ming developed a passion for it. Her fervor can be partially explained by the highly competitive high school and college entrance exams, which include significant sections dedicated to testing students' knowledge of English. Later in the interview, she recognized that English was a way for her to explore the world beyond China, but that English was probably not useful for much of the Chinese population. "To study it [English] but they're [Chinese farmers and laborers] not gonna use it but for me I I love English I have always wanted to go out take a look at the world so."

She goes on to say that she began developing a desire to see America and learn more about American culture in middle and high school. She recalled reading an article that described the instructions American military personnel are given in the event they find themselves in a deadly combat situation. This expression of independence and placing individual needs above community needs had a lasting impression. She contrasted this with Chinese and Japanese culture.



*Excerpt 5.10 (February 22, 2010)*

- 1083 D: Yeah I have uh come to like United States since I was in junior high.  
 1084 M: Okay.  
 1085 D: Yeah.  
 1086 M: Umh.  
 1087 D: I like uh um I remember just anything um uh I think I would was- when I was in  
 1088 junior high I uh was reading XXXXX and it was about uh like uh I don't know  
 1089 what it's about but anyway it has this uh a comment uh like a Japanese and  
 1090 Chinese and we can see their surren- sur- surrendering you say uh it's a shame.  
 1091 M: Umh  
 1092 D: Uh like uh uh our heroes always kill themselves or kill themself with together  
 1093 with the enemy.  
 1094 M: Right.  
 1095 D: Uh blow them uh blow them up uh with a bunch of enemies.  
 1096 M: Okay.  
 1097 D: Uh we think they're heroes and uh we think who surrenders is a shame we  
 1098 wouldn't consider as a hero and especially Japanese they wouldn't (hh)  
 1099 M: Right right.  
 1100 D: Yeah you know [what I'm talking about=  
 1101 M: [hari-kari yeah right right].  
 1102 D: =yeah] yeah.  
 1103 M: Right right.  
 1104 D: But I read this article about Americans uh like military training they would give  
 1105 this pamphlet to soldiers like if you get caught how to make a white flag how to  
 1106 express that you clearly that you are surrendering so they wouldn't wouldn't kill  
 1107 you by mistake you know how to survive and stuff and uh I I was thinking wow  
 1108 this is great culture you know.  
 1109 M: Umh.  
 1110 D: You um you put individual uh uh life safety happiness beyond um as a nation  
 1111 country whatever.  
 1112 M: Umh.  
 1113 D: And uh I like that.  
 1114 M: Okay.  
 1115 D: And uh and uh a lot a lot of other tiny of things I just uh um started to have uh  
 1116 you know fascinations about this culture and this country yeah. [DNL2INT22210]

These early interactions with English in junior high school encouraged Dao-Ming to want to explore the world beyond China. To this point, she had developed good reading and writing skills, had a good knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary (Excerpt 5.11, lines 1076-1082), but her speaking and listening skills were relatively under-developed. Thus,

upon graduating from college in China with her nursing degree, Dao-Ming found work on an island in the CNMI, where she worked in one of the local clinics for five years. It was in the CNMI where Dao-Ming began to develop her spoken skills in English.

*Excerpt 5.11 (March 10, 2010)*

- 1076 D: Um like uh my co-workers uh they they told me that my English improved a lot  
 1077 my reading you know English words always give my TOEFL score like 5 years  
 1078 ago was already 610=  
 1079 M: Umh umh.  
 1080 D: =And uh or 640 I I don't remember.  
 1081 M: Okay.  
 1082 D: So anyway my paper based uh skill is good but my speaking English was very  
 1083 very bad.  
 1084 M: Umh.  
 1085 D: So it's a lot of practice and they told me I improved a lot because uh if a like I'm  
 1086 talking to somebody I notice that uh I couldn't expr- express=  
 1087 M: Umh.  
 1088 D: =Right my thoughts I would remember that.  
 1089 M: Umh.  
 1090 D: Understand later uh during my reading or watching movie I would say oh this is  
 1091 the what I wanted to express.  
 1092 M: Umh.  
 1093 D: So I would uh uh like uh /prəsed/ (present) to my own-  
 1094 M: Umh.  
 1095 D: -Uh language storage and uh so um first uh talk a lot because I worked there for 5  
 1096 years and I talked everyday for 8 hours=  
 1097 M: Umh.  
 1098 D: =In working place in English.  
 1099 M: Okay.  
 1100 D: And uh I read and I watch movies and I pay attention to how American how  
 1101 native speakers do it. [DNL3INT31010]

Thus the natural uncontrolled access to spoken and written English Dao-Ming had in the CNMI enabled her not only to practice her speaking skills, but also allowed her the opportunity to analyze and compare her English to what she heard and read (lines 1086-1090; 1095-1101). Using her analytical skills and her memory, she would study the differences and make adjustments in her own English language use, so that with the next opportunity, she would be able to use the vocabulary and structures like NESs (line 1101).

***Immigration.*** Dao-Ming divorced her Chinese husband while living in the CNMI. At the same time, she was developing a platonic relationship with one of the doctors at the clinic, Jim, a married U.S. citizen. Jim gave her several of his medical textbooks he no longer needed, so she could study medicine on her own. When she had questions, she would ask Jim and he would try to answer as best he could. Between 2007 and 2008, Jim and his family moved back to the U.S. mainland, where he began a three-year fellowship in a highly specialized area of children's medicine at a university in the Southwestern United States. Jim's marriage was also failing at this time, but he did not divorce until Dao-Ming joined him in the United States. It is important to note that at the beginning of data collection, Dao-Ming referred to Jim as her "boyfriend," but late into the data collection phase, I learned from Jim that they had married and are now husband and wife.

Not long after Jim's departure from the CNMI, Dao-Ming began the process of investigating medical schools in the United States and Australia. She even visited Australia in 2009 to assess the country and the medical schools. Throughout this process, Dao-Ming and Jim had maintained contact via email. He helped Dao-Ming evaluate the various medical schools and prepare paperwork for admission. Finally, in 2009, with Jim's marriage ending, he suggested to Dao-Ming that she come to the United States to investigate medical

schools and to visit him. She arrived in the United States in early 2010, but not without drama.

Dao-Ming did not have a visa to enter the United States. In fact, she had been denied a visa in 2003. However, she was able to secure a visa waiver, not an F-1 student visa, from the Director of the Culture and Border Protection agency in the CNMI. This visa waiver allowed her to enter the United States.

A visa waiver for resident aliens living in and working in the CNMI allows a resident alien to visit the United States for up to 45 days. This visa status meant that she had to apply for a different visa upon arrival if she wished to extend her stay in the United States. Therefore, in order to justify her academic intentions to the State Department and to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Office, she enrolled in the Intensive English Program. This gave Dao-Ming the time and protection she needed while her application for a different visa was reviewed.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Dao-Ming sat for the TOEFL-pbt placement test during the IEP's international student orientation in early January 2010, just before the beginning of the spring semester. She scored approximately 650 on this TOEFL-pbt. The local university requires 550 for admission into the graduate school. Additionally, the university School of Medicine (School of Medicine Admissions Office, personal contact) does not have an English language L2 proficiency requirement per se; rather, the medical school requires that international L2 students attend a university or college in the United States for two years. However, international English L2 students must still meet the university's English L2 proficiency requirement for graduate students. Thus, Dao-Ming essentially tested out of the

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<sup>16</sup> Dao-Ming was visited by immigration officials during this study; however, she would not speak with me about her meetings with the immigration officials other than to say that officers were pleasant and polite.

IEP, but for the reasons stated above, she had to enroll in some English language classes for visa purposes, and she needed two years of college level study before she could apply for admission into the School of Medicine. Interestingly, though, she was also permitted to take other courses as a non-degree student, so she enrolled in a dance class and Anatomy & Physiology I.

The university IEP always offers a mid-term TOEFL-pbt. For the Spring 2010 semester, the TOEFL-pbt was administered in the middle of March. Dao-Ming took the TOEFL-pbt again. On this particular TOEFL-pbt, Dao-Ming scored 677 (100%). Like Belita's astounding 240 point jump in her TOEFL-pbt score over 6 months, Dao-Ming's perfect score is a rare accomplishment. Thus, according to her TOEFL-pbt and the university English L2 proficiency requirements, Dao-Ming did not need formal, controlled English language classes. Yet Dao-Ming believes she benefited from taking classes in the IEP. She was complimentary of her experience in the IEP and particularly appreciated her conversation and writing classes, claiming that these two courses provided her cultural and academic insights that she could not have gotten anywhere else.

***Personality.*** Dao-Ming is admittedly a shy individual. When I asked her where she would place herself on the introvert-extrovert continuum, without hesitating she said, "introvert." Unlike Belita, who made a distinction depending on which language she was using, Dao-Ming embraced the introvert label regardless of language. The perceived distrust of the environment outside her home in China that her parents projected may have contributed to Dao-Ming's shyness, yet it also may have motivated her to become the studious individual that she is today. During our 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, Dao-Ming commented on a

recent experience that she had had in the university's main campus library the previous weekend.

*Excerpt 5.12 (February 22, 2010)*

816 And I need to study philosophy psychology a bunch of other stuff I you know I  
817 like studying I like campus and uh uh Saturday was my first day to study in the  
818 library and I feel alone in there among the bookcases and I thought I can I thought  
819 so happy I felt like I was in a shopping mall yeah I like here I like this I like  
820 campus I like school I like libraries it's just not important for me I told my  
821 boyfriend that uh if I don't have to worry about exams I don't have to worry this  
822 international tuition ridiculously uh expensive uh tuition I want to learn lot of a lot  
823 of stuff when I um register on line the courses and I look at the list oh I want to  
824 learn this I want to learn this I want to study this I want study this.

[DNL2INT22210]

As exemplified in Excerpt 5.12, Dao-Ming is an intellectually curious person. She wishes to learn more about psychology, philosophy, and other subjects. In short, she basically gets excited about everything academic (lines 861; 868-869). Furthermore, she likens the experience of being surrounded by books in a library to a person in a shopping mall (lines 863-864). Thus, to be surrounded by books is more comforting to Dao-Ming than being surrounded by people.

Dao-Ming's husband, Jim (Excerpt 5.15) reiterates Dao-Ming's preference to be alone rather than to socialize.

*Excerpt 5.15 (June 13, 2010)*

312 M: How would you describe her personality.  
313 J: Uh she's one of the brightest of the people that I have ever met uh but she's very shy  
314 uh she doesn't um she would rather be at home she just sort of XXXX than being in  
315 a large place XXXX part of the reason why I hesitated on the previous question  
316 about social gatherings.  
317 M: Yeah.  
318 J: She's not that into going to social gatherings.  
319 M: Umh.  
320 J: And she's always been like that you know she likes having friends but she has um  
321 not very many of them and having been in a relationship with them [JDM1INTV71310]

Dao-Ming has already achieved one of her lifelong goals: to come to the United States. She has more plans for her future. She hopes to become a physician in the United States and to own a ranch. Owning land in the United States is important to her. From her perspective, owning a ranch in the United States will demonstrate to her relatives in China that she is successful. Thus, Dao-Ming's own yardstick for success, which I believe is directly linked with her social identity, is measured by the following:

- Having sophisticated English
- Becoming a medical doctor in the United States
- Owning land in the United States

In summary, according to Dao-Ming's TOEFL scores, her English skills are impeccable. Beginning in middle school, she devoted much of her energy to mastering the structures of English, learning vocabulary, and developing her reading skills. Through this process, she also came to believe that the Chinese government was filtering information coming in from the West and discovered that, by learning English, she could access different world perspectives.

*Excerpt 5.16 (March 31, 2010)*

- 51 M: [yeah] yeah yeah interesting um i- k- can you describe how English has  
52 changed your worldview?
- 53 D: Oh um /nyæ/ (no ya) if I uh don't understand English=  
54 M: Umh.
- 55 D: =I would have to I guess I'm st- still in China and I don't understand English I  
56 would have to believe whatever m:: the mainstream uh /midɹ/ (media) media you  
57 know have have been telling us.
- 58 M: Umh.
- 59 D: You know a lot of lies [(hh)].
- 60 M: [(hh)].

[DNL4INT33110]

Though she loves her country, she came to a point in her life where she felt she could no longer live in a place where she was not free to express herself as she wanted. Thus, she found employment in the CNMI, and after five years, succeeded in immigrating to the United States mainland, where she believes her future is, if not brighter, at least hers to determine. Within this framework, therefore, it is appropriate to characterize Dao-Ming's relationship with English as liberating.

I have omitted some of my analyses and descriptions of Dao-Ming for many reasons that I cannot divulge in order to protect Dao-Ming's privacy and confidentiality, as well as her wishes. It is safe to say that during our interviews I never felt entirely comfortable with Dao-Ming and that she was filtering the information that she was giving to me. For example, earlier I noted that immigration officials visited Dao-Ming during data collection, but when the opportunity presented itself, she refused to talk about it. When I discovered that Dao-Ming was divorced, I asked if she would talk about this, but she refused. I found this curious since she knew that I was divorced and felt that we had something in common that would build trust and respect for one another, but this was not the case. Furthermore, she would not allow me to observe her in her classes. Finally, she did not leave me with a forwarding address, phone number or email when she and her husband left the city where the case study was conducted, essentially ending any further interactions with her. These incidents and others, suggests to me that Dao-Ming was taking steps to protect herself.

### **Marcos**

Marcos comes from a north central city in Spain. It is an ancient city with spectacular architecture, attracting thousands of tourists from around the world annually. Marcos is 22 years old. He has a younger sister who is currently attending a university in his hometown.



His father co-owns an auto parts/mechanic store and his mother is an elementary school teacher. Marcos has a Spanish girlfriend who came to visit Marcos for approximately 8 weeks during the 2010 spring semester.

**Education.** Marcos attended the same elementary school where his mother teaches. It is a private school, but it is financed by the government. According to Marcos, “In Spain they are private but they are paid by the government (February 8, 2010).” Marcos went to this school from pre-school through middle school (3 to 16 years old). He then transferred to a local high school, where he studied for two years. Upon graduating from high school, Marcos decided to go away for college, so he enrolled in a university in a different city in northeastern Spain. He received both his Bachelor’s and Master’s degree there. He earned a Bachelor’s degree in telecommunications, but Marcos described the degree this way, “... it’s actually I think it’s the electrical engineering.” For his Master’s he considered returning to his hometown to pursue a degree in audiovisual communication. Ultimately, he decided engineering offered more career opportunities, so he continued with electrical engineering. He is now in the United States pursuing his Ph.D. in the same field.

His English studies began in the third grade and continued through his Bachelor’s degree. Unlike the grammar translation method that Dao-Ming experienced, Marcos’ controlled English instruction included reading, writing, listening, and grammar, with some speaking practice (Excerpt 5.17, lines 130-133).

*Excerpt 5.17 (February 8, 2010)*

*(R= Marcos, M= Michael-interviewer)*

- 128 M: So when when the teacher in your in the public schools in your in that English  
 129 class are you studying grammar reading vocabulary [speaking]?  
 130 R: [Yeah grammar] reading  
 131 vocabulary listening.  
 132 M: Listening.

- 133 R: Yeah just put some song=  
 134 M: (hh).  
 135 R: =and listen to it to learn yes yes all of that. [MRO2INT2810]

Marcos' description of English instruction in Spain reflects a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)<sup>17</sup> approach in which students experience language holistically (Excerpt 5.18, lines 156-157), developing the four basic skills, reading, writing, listening, and speaking simultaneously. As Excerpt 5.18 demonstrates, Marcos' controlled English environment increased in difficulty and expectations as he progressed through his school years. His instruction in elementary school appears to have emphasized social language skills, such as going to the post office and students would role-play parts as a way of practicing their English skills. In middle and high school, the content appears to have shifted to more academically oriented topics such as science and history (line 151) with an emphasis on reading, writing, and commenting on different texts (lines 162-163).

*Excerpt 5.18 (February 8, 2010)*

- 143 R: None of these books were always structured like every chapter was eh the first  
 144 there was the reading some questions and listening some related to the text. The  
 145 text well they put vocabulary there.  
 146 M: Uh.  
 147 R: You know vocabulary and and test.  
 148 M: The readings were they based like a situation like at the bank post office grocery  
 149 [store or were]=  
 150 R: [some of that].  
 151 M: =they more like science and history kinds of reading?  
 152 R: When you are really young.  
 153 M: Umh.  
 154 R: I think it's more eh talking between people.  
 155 M: Okay.  
 156 R: Meet some and XXX "Oh XXX" that "Oh stay and go to the post post office."  
 157 Today we are going to play it's like and it was dramatical when you are when start  
 158 to get to get older you are getting text from magazines from newspapers.

<sup>17</sup> The basic principles of Communicative Language Teaching are a) develop communicative competence; b) the four language skills are recognized as interdependent and thus instruction must strive to link language with communication (Richards & Rogers, 2001, p. 155).

- 159 M: Umh.  
 160 R: And then you have some more background and=  
 161 M: Okay.  
 162 R: =And you have and even when you are 18 you are you don't have to to gave up  
 163 you have to read it and then comment about it and write about a paragraph so.  
 [MRO2INT2810]

Marcos, however, recognized the English he was learning at school was a formal variety of the language. He desired more authentic interactions with English and in 1999/2000 (approximately 12 years old) he got what he wanted (Excerpt 5.19, lines 189-191).

*Excerpt 5.19 (February 8, 2010)*

- 181 M: Okay okay right um um what sorts of opportunities were available for you to use  
 182 English outside of that 2 hours a week?  
 183 R: Um::: opportunities eh it was in in the school we have the English class.  
 184 M: Umh.  
 185 R: Have a little little library.  
 186 M: Okay.  
 187 R: Which you can take books in English and but to me the place was Internet.  
 188 M: Internet.  
 189 R: I got Internet at home in 2000 or 1999 and so this was the break through.  
 190 M: Okay.  
 191 R: It was like I can have English now.  
 192 M: (hh).  
 193 R: Until then it was it was hard.  
 [MRO2INT2810]

Thus, as Marcos states in Excerpt 5.19, the Internet became a source of English for him. The Internet provided a kind of uncontrolled access to English that was not available to him in the classroom or in the “little library” (line 185), allowing him the opportunity to significantly increase the time he could interact with English while at home. After he turned 16 and was able to go out at night, he positioned himself in such a way that gave him contact with uncontrolled access to English in the form of conversations with tourists. One of Marcos’ friends was a Spanish instructor, who would invite Marcos to social gatherings, such as dinner, so the Spanish language students could practice their Spanish skills with a native speaker of Spanish. Though the intent was for the students to have opportunities to practice

their Spanish, many of them were such beginners that conversing in Spanish was strained; thus, they would turn to the common language between them – English (Excerpt 5.20, lines 211-212). In this way, Marcos was able to fulfill his dreams of meeting people from around the world, as well as practicing English.

*Excerpt 5.20 (February 8, 2010)*

209 R: So I used I I dreamed always that I could to talk with people from other countries  
 210 so I used to to go with dinners with them and and talk to them and you usually  
 211 talk talk in English because they they were here learning Spanish but they were  
 212 not quite there yet so. [MRO2INT2810]

Marcos admitted that English was without question the most difficult subject he has ever studied. Even so, he was also intrigued with the new language from the very beginning. As an adolescent, Marcos loved the music coming out of the United States and England. This served as a motivator for him. He recalled buying cassettes and CD's in hopes of getting the written lyrics so he could study English while listening to the music (Excerpt 5.21). However, he also remembers his frustrations with this practice.

*Excerpt 5.21 (February 8, 2010)*

375 R: I remember song and I bought the the the album.  
 376 M: Umh.  
 377 R: And sometimes in my albums I have some albums that before that that they have  
 378 the lyrics.  
 379 M: Umh.  
 380 R: So then I get to the dictionary and try translate them but this was disappointed  
 381 because it didn't have it.  
 382 M: Ah.  
 383 R: In fact I look at it I used to buy eh cassette tapes because I didn't have CD back  
 384 then I bought a CD 2 or 3 years later and and you can if you look at the at the box  
 385 you can see how thick it was the the length of notes.  
 386 M: [(hh):.....]=  
 387 R: [And say though this] this one  
 388 always thick it has the lyrics for sure (hh) but then it you know it have a lot of a  
 389 lot of pictures from a guy (hh) and I don't care about without the shirt and  
 390 anything I don't care about].

- 391 M: =[:(hh:::)]=.  
 392 R: [I guess the fans will love it but I wanted the lyrics].  
 393 M: =[:(hh:::)].  
 394 R: And they weren't so so I just tried to put the ear an and see what what I can.  
 395 M: Okay.  
 396 R: And and the song I like it was, it was troublesome from the beginning because it  
 397 the song is called *You make me wanna* and *wanna* didn't appear I couldn't even  
 398 the translate (hh) the title so it was (hh) you know I am just a 9 year old I was an  
 399 innocent boy (hh) and I couldn't translate the title it was like (hh) it was hard it  
 400 [was a really hard time so].  
 401 M: [:(hh:::)]  
 402 R: So so I just have to my ear and then eh eh when when I could could get the lyrics.  
 403 M: Umh.  
 404 R: I I knew had 90% wrong [(hh)].  
 405 M: [(hh)].  
 406 R: I did have war with it. [MRO2INT2810]

As Marcos relates (lines 383-385), he would buy music packaged in thick containers hoping that the lyrics to the songs would be included. Sometimes the music did not contain the written lyrics (lines 388- 390), so Marcos would listen carefully to the songs, trying to understand the English by ear (line 394). Marcos' frustrations with trying to translate *wanna* exemplify the difficulties he experienced. More importantly, though, the Excerpt highlights his resolve to learn English. Marcos describes his interactions with the lyrics as a "war" with English, but it was a struggle that he embraced, recognizing that "English opens you the key to the world."

Through his English interactions with tourists, music, the Internet, and his communicative language learning experiences in school, Marcos came to understand that learning English entailed more than mastering grammatical structures. Unlike Dao-Ming, who takes pride of her domination over the TOEFL exam, Marcos prefers social interaction and using English for meaningful, communicative purposes. For Marcos, social interaction is the way to develop vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, and confidence (Excerpt 5.22, lines 250-

256; 272). In fact, he frequently referred to the study of grammar as the “ticky-tacky” stuff, acknowledging that knowing grammar is necessary, but that vocabulary is more basic to communicating meaning than “correct grammar” (lines 256-263).

*Excerpt 5.22 (March 3, 2010)*

- 249 M: What do you think is important in learning another language?  
 250 R: Well just to to get confident enough to use it.  
 251 M: To get con[fident enough]  
 252 R: [Yes to get to] a point that you feel confident enough to.  
 253 M: Okay.  
 254 R: To an to build up to build up vocabulary an.  
 255 M: Okay.  
 256 R: An an I think that that’s more important the to work in the vocabulary than the  
 257 grammar.  
 258 M: Okay.  
 259 R: Cause well the grammar you have to do it and an but /juw/ (you) can get your point  
 260 eh not being grammatically perfect.  
 261 M: Umh.  
 262 R: But /juw/ (you) can probably /juw/ (you) can’t probably do it if you don’t have the  
 263 vocabulary.  
 264 M: Okay so so without the vocabulary you might have the grammar but [with]out=  
 265 R: [Yes]  
 266 M: =The vocabulary.  
 267 R: You have the vocabulary perfect but you don’t know yes.  
 268 M: Okay you can’t say as much.  
 269 R: And you can allow yourself to /kɔnstru/ (construct) the phrases bad to put things  
 270 before and after they will understand you probably.  
 271 M: Uh going back to the confidence how do you how do you develop that confidence?  
 272 R: Jus- putting putting yourself in that that position to use it.  
 273 M: Okay.  
 274 R: To use it cook to use it to eat get /juw/ (you) interesting. [MRO4INT30310]

Thus, Belita’s, Marcos’, and Dao-Ming’s approaches to learning English contrast significantly. Dao-Ming prefers to silently listen, analyze, and compare her English to NESs, while Belita and Marcos prefer verbal interaction, being active participants in English conversations, and accepting the inevitability of mistakes in the learning process.

***Immigration.*** In contrast to Belita and Dao-Ming, who immigrated to the United States as a way of running away from unsatisfactory conditions in their home countries, Marcos came running to the United States. As opposed to risking his life savings as Belita did, Marcos came to the United States on an academic scholarship, and he came with the approval and emotional support of his family and friends. Marcos once said of his reason for wanting to come to the United States, “If you can make here, you can make it anywhere.” Thus, when Marcos received his doctoral fellowship in electrical engineering, he jumped at the chance to come to the United States in the spring of 2010. However, before securing his student visa, Marcos had to take an English L2 proficiency exam, since his fellowship would not cover the cost of English language classes in the United States. Marcos chose to take the IELTS exam, rather than the TOEFL. Marcos felt the IELTS, “fits [him] well,” since the exam focuses on an individual’s productive and receptive L2 skills (communicative skills), rather than analytical skills (grammatical knowledge). Marcos scored high enough on the IELTS for him to be fully admitted into the Ph.D. program in electrical engineering, bypassing the university IEP and controlled access to English in the United States.

***Personality.*** Marcos, like Belita, claims to be both introverted and extroverted, depending on the context. Unlike Belita, though, this dichotomy is not predicated on language, but on his level of familiarity. He describes himself as initially being introverted, but as the relationship develops and trust is established, he becomes more extroverted. He also believes himself to be a loyal friend, but if that loyalty is not reciprocated, he will walk away from the relationship.

It is unclear what Marcos wishes to do with his electrical engineering degree when he graduates. He may aspire to be a professor, own an engineering firm, or go off in a

completely different direction. What is clear is that Marcos does not feel constrained by his social or national identity.

*Excerpt 5.23 (March 3, 2010)*

- 360 M: Um are you do you feel like you're (.04) you know a Spaniard who i::s  
 361 R: XXX  
 362 M: You know experiencing the world or are you.  
 363 R: I:: I don't get the feeling that yeah uh no I feel like we are not we are Spaniards but  
 364 we are not li:::mited to where we born where we were /reyzɪd/ (raised).  
 365 M: Okay.  
 366 R: ((*tape malfunction*)) XX I feel like we are children of the world [(hh) or something].  
 367 M: [Children of the  
 368 world] okay.  
 369 R: That corny (hh).  
 370 M: Okay.  
 371 R: Or something I think that that we are human beings we are all from (hh) we are all  
 372 the same an.  
 373 M: Umh.  
 374 R: Where you born and when you are /reyzɪd/ (raised) is just /sɪrkəlstæŋçəl/  
 375 (circumstantial).  
 376 M: Right okay.  
 377 R: Can you move there and an I would like to move there from all over the world to  
 378 visit a lot of places and.  
 379 M: Umh.  
 380 R: And to share of things to share the culture around an what it's part of your identity  
 381 there's no doubt about it.  
 382 M: Umh.  
 383 R: Culturally and a lot of things that's part of your identity but yeah I think /juw/  
 384 (you) can mess mesh up with I a lot of different identities from over the world  
 385 learn from them. [MRO4INT30310]

As illustrated above, Marcos does not feel constrained by the borders of Spain (line 363).

Furthermore, he believes people ultimately are people (line 371). Thus, Marcos' identity is not constructed so much through the lens of a Spaniard as it is by being a human who is curious about other people and the world. In this sense, English affords him the opportunity to explore his world beyond the borders of Spain.



Marcos specifically refers to his multiple identities several times in Excerpt 5.23 (lines 363, 366, 371, 380, and 384). He recognizes a “fixed self” (Gee, 1999) in that he is a Spaniard (line 363), yet he perceives this identity as something that is circumstantial, beyond his control (line 374). At the same, though, Marcos believes he is not restricted by his Spanish heritage and that he is able to control where he goes, who he meets, and how he chooses to interact with people and the world (lines 377-385), expressing a situated identity (Gee, 1999). When asked if he believes learning English has contributed to his worldview, hence his multiple identities, Marcos replied with the following:

*Excerpt 5.24 (March 31, 2010)*

Yes yo-sa- I think it's been very important. Because that's what makes you think well eh yeah it's I can go there an mesh with them an and learn a lot of things an and gives you a confidence that maybe you can do it another place. An English is a is an universal way to it. [MRO4INT30310]

In characterizing Marcos' relationship with English, I have described it as opportunity. Marcos began his English language journey in the third grade in Spain. Though at the age of 8 he may not have been conscious of the opportunities that would become open to him through learning English, he was aware that learning English would permit him the opportunity to learn more about American and British music and American sports, particularly football and basketball. Yet, by battling with English at an early age and seeking opportunities to interact with tourists in English, the field of engineering became an option for him upon entering college, for as he stated English is the language of Engineering. Throughout his college career, many of his engineering classes were taught in English. Additionally, the engineering books and journal articles he read were also in English. Furthermore, through his developing expertise in engineering, he was presented with the

opportunity to attend a U.S. university on a fellowship for the purpose of earning a Ph.D. in electrical engineering. Finally, Marcos believes that the world is open for him to explore and that he can mesh with different cultures because he has the English skills that allow him the opportunity to engage in conversation and cultural activities with anyone, anywhere.

### **Melosia**

Melosia is from a medium sized industrial community in northern Mexico, about 3 hours south of the U.S. border. Growing up near the U.S.-Mexico border, Melosia has felt the economic, political, and educational influence of the United States for most of her life. Melosia, 23 years old, is the oldest of three children and is the only one currently living outside of Mexico. Her father has two jobs. He holds an upper management position at a factory and also teaches accounting at a university in her hometown. Her mother was an administrative assistant before marrying Melosia's father but has been a homemaker ever since. When I first met Melosia in December 2009, she was not involved in a long-term relationship, a point of frustration for her. She is now married to a NES American.

***Education.*** Melosia's primary and secondary education was a mix of private and public school experiences. She began her educational career in a private Montessori elementary school. Her father, who was disappointed in Melosia's elementary school performance, put her in a public middle school, which she described as "hell." She attended the public high school, though, stating that it was better than the private Catholic high school in her hometown. After graduation, she wanted to attend a university in Monterrey, Mexico, but her father insisted that she go to the university in her hometown. Though unhappy about the university she was attending, Melosia studied hard and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in computer science. Upon graduation, she gained employment as a data entry

technician in a local manufacturing company in Mexico. Unsatisfied with her job as a data entry technician, Melosia began attending a private school on the weekends, where she could earn a license to teach English. Two years later, after completing the licensure program, she was hired as an English teacher for a private Catholic school in Mexico.

Melosia was first introduced to controlled English instruction in a Montessori elementary school in the first grade in Mexico. She had English classes every year after that until high school, where she was required to take two years of English. In college, she also had two years of English. Thus, at the time of this study, Melosia had been in consistent contact with controlled English for over 15 years. She describes her controlled English learning experiences as sort of a love-hate relationship, in which she liked English in the Montessori system (Excerpt 5.25, line 414), but found it repetitive, boring, and tedious in middle and high school, where many of the lessons, based on Melosia's descriptions, were grounded in grammar translation methodology (Excerpt 4.26 lines 518-524).

*Excerpt 5.25 (February 11, 2011)*

*(L= Melosia; M=Michael, interviewer)*

- 393 L: XXXXXX even we practice with a clock.  
 394 M: Okay with a clock.  
 395 L: Yep and show me the hour you know "Oh it's 1:00 2:00 uh you know 30 in the  
 396 morning or something.  
 397 M: Umh.  
 398 L: You know the things that you need to learn the how to say the hour.  
 399 M: Okay.  
 400 L: They try to make it /numæik/ (mnemonic).  
 401 M: Okay.  
 402 L: Uh for example they have a bunch of uh dish cup fork and they say "What was  
 403 this?" like try to regalia.  
 404 M: [Right right right].  
 405 L: [Like with the regalia] I remember that and regalia and they try to learn teach you  
 406 how to say the word uh the vocabulary I remember even exercise that they teach  
 407 the way that a sentence is and you need to eh fix fix it.  
 408 M: Okay [okay].

- 409 L: [Trying] to do eh write it correctly and a lot of exercises even songs I  
 410 remember were the most important because it makes you practice the speech and  
 411 the pronunciation eh even if I didn't know what what I was going what I am  
 412 saying,  
 413 M: Umh.  
 414 L: An I was thinking and I remember that I like.  
 415 M: Okay.  
 416 L: An games big numbers um um what else we have time even there's there's at the  
 417 end or in the middle of the year there is a English festival= [MNC2INT21110]

*Excerpt 5.26 (February 11, 2011)*

- 504 M: Alright so most that study is reading and grammar?  
 505 L: Most of them grammar exercises well in middle school it was more like grammar  
 506 exercise and do you what want if you finish okay do wha- do what you want to do  
 507 if you wanna play play in the classroom they they they wasn't I mean I couldn't  
 508 see discipline I couldn't.  
 509 M: Okay.  
 510 L: Um just=  
 511 M: Umh umh.  
 512 L: =Just work and that's it not not no no songs no dynamics no nothing.  
 513 M: Umh.  
 514 L: Just grammar exercise and that's when I become like I hate English.  
 515 M: Okay.  
 516 L: In middle in high school in the public [(hh)].  
 517 M: [Umh, umh].  
 518 L: In the public high school I remember that I I understand what my teacher was was  
 519 saying uh cause even he made a strange exercise.  
 520 M: Okay.  
 521 L: He has he had the story he is okay "Translate me this /estori/ (story) in Spanish."  
 522 M: Umh.  
 523 L: I mean read this story in front of the class and try to tell me eh the sentence in  
 524 Spanish and I remember I wasn't great. [MNC2INT21110]

Melisia's reflections on her English language instruction in Mexico suggest that she was first exposed to an English instructional environment consisting of near total immersion. Her Montessori elementary school teacher engaged students through song (line 409), Total Physical Response (lines 395-403), and Audiolingual drills (lines 406-407) in the Montessori school (Excerpt 5.25). In middle school and high school, the English pedagogy shifted

toward grammar translation, essentially stifling any interest she may have developed for English as a child (Excerpt 5.26, line 514).

In college, her degree program required that graduates pass an oral English exam. Each student was required to give a presentation in front of a committee of three faculty members on a topic related to computer science. Students had the choice of presenting alone or in groups of up to three members. Melosia, not wanting to depend on others, chose to speak about software piracy for 10 minutes. She recalls being amazed that many of her classmates had memorized their entire speeches (Excerpt 5.27, lines 789-790). Melosia, conversely, concentrated on learning the issues of software piracy, knowing that if she knew her topic well, then the English presentation would not be that difficult (Excerpt 5.27, lines 803-806).

*Excerpt 5.27 (February 11, 2010)*

- 784 L: So I choose to do it by myself I felt confident about my own uh knowledge.  
 785 M: Umh.  
 786 L: And I remember that everyone everyone was so nervous so freaked out like ev-  
 787 there were some people who memorized=  
 788 M: Ah[h that would be me] [(hh)].  
 789 L: =[Their::: speech] [Like] you wh,wh,wh and they they didn't know what  
 790 that they were doing but they memorized everything a huge /εspiç/ (speech).  
 791 M: Okay.  
 792 L: Cause it's like uh 10 minutes.  
 793 M: Oh my.  
 794 L: 10 minutes talking in front of the audience without stopping.  
 795 M: Wow okay.  
 796 L: 10 minutes.  
 797 M: Wow.  
 798 L: From memorize k- okay if you are on team you only talk like 5 minutes.  
 799 M: Okay.  
 800 L: And the other ones talk a 5 5 5 but I was the only one so I talked like 10 15  
 801 minutes.  
 802 M: Umh.  
 803 L: And I think that's more and then at the end they ask you questions.  
 804 M: Umh.

805 L: Ask you questions about “Oh I don’t understand this sign could you explain again”  
 806 And I was like sure why not and and I pass it (hh). [MNC2INT21110]

Excerpt 5.27 exemplifies Melosia’s attitude not only about learning English, but about learning in general. She does not want to study something just to pass an exam, but she wants to understand, use, and talk intelligently about whatever she has studied. She recognizes exams serve to satisfy bureaucratic and institutional requirements but that the ultimate test of knowledge is being able to apply what has been learned in real life situations.

As mentioned earlier, Melosia taught English at a private Catholic elementary school in Mexico for a year and this experience, maybe more than any other, is what encouraged her to come to the United States. Growing up and while in college, she remembers wondering why some people in Mexico were so fascinated with the United States (lines 88-89).

*Excerpt 5.28 (March 4, 2010)*

88 L: But um in the United States I always felt that why people come here you know  
 89 why people love uh United States they have so many problems with um um I don’t  
 90 know um::: police officers you know. [MNC3INT30410]

In the summer of 2008, she was given the opportunity to participate in a Latin American Outreach program in which she and 14 other students came to the United States to study English at a university in the Southwest. This would be the first time for Melosia to use her English with native speakers of English in an uncontrolled context.

*Excerpt 5.29 (January 28, 2010)*

970 L: And in the cafeteria=  
 971 M: Uhn uhn.  
 972 L: =There was like a handsome boy.  
 973 M: Eh::::: oh!  
 974 L: Who ask [me in Eng]lish politely “may I sit down here?”  
 975 M: [hh].  
 976 L: And I just look at him and say “yeah of course” and suddenly I was speaking  
 977 fluently.

- 978 M: [(hh)].  
 979 L: [I m]ean it was uh like a “oh my God” um I didn’t know that I could speak  
 980 with fluency=  
 981 M: Umh umh.  
 982 L: =In English.  
 983 M: In English until you met this man.  
 984 L: Yeah (hh).  
 985 M: This handsome guy.  
 986 L: Handsome guy.  
 987 M: [(hh)].  
 988 L: [(hh)] it was a real problem and I was like surprised because I didn’t like English  
 989 all my life they tried to motivate me “you should learn English, you should you  
 990 need to have this uh learn this English” [Unnh] (shaking head). [MNC1INT12810]

That Melosia was at once conversing with a NES in the United States (Excerpt 5.29, line 979) was a watershed moment. After her experience in the student cafeteria, her motivation to learn English became stronger (Excerpt 5.30, lines 988-990). Possibly more significant, however, is that she began developing a sense of investment. She recognized that English and the United States could offer her a more exciting future than Mexico. Thus, Melosia spent the rest of 2008 and part of 2009 saving her money and convincing her parents that studying in the United States would be good for her future. One year later, in the Fall of 2009, with tepid support from her father, she returned to the United States with an F-1 student visa and began taking English classes in the university’s IEP, hoping to eventually be admitted into a graduate program in the College of Education.

### ***Immigration***

*Excerpt 5.30 (March 4, 2010)*

- 94 L: Um:: people there I thought that there were cold.  
 95 M: Okay.  
 96 L: An-  
 97 M: In the United States.  
 98 L: /yεf/ (yes) yeah in the United States so then I came here and I get in love of people.  
 99 M: Umh.  
 100 L: Uh the first week I have friend.

- 101 M: Okay okay.  
 102 L: Yeah but maybe because of my personality.  
 103 M: Umh.  
 104 L: Extroverted.  
 105 M: (hh).  
 106 L: An I always /ɛspok/ (spoke) with everybody and I think that they can see me an  
 107 they see they say like you don't have a double face. [MNC3INT30410]

In Excerpt 5.30, Melosia describes how coming to the United States in the summer of 2008 removed many of the stereotypes that she had formulated about the United States (line 94) and discovered that she could not only communicate in English, but that people appreciated her for who she was (line 106).

Furthermore, Melosia also felt that in Mexico she was under a great deal of pressure to get married because she was nearing the age of 25, and she was not ready for that. She says she wanted more and did not want to become like many of her friends who had married directly out of high school (Excerpt 5.31, lines 1176-1177). Thus, coming to the United States allowed her to escape these sociocultural expectations.

*Excerpt 5.31 (February 11, 2010)*

- 1175 That's why um I think that I love here I love to be here because I'm 23 and I feel  
 1176 that I am living stuffs that my other classmates who are pregnant or who are  
 1177 married they are not going to live with that and I feel kind of great. [MNC2INT21110]

Melosia knew that she would take intensive English classes when she returned to the United States, but she did not expect to test into the highest L2 proficiency level the university IEP offers, the Academic Bridge class. Even so, her TOEFL-pbt score was only 500, high enough for her to take some university courses, but not high enough to be admitted into graduate school. Therefore, Melosia only took intensive English classes during Summer and Fall 2009. In Spring 2010, she enrolled in two academic classes plus two IEP classes. Her two academic classes were Linguistics 101 and a senior level undergraduate section of a



first and second language acquisition class in the College of Education, a course that I happened to be teaching that same semester. Melosia claims she did not know I was the instructor at the time she enrolled in the class. She said that she found the title interesting and thought she could do well in the class because first and second language acquisition are subjects with which she is familiar both as a learner and as a teacher.

***Personality.*** When Melosia greets someone that she knows, she does not merely extend a peck on the cheek, customary in Mexican culture. She gives bear hugs. Melosia is comfortable with being an extrovert. In addition to her gregarious, socialite personality, Melosia is also a confident and reflective person who does not make decisions without a great deal of contemplation. Yet, once she makes a decision, she remains focused to the end. Furthermore, she is resourceful, not accepting “no” or “I can’t” as an excuse for not succeeding. During the Spring 2010 semester, Melosia, who was under increasing pressure from her parents to return at the end of the semester and to complete her graduate studies in Mexico, held down two and sometimes three jobs to earn enough money to support herself. Additionally, she applied for nearly every scholarship, assistantship, and campus job that she could. In short, she is driven.

When I first met Melosia, she was more interested in beginning a Master’s degree program than marriage. At the time, she was undecided, vacillating between bilingual education or math education. She was always hopeful of meeting a nice man, but she was more intent on studying and finding a way, financially, to stay in the country. She had dated several men over the past 6 months, but had determined that American men were not for her because they lacked the sensuousness of Mexican men. This changed, though, in the summer of 2010 when she moved from her apartment to a house. The owner and primary resident of

the house, Alan, was looking for roommates to help offset his expenses. Alan and Melosia began dating about 2 months after she moved in. They fell in love and married in the summer of 2011. Thus, Melosia's dreams for the future appear to be on a steady course: taking courses toward a Master's degree in bilingual education, marrying an American man, and settling down.

In summary, Melosia was introduced to English in elementary school. Initially, she flirted with English, showing interest when instruction was exciting and active, but when instruction shifted to a more traditional grammar translation pedagogy and less entertaining, she lost interest. After college, recognizing that computer science did not offer her the adventure in life she desired, she revisited English and worked her way into a brief career as an English teacher in Mexico. The most significant turning point for Melosia, in terms of her relationship with English, was her Latin American Outreach Program adventure to the United States. After successfully communicating with an American man in the university cafeteria and after learning that the United States had a lot to offer her emotionally, physically, and intellectually, she committed herself to learning English and to returning to the United States to continue her adventure. Thus, Melosia's relationship with English might best be characterized as one of adventure, where not knowing what's around the next corner is exhilarating, yet preparing for the mystery is essential to success. She is a reflective person, helping her prepare for the unknown adventure that lies ahead.

### **Education Compared**

Before concluding the participant chapter, it will be helpful to directly compare the English education instructional approaches (controlled access) that the case study participants experienced (Table 5.5), and the sources of uncontrolled access they reported having had

contact with in their countries (Table 5.6). Since I was not able to directly observe the case study participants in their countries of origin, nor was I able to observe them during their early schooling, the tables, comparisons, and descriptions of these controlled and uncontrolled contexts are based solely on the comments the case study participants made during the face-to-face and focus group interviews.

**Table 5.5: English Learning in Home Countries: Controlled Access**

	School Type	Begin English study in school	# of years of English in school	Instructional Approaches*
Belita	Private	Middle	4	DM, GT, AL
Dao-Ming	Public	Middle	10	GT
Marcos	Public	Elementary	14	DM, AL, CLT, CTB
Melosia	Private/Public	Elementary	17	DM, AL, GT, CLT, CTB

\*Key: Direct Method=DM; GT=Grammar Translation; AL=Audiolingual; Communicative Language Teaching=CLT; Content Based-CTB

The types of controlled English teaching approaches to which the case study participants were exposed run the gamut of language teaching practices and epistemologies. Table 5.5 shows that Dao-Ming's English language instruction was the most limited pedagogically while Marcos' and Melosia's were the most robust. Belita's exposure to controlled English language learning is the most sparse in terms of years of exposure, but there is evidence that there was some variety in the instructional delivery of English.

Marcos and Melosia were also required to apply their English skills to content-specific areas, engineering for Marcos and computer science for Melosia; thus, they had some uncontrolled contact with English in their respective disciplines in college while in their home countries. I have labeled these experiences as content-based, though it is probably the case that the classes focused on course content, not English language.

Regardless of the English language instruction the case study participants experienced in school, each has successfully met the U.S. university's English L2 proficiency

requirements. During the course of this study, they were taking regular content-based university classes and passing them. Furthermore, they are linguistically capable of participating in various social situations with NESs through the medium of English. The fact that these latter observations are true leaves open the question of the role that their home country English language instruction played in the case study participants' acquisition of English.

Table 5.6 represents the types of uncontrolled access to English that the case study participants claim they could have had contact with in their countries of origin during their childhood and early adult years. Whether they took advantage of these sources of uncontrolled access to English or not is another matter. Dao-Ming and Marcos actively sought out sources of uncontrolled English, whereas Belita and Melosia describe themselves as much less proactive.

Table 5.6 illustrates not only the sources of uncontrolled access available to the case study participants in their home countries, or the lack thereof, but also the early investment in learning English that some of the case study participants displayed. Thus, Marcos had ample opportunities and a variety of sources to access uncontrolled English, whereas Dao-Ming had none until entering college. Belita had American songs and movies, but these were mediated by Spanish disk jockeys and/or subtitles. Melosia had TV such as the Cartoon Network and music. Melosia also took the extra step of attending a school where she could earn her English language teaching license, demonstrating an investment in herself as a professional.

**Table 5.6: *English Learning in Home Countries: Uncontrolled Access***

	<b>Uncontrolled Access</b>	<b>Descriptions/Qualifications</b>
Belita	Radio, movies, internet	Radio stations played English language songs, but disc jockeys spoke Spanish. English language movies were available but contained Spanish subtitles or were dubbed in Spanish. Internet

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		access is expensive, making it prohibitive to access for the masses.
Dao-Ming	Internet, movies	Dao-Ming claims she did not have access to the internet or American movies until she went to college. Even then she had to use Internet “proxies” to circumvent Chinese firewalls designed to filter content coming in from the West.
Marcos	Radio, TV, movies, print, tourists, internet, content-based university classes	Marcos had a plethora of uncontrolled English sources in Spain. Specifically, he took advantage of English language music, TV and print news about American sports, the internet, and the constant flow of English speaking tourists visiting his hometown.
Melosia	Radio, TV, content-based university classes	Like Belita, the radio played English language songs, but the disc jockeys spoke Spanish. Melosia also recalled watching the Cartoon Network during her youth and that her sister would often translate into Spanish for Melosia. Melosia also attended an English language teaching licensing school while she was working as a data entry technician.

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When I asked the case study participants if any of them had participated in any sort of “English clubs” outside of school where they could practice their English free from a school teacher’s oversight, they all replied that they were unaware of any such opportunities. Thus, the concept of safe house as described by both Canagarajah (2006), and Clemente and Higgins (2008), according to the case study participants’ knowledge, did not exist in their respective countries. If safe houses did exist, then the case study participants did not make use of them.

### **Conclusion**

Each of the four participants came to know English in very different ways in their countries of origin, with different attitudes and beliefs. Some had communicative learning experiences, others grammar translation, while others were exposed to a cornucopia of pedagogical practices. Some came to the United States with an L2 proficiency level that, according to the university’s admissions office, allowed them immediate entry into university classes, while others required additional English language training after arriving in the

United States before being admitted as full-time, regular university students. Additionally, the participants came to the United States for different reasons. Some came to escape oppressive conditions: political, educational, social, and/or economic; others came initially for the purpose of improving their English skills, while others came to earn an academic degree in the United States. Some approached learning English with almost reckless abandon, whereas others proceeded with cautious, calculated steps designed to minimize embarrassment and unwanted attention. The point is, even though their motivations for coming to the United States, their attitudes about English, and their EFL learning experiences differ, they all share the challenges of adapting to life in the United States, of establishing themselves as legitimate members of their academic and social communities, and of gaining access to opportunities that will help them develop their L2 English skills and succeed academically. The following themes and/or questions remain unexplored.

- How does their L2 proficiency upon arrival in the United States intersect with the case study participants' abilities to access English in the United States?
- What kinds of English do the participants have access to (controlled/uncontrolled, academic/social, formal/informal) in the United States?
- How is L2 proficiency defined and perceived by the U.S. academic community?
- How do the case study participants' identities and investment contribute or hinder their opportunities for gaining access to English?
- What role does the U.S. academic community play in facilitating or discouraging access and investment?

The following chapters will address these questions. Definitive answers are unlikely, yet perhaps greater insight into this transitional period of leaving an EFL context and

entering an academic ESL context will reveal strategies from which international L2 students, as well as the U.S. academic community, can benefit, helping to make this transition smoother and less alienating.

## Chapter 6

### Second Language Proficiency

#### Introduction

If you understand the language responsively and are able to manipulate it, you pass; if you have access to the more highly valued form of that language, you gain a more prestigious identity. In other words, to construct an identity that allows access, you need to master the language first (Li, 2007, pp. 261-262).

Li's statement summarizes the bootstrapping effect of L2 proficiency. Theoretically, with increased L2 proficiency, learners have more access to the L2. Likewise, with increased access, learners have more opportunities to develop their L2 proficiency. Theoretically, learners who immigrate (permanently or for a short period of time) to a country where the L2 is the dominant language have ample access to the L2. Therefore, L2 learners have abundant opportunities to engage with native speakers through written and oral practices. Furthermore, Li's statement claims that one's L2 identity, as constructed by the host community, is contingent upon increased L2 proficiency.

This chapter intends to dissect and complexify the issues that underlie L2 proficiency. First, incorporating an etic stance, I situate each of the four participants within an L2 proficiency framework that includes their TOEFL-pbt or IELTS English L2 proficiency scores, the morpheme acquisition model, and several structure acquisition measurements. I then compare these quantitative descriptions with native speaker impressions of the participants' English L2 proficiency. Next, I invoke an emic perspective. I present four criteria of L2 proficiency that emerged from the emic perspectives of the case study participants. I call these "naturally occurring" measurements because they emerged as common themes across all four case study participants' descriptions of L2 proficiency.



Finally, I discuss the English L2 proficiency of each participant from my perspective as an interactional participant in the interviews, and researcher, and therefore call this view the researcher perspective. The NES, the case study participant, and the research perspectives provide qualitative perspectives that demonstrate the complexity of assessing L2 proficiency. Furthermore, the qualitative lenses expose some of the gaps of measuring L2 proficiency quantitatively. Yet, as problematic as the quantitative assessments are, using holistic qualitatively informed frameworks to measure L2 proficiency assessment are also problematic (Chalhoub-Deville & Deville, 2005; Young, 2011). The chapter will end with a discussion of the convergence of these various perspectives – quantitative assessments, NES observations, participant emic perceptions, and the researcher’s emic perspective – on L2 learners’ investment and social identity. Thus, the chapter demonstrates that assessing L2 development and L2 proficiency accurately and efficiently is dependent on myriad cognitive and affective variables.

The ultimate goal in determining L2 proficiency essentially addresses the question: What does it mean to “know” a language? For SLA research agendas steeped in cognitive explanations, the answers are found in measurements of grammaticality, such as in morphosyntactic development, reaction time, and/or lexical development (Atkinson, 2011a). The tools developed to test learners’ L2 proficiency rest on the premise that language learning is a purely individual cognitive process. Surface level iterations (spoken or written) are evidence of internal psycholinguistic processes at work. Furthermore, deviations from a “standard” form of the L2 suggest possible interference from L1 structures and/or overgeneralizations about the structure of L2. Thus, assessment tools that measure the ability to make judgments of grammaticality or that measure the grammaticality of L2 learners’

production are thought to be accurate measures of L2 learners' L2 proficiency (Atkinson, 2011a).

Sociocultural influences are acknowledged as providing contexts in which language functions, but have only tangentially been considered relevant for assessing L2 proficiency, since L2 development is seen as patterned and regular (a similar claim is made for L1 child language acquisition). Thus, an individual who demonstrates L2 proficiency in context A will also be proficient in the contexts of B, C, D, etc.

Social interactionists also acknowledge the cognitive nature of L2 learning, but believe the L2 learning process includes output as well as input (Swain, 2005). Through the processes of receiving (input) and producing (output), the learning "cycle" is complete, resulting in internalization. With the internalization of the linguistic features of the L2, such as syntax and vocabulary, L2 proficiency increases. Though social interactionist accounts of L2 development acknowledge the learning power of articulation, L2 development is still viewed as a primarily individual cognitive process that is patterned and unaffected by diverse sociocultural contexts (Mitchell, R. & Myles, F., 2004). For a social interactionist, therefore, to know a language is to be able to successfully comprehend and respond to a text (oral or written) with increasing morphosyntactic and lexical accuracy and complexity.

The quantitative assessments discussed in detail later, which explicate the case study participants' L2 proficiency levels, are focused on form-function development and base their claims of L2 proficiency entirely on the L2 learners' receptive and analytical skills. These assessments effectively ignore the co-operative nature of language in use and the social, historical, and political indexing embedded in each linguistic exchange. Even so, some of these L2 proficiency exams, specifically TOEFL and IELTS, continue to be the standard by

which university international admissions offices base their decisions regarding English L2 proficiency and whether to accept or deny the applications of international English L2 students. As will become apparent, for logistical reasons the quantitative assessment tools, even with all of their shortcomings, are valued because it is believed that they provide an efficient and economical means for determining L2 proficiency on a large scale.

Sociocultural Theory (SCT) also readily acknowledges that learning is a cognitive endeavor; the genesis of the process is dependent on both external and internal influences. That is, internalization can be contingent on both the self and the social, but eventually the true measurement of L2 proficiency is the individual, independent, automated, non-supported production of the L2 (Lantolf, 2011). Therefore, the social context and the people present in that context work collaboratively to co-construct meaning. Within this framework, then, the accurate and consistent production of bound morphemes, for example, only partially contributes to meaning making. Determinations of L2 proficiency, therefore, are contingent on the transformation of existing shared knowledge into new knowledge. Shared knowledge, from a sociocultural framework, consists not only of the linguistic sign, but also pragmatics, gesture, and content, all of which are thought to be situational, local, yet historical, current and predictive of future events. Thus, in answering the question, “What does it mean to know a language?,” sociocultural theorists look for evidence of automation across time, as well as the ability of the interlocutors to successfully co-construct meaning from novel utterances (Lantolf, 2011). To my knowledge, quantitative instruments, those presented below as well as others, have yet to be developed that measure L2 proficiency within an SCT framework (Chalhoub-Deville & Deville, 2005).

Closely aligned with SCT is research on the co-construction of identity and L2 learning. The SLA-Identity (SLA-ID) perspective aligns itself with SCT in that SLA-ID accepts unconditionally that L2 acquisition occurs through engaging in opportunities to interact with sympathetic native speakers of the language. Furthermore, SLA-ID recognizes that the acquisition process is both local (context driven) and interpersonal (cognitive) (Norton & McKinney, 2011). SLA-ID departs from SCT in that SLA-ID emphasizes the central role that identity plays in the acquisition process. SLA-ID considers identity to be central to the L2 acquisition process as it recognizes that language-in-use is never neutral, that a power differential between interlocutors is always present, and that the dominate-subordinate relationship is constantly being negotiated and re-negotiated.

Thus, SLA-ID maintains that L2 learners, in addition to having to learn the linguistic features of the L2, must also struggle to gain the respect of native speakers so that the L2 learners can create a space with the native speaker community where they can be listened to and believed. In order to do this, SLA-ID contends that L2 learners must constantly negotiate and renegotiate their identities as L2 speakers with native speakers (Norton & McKinney, 2011). Without these opportunities, SLA-ID asserts that L2 proficiency resembling that of the “idealized speaker” may never be attained, as Li suggests in the quote at the beginning of this chapter.

At the same time, though, SLA-ID accepts that L2 learners have different motivations and purposes for learning the L2, thus, an adequate L2 proficiency level for one learner may or may not be adequate for another L2 learner. For example, an immigrant who wishes to earn a Master’s or Ph.D. degree and enter a professional career in the United States, especially in social rather than technological fields, may need to achieve a “near-native” level

of L2 proficiency. Another immigrant, however, who wishes to work as a laborer or own a business that primarily serves a local, immigrant community, and who shares the same L1 as the local immigrant community, may not require or even desire to achieve a “native-like” proficiency level in the L2. The decisions and desires of L2 learners, therefore, are contingent on the learners’ image of themselves, the community’s image of the L2 learner, as well as the L2 learners’ desires for the future, and the community’s desires for the L2 learners’ future: all features contributing to the construction of identity.

The discussion thus far illustrates the complexity in which defining and determining L2 proficiency is mired. The cognitive framework is primarily interested in how L2 input interacts with the L1 and the resulting L2 output. The social interaction framework, which is also interested in describing a cognitive model of L2 processing, considers the Input/Output cycle as integrated and inseparable, but not the larger sociocultural context. The sociocultural perspective, which strives for a more holistic description, fails from methodological and practical perspectives since developing such an assessment instrument seems unwieldy and even incapable of generalizing L2 proficiency across contexts. SLA-ID further complicates the question of L2 proficiency due to its focus on highly intimate, personal desires, and the power relations inherent in acts of communication. Thus, the answer to the question, “What does it mean to know a language,” for SLA-ID theorists, can only be answered on an individual, case-by-case basis. Like SCT, the logistics for employing such an assessment on a global scale are untenable, if not counter intuitive.

The L2 proficiency quagmire faced by university international admissions offices, classroom faculty, native speaker classmates, and international English L2 students raises questions of how to determine accurately, efficiently, and equitably L2 proficiency for the

purposes of academia. Should L2 proficiency be assessed and determined by department? Should discipline specific TOEFL and IELTS exams be created, i.e. TOEFL-mathematics, TOEFL-psychology, and TOEFL-engineering? Should L2 proficiency be assessed in international L2 students' home countries, or should the assessment only take place after arriving in the United States? Should the issues of context and power that SCT and SLA-ID raise be incorporated into standardized L2 proficiency assessments? If so, how can this be done? Ultimately, each of the communities mentioned above (university admissions, faculty, native speaker classmates, and international English L2 students) desires and deserves an answer to the question, "What does it mean to know a language?"

### **Quantitative L2 Proficiency Assessment: Standardized L2 Proficiency Exams**

Table 6.1 shows the English L2 proficiency scores for each participant in this case study. The L2 proficiency scores are based on the TOEFL-pbt, which is administered by the university's IEP and is accepted for admission into the university by the international admissions office.<sup>18</sup> Marcos is the only participant to take the IELTS exam. The TOEFL-pbt score provided for Marcos is the TOEFL-pbt equivalent.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 6.1: L2 Proficiency Exams**<sup>\*</sup>

Name	TOEFL/IELTS <sup>**</sup>	Minimum requirement <sup>20</sup>	Difference	Major	Status
Belita	590 (T)	550	+70	Undecided	PB <sup>***</sup>
Dao-Ming	677 (T)	550	+157	Medical school	PB
Marcos	7.5 (I) ~ 625 (T)	7.0 (I) ~ 550 (T)	+0.5 (I) ~ +75 (T)	Electrical Engineering	G
Melosia	550 (T)	550	--	Education	G

<sup>\*</sup>Based on the most current scores for each participant; <sup>\*\*</sup>T = TOEFL, I = IELTS; <sup>\*\*\*</sup> Post-baccalaureate

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the various TOEFL formats and the university's English L2 proficiency requirements see Chapter 2.

<sup>19</sup> This comparison is made by the ELT Centre at the University of Sheffield and does not imply recognition by IELTS or ETS Ltd. Source: <http://study-in-ohio.nuvvo.com/lesson/11273-toefl-and-ielts-conversion-chart>

<sup>20</sup> English L2 proficiency minimum requirements for undergraduate and graduate students are set by the Office of International Admissions

With the exception of Melosia, all of the participants exceed the minimum English L2 proficiency requirements for their respective degree programs and student status. At the beginning of the case study, Melosia had not attained the required 550 on TOEFL-pbt to be admitted into a graduate program in the College of Education, but she did achieve the minimum score by the end of the spring semester. Thus, according to the standards set by the university, all of the participants had attained an L2 proficiency level in English that allowed them to be fully admitted into the university. The implication is that the students have demonstrated quantitatively that they have the English skills necessary to undertake the rigors of undergraduate or graduate academic work. In other words, lack of English L2 proficiency is not an excuse for being unable to perform academically in English. As evidenced in the participant excerpts in Chapter 5, however, one can readily see that all four case study participants are still developing their “standard academic” English language.

### **Quantitative L2 Proficiency Assessment: Morpheme Acquisition**

The following L2 proficiency assessment has been conducted according to the methodology set forth by Bailey, Madden, and Krashen (1974), in which they duplicated for adult second language learners the morpheme order acquisition studies of children learning their home language(s) conducted by Dulay and Burt (1974). Bailey, Madden, and Krashen’s methodology begins with identifying all of the grammatical morphemes, i.e. *-ing*, *-s*, *-ed*, in passages produced by second language learners. Next, they identified all of the contexts in which a grammatical morpheme is obligatory, i.e. in which a grammatical morpheme is necessary according to the prescriptive rules for standard American English (SAE). For example, in the utterance, *I talked to my daughter for 2 hours last night*, there are two grammatical morphemes: *-ed* and *-s*. The plural obligatory context is established by the

adjective 2, requiring the addition of *-s* to pluralize the noun *hour*. The adverbial phrase *last night* creates another obligatory context, dictating that the verb *talk* be conjugated with the regular past tense marker *-ed*. According to Bailey, Madden, and Krashen, the number of correctly used morphemes is divided by the number of obligatory contexts, determining the percentage of accuracy for each morpheme. Irregular forms such as irregular past tense (*eat-ate*) or irregular plurals (*child-children*) are not included in the morpheme acquisition studies.

To calculate the morpheme acquisition percentages for my case study participants, I used the conversation that ensued immediately following the questions: “Why did you choose this university and when did you come?”<sup>21</sup> I chose this point in the interviews for several reasons. 1) To establish a relatively similar linguistic context, 2) The two questions lend themselves to natural conversation shifts between the past and present tenses, 3) The past tense “axis” or frame is established in the questions, encouraging the use of the English past tense (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1983, p. 67), and 4) These particular questions came up in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> interview for each candidate, thus minimizing any anxiety that the participants may have been feeling with me or the interview process. Following my initial prompt, I took the following one hundred lines of conversation to conduct my analysis.

Table 6.2 presents the results of the morpheme analysis for each participant. The grammatical morpheme categories used are plural *-s*, 3<sup>rd</sup> personal singular *-s*, progressive and present participle *-ing*, past and past participle *-ed*, and contractions, such as *it’s*, *that’s*, and *there’s*. Contractions such as *don’t*, *aren’t*, and *I’m* are considered to be single units of meaning, and therefore, are not counted as having a bound grammatical morpheme.

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<sup>21</sup> See transcripts appended at the end of this chapter.



**Table 6.2: Morphemes versus Obligatory Contexts**

Name	Total Grammatical Morphemes	Total Obligatory Contexts	Overall Percent of Correct Usage
Belita	38	44	84%
Dao-Ming	39	40	98%
Marcos	45	46	98%
Melosia	17	23	74%

Table 6.2 shows the total number of grammatical morphemes each participant produced orally compared with the number of obligatory contexts. The last column on the right shows the overall percentage of morphemes produced correctly in the obligatory context. It is interesting to note that the percentages align relatively closely with the participants' TOEFL-pbt and/or IELTS test scores. In other words, if the participants were to be ranked from most proficient to least according to their TOEFL-pbt or IELTS scores and the morpheme counts, the order would be the same, with Dao-Ming and Marcos being listed at the top, followed by Belita and then Melosia. Tables 6.3 through 6.6 specify morpheme production versus obligatory context for each participant.

**Table 6.3: Belita**

Grammatical Morphemes, Obligatory Contexts, Percent Used Correctly									
<i>Plural-s</i>		<i>3<sup>rd</sup>Sg -s</i>		<i>-ing</i>		<i>-ed</i>		<i>contractions</i>	
M/OC*	%	M/OC	%	M/OC	%	M/OC	%	M/OC	%
13/14	93	1/1	100	14/13	93	1/8	13	8/8	100

\*M= Morpheme; OC= Obligatory Context; %= percent used correctly

Table 6.3 represents a break down of Belita's grammatical morpheme production. Of the total number of grammatical morphemes she used, regular past tense *-ed* appears to be the most problematic for her, as she only used the past tense marker correctly 13% of the time. The *-ing* morpheme is also continuing to develop but is more advanced with 93% correct usage. It should be noted here that Belita produces a present participle *-ing*

morpheme in a non-obligatory context: *when I came here for visiting my mom maybe 9 months after I* (line 774), explaining why there are 14 morphemes but only 13 obligatory contexts. In some respects, Belita is following an English grammatical rule that calls for a gerund after the preposition *for*. Thus, it could be that for Belita's utterance, the present participle *-ing* is appropriate. However, in this context, the utterance should be *came here to visit my mom* with *to* rather than *for* being the correct preposition. By choosing the preposition *for*, Belita sets up, incorrectly, an obligatory context for *-ing*. Belita's apparent acquisition of the morphemes *-ed* and *-ing* corroborate the findings of Bailey, Madden, and Krashen (1974) that *-ing* tends to be acquired before *-ed*. Thus, according to L2 proficiency assessments based on morpheme acquisition, the overall grammaticality of Belita's English (84%) indicates that she uses inflectional morphemes accurately three-quarters of the time.

**Table 6.4: Dao-Ming**

Grammatical Morphemes, Obligatory Contexts, Percent Used Correctly									
<i>Plural-s</i>		<i>3<sup>rd</sup>Sg -s</i>		<i>-ing</i>		<i>-ed</i>		<i>contractions</i>	
M/OC	%	M/OC	%	M/OC	%	M/OC	%	M/OC	%
6/6	100	0/1	0	10/10	100	12/12	100	11/11	100

Dao-Ming's grammatical morpheme production, like her TOEFL-pbt, indicates an almost native-like grammatical L2 proficiency in English. She essentially produces one grammatical morpheme inaccurately, a 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular *-s*, where the context dictates the marked form for correct subject-verb agreement. A closer look at the actual utterance Dao-Ming produced reveals that the construction was extremely complex: *I don't care what's the director said I said "um you work for the director" (hh) an (hh) you not care what he say*" (lines 1125-1126). Dao-Ming is using reported speech in which she is shifting from past to present tense and from 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular. Quantitatively, therefore, Dao-Ming

appears to have achieved a comparable level of grammaticality (98%) on these morphemes to that of a native English speaker, suggesting that she is highly proficient.

**Table 6.5: Marcos**

Grammatical Morphemes, Obligatory Contexts, Percent Used Correctly									
<i>Plural-s</i>		<i>3<sup>rd</sup>Sg -s</i>		<i>-ing</i>		<i>-ed</i>		<i>contractions</i>	
M/OC	%	M/OC	%	M/OC	%	M/OC	%	M/OC	%
11/12	92	2/2	100	7/7	100	7/7	100	18/18	100

Marcos, like Dao-Ming, is nearly perfect in his use of these grammatical morphemes. Marcos misses one obligatory context for the plural *-s* marker: *well I have 3 place open...* (line 839). Otherwise, he appears to have no trouble invoking the correct grammatical morpheme in the appropriate obligatory context. It is interesting to note that Marcos produces nearly one third to two times the number of contractions as compared to the other participants, yet all of the participants, regardless of the number of contractions they produce, use them correctly 100% of the time. In summarizing Marcos' L2 proficiency according to the morpheme grammaticality assessment, Marcos, with a 98% accuracy rate, is considered to be highly proficient, the same as Dao-Ming.

**Table 6.6: Melosia**

Grammatical Morphemes, Obligatory Contexts, Percent Used Correctly									
<i>Plural-s</i>		<i>3<sup>rd</sup>Sg -s</i>		<i>-ing</i>		<i>-ed</i>		<i>contractions</i>	
M/OC	%	M/OC	%	M/OC	%	M/OC	%	M/OC	%
9/10	90	1/4	25	3/3	100	1/4	25	3/3	100

Melosia demonstrates considerable difficulty with producing the bound grammatical morpheme *-s* for 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular and the regular past tense marker *-ed* consistently correct in their appropriate obligatory contexts. She produces each morpheme correctly only 25% of the time. However, plural *-s* appears to be well established as does *-ing* in both

progressive and present participle contexts, supporting Baily, Madden, and Krashen (1974).

The chart above suggests that Melosia may be avoiding the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular and the past tense, but the interaction displayed in her transcript suggests a different explanation.

Melosia, rather than talking about other people who may or may not have helped in her decision to come to the United States, talks about herself, relying primarily on the first person singular pronoun *I*. This structure, obviously, does not require conjugating the verb in the same way that the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular does. When looking at the obligatory contexts for the past, Melosia only creates 4 instances, which may appear as if she is avoiding the past tense. Again, her transcript reveals a different pattern. Melosia tends to rely heavily on the past-tense form of BE, *was* and *were*, which, according to the methodological parameters set by Bailey, Madden, and Krashen (1974), are not to be counted because *was* and *were* are free morphemes, excluding them from the bound morpheme count procedure as prescribed by Baily, Madden, and Krashen. Based on Melosia's overall morpheme acquisition, her English L2 proficiency is just below 75% accurate. This suggests that, of the four case study participants, because of her lack of command over basic inflectional morphemes, Melosia experiences the greatest challenges in maintaining sustained, meaningful interactions with native speakers of English.

It is important to note that the morpheme acquisition measurements of the case study participants reflect, roughly, the TOEFL and/or IELTS scores for each participant. In other words, Dao-Ming and Marcos, who had the highest scores on their standardized L2 proficiency exams, also came out highest on the morpheme acquisition measurements. Belita was next on both L2 proficiency measurements and finally Melosia scored the lowest on both the L2 proficiency and morpheme acquisition measurements.

### **Quantitative L2 Proficiency Assessment: Structure Acquisition**

In addition to the morpheme count L2 proficiency assessment detailed above, other L2 proficiency assessments have been developed: negation (Wode, 1981), question formation (Pienemann, Jonston, & Brindley, 1988), possessive determiners (White, 1998), relative clauses (Doughty, 1991), and references to the past (Meisel, 1987). Though the different instruments measure different discrete features of English syntax, they find common ground with Bailey, Madden, and Krashen (1974). The researchers and their studies make the claim that language is learned through incremental, predictable steps, that these internal cognitive processes can be isolated and observed, and that these stages are consistent and patterned, regardless of L1 background, length of study, place of study, and communication act. A brief description of each assessment instrument is provided below, followed by an analysis of the case study participants' English language development according to each of these L2 proficiency measurements. For consistency purposes, I used the same transcript excerpt of each participant that I used to calculate the participants' morpheme acquisition to analyze these other L2 proficiency measurements. After the description of each L2 proficiency measurement, I provide the participants' stage of development, according to the authors of these assessments. Finally, I provide a chart that collectively summarizes and compares the participants' stages of development across these quantitative measures.

***Negation.*** For the negation studies, Wode (1981) determined that there were four stages of development. Negation begins with using the simple free morpheme *no* and progresses to more complex constructions in which auxiliary morphemes, contractions, and main verb conjugations are used. Note that even stage 4 does not fully resemble that of NES negation constructions.

- Stage 1. A negative free morpheme such as *no* is placed before the item being negated, i.e. *I no have car.*
- Stage 2. *Don't* is used with *no* and *not*, but *don't* usually does not agree with person, number, or tense, i.e. *I don't see that movie yet.*
- Stage 3. The negative morphemes *no* and *not* are placed after the auxiliary verbs but *don't* is still not used accurately, i.e. *I cannot cook. She don't go to the university.*
- Stage 4. Negative forms of *DO* are fully internalized but there may be occasions where both the auxiliary *do* and the main verb are conjugated for the past, i.e. *I don't went to the party.*

*Participant development:*

Belita:	Stage 1
Dao-Ming:	Stage 4
Marcos:	Stage 4
Melosia:	Stage 4

**Question formation.** Pienemann, Johnston, and Brindley (1988) identified six general stages of question formation development:

- Stage 1. Single word or phrases coupled with a rising intonation, i.e. *Cookie? 5 dollars?*
- Stage 2. The use of declarative sentences with rising intonation. Inverted word order or fronting is not included, i.e. *It's a good book? They are at the movie?*
- Stage 3. Shows signs of fronting with the auxiliary *DO* and *Wh-* and other fronting, but word order continues to be consistent with declarative sentences, i.e. *Where the bank is? Does in the shopping center there are restaurants?*

Stage 4. The copula BE with *Wh-*, and *YES/NO* questions emerge, i.e. *When is the movie? Are there basketball games today?*

Stage 5. Marked by the use of *Wh-* questions with inversion, i.e. *How can I buy a ticket? What's in the bag?*

Stage 6. Includes complex questions, such as

i. Embedded questions: *Do you know where the train station is?*

ii. Tag questions: *It's cold outside, isn't it?*

iii. Negative questions: *Why can't he do it?*

*Participant development:*

Belita: Stage 4

Dao-Ming: Stage 4

Marcos: NA (did not produce any questions in the segment analyzed)

Melosia: Stage 3

**Possessive determiner.** Likewise, White (1998) investigated the production of possessive determiners and identified four stages of development:

Stage 1. Pre-emergence: Use of *his* or *her* is non-existent and the definite article *the* and *your* are used to modify all people, both genders, and numbers, i.e. *She have a bump on the head.*

Stage 2. Emergence: *His* and *her* are beginning to emerge with one being preferred over the other, i.e. *The girl is playing with his brother's baseball.*

Stage 3. Post-emergence: *His* and *her* are used alternatively but not when the noun has natural gender, i.e. *The mother baked cookies for his little boy.*

Stage 4. Stage 4: Use of *his* and *her* are consistently used correctly, i.e. *The boy wanted to go to the baseball game. His father bought him a ticket to the baseball game.*

*Participant development:*

Belita:	Stage 1
Dao-Ming:	Stage 4
Marcos:	Stage 4
Melosia:	Stage 4

Turning to the case study participants, Table 6.7 summarizes the participants' stages of English L2 development according to the Negation, Question Formation, and Possessive Determiner L2 proficiency assessment calculations. It is interesting to note that the measurements for negation and possessive determiner indicate the exact same stage of development for each individual participant. Also interestingly enough, Melosia, whose TOEFL-pbt and morpheme acquisition assessments indicate that her L2 English development is the lowest, places in stage 4 development for both negation and possessive determiner, while Belita, who has a TOEFL-pbt of 590 and an 84% morpheme acquisition accuracy rate, is in stage 1 of the negative and possessive determiner assessments. Yet, in terms of question formation, Belita and Melosia, though close in development, switch places, as Belita appears to have achieved a stage 4 development while Melosia tops out at stage 3. Dao-Ming and Marcos show consistent development across the different L2 proficiency measurements. None of the four case study participants, with the possible exception of Marcos, who did not produce any question constructions in the transcript analyzed, have achieved a stage 6 development in question formation.

The limitations of this brief structural analysis of the participants' English L2 development are obvious and worth addressing. The sample size of one hundred lines is minute compared to the total amount of data generated from four one-hour individual interviews and two ninety-minute focus group interviews. Thus, if additional transcript excerpts were to be included, overall results of the participants' L2 proficiency development



may differ. However, since the results presented roughly correlate to the L2 proficiency levels indicated by the participants' standardized TOEFL-pbt or IELTS scores, it can be assumed that larger sample sizes would not reveal significantly different L2 proficiency levels.

**Table 6.7: Stages of English Development in Negation, Possessives, & Question formation**

Name	Negation	Question	Possessive
Belita	1	4	1
Dao-Ming	4	4	4
Marcos	4	NA*	4
Melosia	4	3	4

\*Marcos did not produce any questions in the segment analyzed.

**Relative clause.** According to Doughty (1991), there appears to be a hierarchy of relative clause acquisition. Doughty claims that relative clauses that modify the subject of a sentence (subject relative clause) are the first level of production, followed by object relative clauses, which modify the direct object in a sentence. The next relative clause to be acquired is the indirect object relative clause, followed by relative clauses that modify the object of a preposition. The last clause in the relative clause acquisition hierarchy, according to Doughty, is the comparative relative clause in which the relative clause serves to compare two items. Examples of each type of relative clause in the hierarchy identified by Doughty are listed below, with item 1 being the type that is acquired first and item 6 being acquired last:

1. Subject, i.e. *The woman who is in the corner is my mother.*
2. Direct Object: i.e. *The car that I bought is orange.*
3. Indirect Object: i.e. *The man with whom I am engaged is in Peru.*
4. Object of a preposition: i.e. *I saw the movie that everyone was raving about.*

5. Possessive: i.e. *I met the person whose father owns the local grocery store.*
6. Object of comparison: i.e. *The college that Harvard is better than is Yale.*

**Table 6.8: Relative Clause Development**

Name	Level	Number and Type of Relative Clauses Produced
Belita	2	1 Subject; 1 Object
Dao-Ming	2	1 Object* (Ln 1078)
Marcos	2	1 Subject; 1 Object
Melosia	2	11 RC: 4 Subject; 7 Object

\* Dao-Ming's non-standard grammatical construction makes it difficult to determine the type of relative clause or if it's a relative clause at all.

Table 6.8 reveals that all of the case study participants have eclipsed the subject relative clause level and are squarely positioned in level 2: object relative clause. What is fascinating is Melosia's productive use of subject and object relative clauses. While the other three case study participants together produce five relative clauses, Melosia invokes 11 total relative clauses. Once again, Melosia, according to her TOEFL-pbt and morpheme acquisition count, has the lowest English L2 proficiency of the four case study participants, yet her relative clause production doubles that of the other three case study participants collectively. Thus, it may very well be that a relative clause acquisition hierarchy exists, but to claim that the relative clause hierarchy accurately measures English L2 proficiency (or not) remains an open question. Clearly, there is a disconnect between the L2 proficiency assessments presented thus far. It may be that the relative clause acquisition hierarchy is more accurate than the TOEFL/IELTS, morpheme acquisition, negation, possessive, and question formation assessments, or it could be that all of the assessments presented here fail to account for other factors that may influence L2 proficiency assessment.

**Past tense.** The development of the past tense for L2 learners of English appears to resemble that of children learning English as their first language, according to the findings

that Meisel (1987) reports. Meisel lists four stages of temporal development for the past tense:

Stage 1. No use of past to indicate time. Rather the speaker may just relay the events as they occurred or may use location to indicate a time in the past, i.e.

*Taiwan, I study business.*

Stage 2. A morpheme may be used at this stage to indicate a time in the past, but it may not be the correct morpheme, i.e. *I working long time in Chile.*

Stage 3. Irregular forms of the past may emerge before regular forms, i.e. *We went to the movie. We walk there.*

Stage 4. Once the regular past tense is used, learners may over-generalize and place the *-ed* morpheme on verbs which are irregular or may use the tense when another tense, such as the present perfect is more appropriate, i.e. *He tached me English in my home country. Now I studied English in the United States since 3 years.*

Meisel's (1987) past tense acquisition hierarchy, though similar in methodology, differs from the morpheme acquisition studies of Bailey, Madden, and Krashen (1974). In the latter, only bound morphemes are counted and include inflectional morphemes other than the past tense. Meisel, on the other hand, looks exclusively at past temporal development and includes irregular free morphemes in the analysis.

Table 6.9 shows the past tense development of the case study participants. Included in the data are not only the kinds of verb used (regular or irregular), but also the specific lexical items produced. Though Meisel (1987) is not concerned with the different constructions, only with iterations of past tense morphemes, it is worth noting that past tense

morphemes, bound and free, occur in constructions other than the “simple past,” such as present perfect, past perfect, and passive voice. Furthermore, Table 6.9 provides the different temporal constructions that each participant produced, such as simple present, present progressive, past tense, and active or passive voice. I provide the other contexts in which the past tense morphemes occur to indicate the range of production the participants exhibit with past tense morphemes.

**Table 6.9: Past Tense Measurements for English Development**

Name	Form & Lexical items	Constructions	Voice
Belita	Irregular	was, came, found, said	Simple past, past progressive, present perfect, reported speech
	Regular*	decide, receive, walk	
<i>Unique productions:</i> was a prepare (line 783), was say (line 793)			
Dao-Ming	Irregular	was/were, came, went, said, did	Simple past, past progressive, present perfect, modal auxiliaries
	Regular	No occurrences	
Marcos	Irregular	was/were, made, did, came*, went, took, told	Simple past, past progressive, conditional past, future-going to, future perfect, modal auxiliaries
	Regular	call*, award*, remind*, want	
Melosia	Irregular	was/were, had, thought, saw, felt, came, heard, went, knew	Simple past, past progressive, present perfect
	Regular	talk*, motivate*, love	
<i>Unique productions:</i> have friend (line 99)			

\*Regular form used but not correctly for the temporal context.

Table 6.9 shows Marcos’ facility with the English past tense temporal spectrum. It also demonstrates Dao-Ming and Marcos’ ability to switch from active to passive voice. What is interesting is that Dao-Ming does not produce a single regular past tense verb. All of her verbs are irregular. This does not mean that Dao-Ming cannot or does not use regular past tense structures in English accurately. A more detailed analysis of her English, using

other extended excerpts may reveal that she has internalized the regular past tense structures of English. At the same time, though, Dao-Ming's use of the irregular past tense structures does corroborate what Meisel (1987) found in that irregular forms tend to be used consistently correct before regular past tense constructions.

Both Belita and Melosia produced utterances that were difficult to categorize. These are indicated as *unique productions* in Table 6.9. Belita says "was a prepare" in line 783. It is difficult to determine if the structure should be *was prepared* in either active or passive voice, or if the intended meaning dictates a different verb tense altogether, such as past perfect (*had prepared*), or if the construction required a different lexical item, such as need (*needed to prepare*). In line 793, a similar analysis conundrum occurs. Should the phrase *was say* be simple past (*said*) or was Belita referring to an on going event in the past, which would dictate the past progressive (*was saying*). Similarly, Melosia, in line 99, uses the first person singular present tense form *have*. Within the context of the conversation, however, it is difficult to determine if she meant that she *had* already made a friend within her first of week of being in the United States. If this is the intended meaning, then lexically it would be more appropriate to use *made* than *have*. Yet, she could also mean that the person is still a friend; therefore, the use of *have* appears to be appropriate. For either explanation, using the adverb *already* seems appropriate.

To summarize the quantitative L2 proficiency assessments section, the different morpheme and structural measurements for each participant, in general, reinforce previous research findings. They also correlate well with the L2 proficiency levels indicated on the standardized TOEFL-pbt scores as shown in Table 6.10. Melosia and Belita are notable exceptions. Melosia's TOEFL-pbt is much lower than one might expect for an L2 speaker of

English who, it can be said, demonstrates a comparable L2 proficiency level based on the other L2 proficiency measurements presented in this chapter. On the other end of the spectrum, Belita, whose TOEFL-pbt is relatively high, generally displays an average developmental stage of 2 across the various L2 proficiency calculations.

**Table 6.10: TOEFL-pbt, Morphemic, and Structural Measurement Correlations**

Name	TOEFL-pbt	Morphs	Neg	Poss	Q	RC*	Verb
Belita	590	84%	1	1	4	2	4
Dao-Ming	677	98%	4	4	4	2	3
Marcos	625	98%	4	4	NA	2	4
Melosia	550	74%	4	4	3	2	4

\* Stage classification based on the relative clause hierarchy of acquisition

Though the standardized test scores and the various structural and morphemic measurements correlate to some degree, the accuracy of these quantitative tools must necessarily be scrutinized. In conducting the analysis for the morpheme and structural measurements, I observed unique linguistic characteristics for each participant that suggest quantifying language L2 proficiency can be problematic. For example, Dao-Ming's frequent use of filled markers, such as *um*, *uh*, sometimes between nearly every content or function word, might give her interlocutor the impression that her level of L2 proficiency is lower than her "perfect" TOEFL-pbt indicates. Yet, Jan Blommaert, in a personal conversation (2010), observed at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Ethnography in Education Conference 2010, the frequency and accuracy of intra-sentential filled markers that Dao-Ming produces may indicate a highly sophisticated use of English and one that demonstrates her desire to be identified as a native speaker of English. This phenomenon is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7, where the concepts of investment and identity are taken up.

Conversely, Melosia comes across as a competent and confident user of English, while her TOEFL-pbt scores indicate that she possesses the bare minimum linguistic skills to perform academic work in English. A more detailed discussion of the participants' interactional competence (Young, 2011) is given at the end of this chapter. Triangulating the various quantitative measurements with their NES friends' and/or instructors' observations, the participants' personal self-evaluations, as well as my personal experiences with each of the case study participants, will help create a more holistic portrait of the English L2 proficiency each case study participant has developed.

### **Qualitative Assessment: Native English Speaker and Self Observations**

The data for the following discussion was collected via interviews with native speakers of English whom the case study participants self-selected. Unfortunately, I did not interview an equal number of secondary NES participants. Marcos, for example, was unable to identify a NES peer, so he could only refer me to his professors. Dao-Ming, reticent about me talking to others about her, would only single out her NES boyfriend/husband, and refused to allow me access to her instructors. Belita and Melosia, on the other hand, named both NES instructors and NES peers. Table 6.11 summarizes the secondary NES participants I interviewed and their relationship with the case study participants. Again, all of the secondary NES participants have been given pseudonyms.

**Table 6.11: *Secondary NES Participants***

<b>Name</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Party Name</b>	<b>Relationship to Participant</b>
Belita	Andy	Public Speaking Instructor, Teaching Assistant
	Lisa	Friend, Intensive English teacher
Dao-Ming	Jim	Boyfriend/Husband
Marcos	Paul	Professor Emeritus, Engineering (since deceased)
Melosia	David	Classmate, 400 level language acquisition class
	Andrew	Linguistics Instructor, Teaching Assistant

**Belita.** Belita identified two native English speakers for me to interview. Both of them were her teachers. Lisa was Belita's conversation teacher in the university's IEP, but according to both Belita and Lisa, their relationship is better characterized as friends rather than teacher-student. Lisa is from a Texas-Mexico border town and claims to have learned a border pidgin, consisting of English and Spanish that Lisa describes as "Texmex." Lisa is a Ph.D. student in the university's Bilingual Education program in the College of Education. She claims to identify more closely with Latino cultures than with white American cultures, even though she is self-conscious and critical of her Spanish skills. Lisa says that she connected with Belita's Guatemalan culture because of her Latina identity. Lisa also said that she views her relationship with Belita as providing her an opportunity to develop better Spanish speaking skills.

Andy, a Ph.D. student in Communications and Teaching Assistant in the Department of Communication and Journalism (C&J), was Belita's instructor for Public Speaking 101. Andy is a white male from Colorado in his late 20's. This was Andy's second semester as a teaching assistant in the C&J department. Also noteworthy is the fact that Andy is English monolingual, though he has studied other languages. In his words, "I have tried several times and it has not stuck yet." Andy also self-reported that he has suffered from stuttering, which he believes contributes to his empathy for L2 learners of English.

Both Andy and Lisa were complimentary of Belita's English skills (a common theme throughout all of the NES contacts). Andy, however, was a little more guarded in his assessments, using phrases such as "she catches on" and "she is just trying really hard." When I asked Andy about Belita's performance in class, he said that he works with her on "structure, content, presentation...confidence in the language" and that he encourages her to



speak to her strengths. Andy said he recognizes that Belita struggles with the grammatical structure of English and has tried to help her feel comfortable speaking English in spite of her grammar skills. He also noted that Belita tends to be a leader in her small group and that she was not afraid to offer her perspective on such controversial topics as illegal immigration.

Lisa, being an English language teacher, was a little more specific in assessing Belita's English, noting that she has difficulty conjugating verbs and using singular/plural forms accurately. For Lisa, the fact that Belita is taking university classes and succeeding in them is evidence enough that Belita's English is good. "She's fine I think she can do if I I apparently she's doing fine she's at a university. She's taking classes. She's fine yeah."

Thus, Andy and Lisa appear to have adopted a "sympathetic" native speaker role and are helping to scaffold Belita's English (Norton, 2000). Both Andy and Lisa noted that Belita needs to develop a larger working vocabulary, but her determination to be heard and to participate carries her at times. Thus, grammatical accuracy may be important, but determination, continuous practice, patience, and perseverance provide the necessary avenues to access. In this we can readily see evidence for sociocultural influences on L2 learning, particularly Norton's (1995) concept of investment.

***Dao-Ming.*** As mentioned previously, Dao-Ming did not permit me to make contact with her Anatomy and Physiology or dance instructors, stating that she did not want to bring attention to herself. She also claimed that the only native English speaking person she knew, other than me, was Jim, her boyfriend/husband. Thus, Jim's is the only NES third party voice I have for Dao-Ming.

As detailed in Chapter 5, Dao-Ming's and Jim's relationship dates back to their time in the CNMI where they worked together in one of the island's medical clinics. Briefly, their

relationship began as strictly plutonic but after their collective divorces, they began to cultivate a more intimate relationship that, according to Dao-Ming, is what brought her to the southwestern United States.

When I asked Jim to assess Dao-Ming's English skills, he made the following observations:

*Excerpt 6.1 (June 13, 2010)*

*(J=Jim; M=Michael)*

- 266 J: I think she has very good English she is often asking me definitions of words that I  
267 don't know um she does occasionally things that um that shows that she isn't a  
268 native speaker uh and so things that I notice most often about them is the gender of  
269 pronouns so she'll say the man she da da da or the XXXx.
- 270 M: Right.
- 271 J: And um I think that's because um I guess there are their pronouns are gender neutral  
272 or something in in Chinese uh but she does lots of work with that XXXX trying to  
273 work that out her but um she does have um she does have sort of interesting  
274 pronunciation issues her pronunciation is great but I can tell that she has difficulties  
275 discerning some sounds that I hear really well like um uh we were driving past a  
276 pawn shop.
- 277 M: Umh.
- 278 J: And she was asking about the difference between the pronunciation of pawn and  
279 porn.
- 280 M: (hh).
- 281 J: Kind of a funny example because she's really she couldn't really mentally  
282 distinguish those very well.
- 283 M: Right right.
- 284 J: Because they both sound the same to her.
- 285 M: (laugh) yeah yeah.
- 286 J: Yeah so uh and we were laughing about that.
- 287 M: (hh) [XXXXXXXXXXXXX porn shop pawn shop].
- 288 J: [Yeah yeah course I've never heard her say] I never heard her you know say you  
289 know the I have no trouble distinguishing what says and I don't think anyone else  
290 does either. [JDM1INTV71310]

In the preceding excerpt, Jim describes how Dao-Ming continues to struggle with pronouns and their antecedents in English, speculating that her L1, Mandarin, may be the source of her difficulties. Further, he recounts a time when Dao-Ming was trying to differentiate between the minimal pairs of *porn* and *pawn*, noting that some English

phonemes prove challenging for Dao-Ming to perceive, therefore, pronounce. Yet after describing these specific instances, Jim states that he has “no trouble distinguishing what [she] says” and asserts that no one “else does either” (lines 289-290). Therefore, though Jim recognizes that Dao-Ming produces English structures that may veer from a “standard” English, he does not consider these variations in Dao-Ming’s English significant enough to interfere with communication.

Dao-Ming originally established a platonic relationship with a person who could help her enter into the English speaking medical community. Through time, he became her boyfriend and then husband. This direct, sustained access to a sympathetic NES has undoubtedly facilitated Dao-Ming’s English L2 proficiency, but her interest in Western culture and English that began in middle school can be said to have laid the groundwork for her current linguistic trajectory.

Dao-Ming in some ways represents a gross anomaly in this case study. Other than Jim and me, the researcher, Dao-Ming does not actively engage with other NESs. She claimed that she does not ask questions in class or interact with her classmates outside of school. In effect, she insulates herself from NES resources, essentially cutting off access, yet she has acquired a fairly sophisticated level of English. Her investment in learning English and learning about Western culture via books, the internet, and movies has sustained her English L2 development. When she has questions about the language or the culture that she cannot explain on her own, she has Jim to fall back on for questions and clarification. In many ways, Dao-Ming resembles a combination of Norton’s (2000) Katrina, who recognized that English was “a resource that would secure for her the educational training she sought, and ultimately a responsible job in which she could work autonomously” (p. 93) and Felicia,

who wished to retain her Peruvian identity and be thought of as someone who was “timid or unfriendly” (p. 105).

During my interview with Jim, I told him that my sense of Dao-Ming was that she wished to shed herself of her Chinese skin, Jim immediately corrected me, saying “some part of her is deeply invested in China’s culture. She just wants to have the freedom to be associated with another first world country: a first world country where, I mean she’d love to go back to China.” Jim went on to say that they were planning to go back to China to have a traditional Chinese wedding ceremony in the summer of 2011.

In the end, Dao-Ming controlled her access to English, maintaining consistent contact with NESs that she trusted, while relying on other forms of English language media as her sources for linguistic and cultural knowledge.

**Marcos.** Identifying a third person contact proved to be a challenge for Marcos. He was not opposed to me talking to others. The problem was that he could not identify a NES peer with whom I could speak. All of his friends in engineering were L2 learners of English, including his closest friend, who is also from Spain. Thus, he ended up identifying the three professors he was taking class from that semester. I contacted all three of them. Two of the professors returned my request to speak with them, expressing an openness to talk. Ultimately, however, I was only able to secure one interview with one professor. The other professor, originally expressing a willingness to meet, never returned my follow up email.

The one interview I did conduct was with a professor emeritus whom I will call Paul. On the day of the interview, I went to Paul’s office, prepared with my tape recorder and interview questions. However, upon being invited into Paul’s office, he began talking immediately. Not wanting to interrupt Paul, I never produced the tape recorder or the

interview questions. Reasons for this are that I was intimidated by his stature as a world renowned scholar, but also, through our conversation, it became apparent to me that he did not know who Marcos was. I became aware of this when Paul made reference to Marcos' Latin American heritage. In the end, I received a great deal of information about the relationship between English and the field of engineering, and Paul's opinions regarding the contributions of international students in the School of Engineering at the university. Thus, the NES data I have for Marcos is based on my field notes that I took during and immediately following the interview. As a result, Marcos' third party data is not as rich as that of the other case study participants. Sadly, Paul has passed away since the initial interview, making it impossible to follow up on my field notes.

Speaking about the field of engineering in general, Paul observed that L2 speakers of English who are engineers or studying to become engineers learn English for the purpose of learning engineering. Paul's observation confirmed Marcos' claims that English is the language of engineering: that regardless of where people come from, where they study engineering, or what language(s) they speak, to be an engineer requires knowing English. Though becoming an engineer may not have been on Marcos' mind when he began studying English in elementary school in Spain, he has certainly strived to develop his English skills so that he can participate in the academic discourse community of engineers.

Not speaking specifically about Marcos, but instead of the expectations of the engineering faculty at the local university, Paul claimed that faculty get irritated if the L2 English speakers in engineering cannot write using good English, stating that "students must be able to publish in English." Paul explained that admission for international students into the various engineering programs (chemical & nuclear, civil, computer science, electrical &

computer, and mechanical) at the university is highly competitive because of the large number of international applicants; thus, the expectations for those admitted are high. One of these expectations is academic scholarship. Marcos confirmed Paul's assertions about the engineering field, saying that coming to the United States to study was not that challenging linguistically since he has been studying engineering and reading academic articles and books on engineering in English since beginning his tertiary studies in Spain.

The discussion thus far of a NES's assessment of Marcos' English skills has been indirect and opaque. For reasons given previously, this is all that I was able to collect. However, I do believe some conclusions can still be drawn regarding NES's perceptions of Marcos' English L2 skills. Based on Paul's comments, the following three points emerge.

1. English is the lingua franca of engineering.
2. Admission into the School of Engineering for international students is highly competitive.
3. The expectation for graduate students to publish in academic journals is high.

It can be reasonably deduced, then, that Marcos' academic English skills, as perceived by the faculty in electrical engineering, are acceptable because he was admitted to the School of Engineering, and that the faculty believe Marcos has the skills to contribute to academic scholarship.

**Melosia.** Melosia identified two NES's for me to interview: Andrew and David. Andrew, a doctoral student in linguistics, was Melosia's Linguistics 101 instructor. In addition to English, Andrew speaks six languages, including Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, German, Arabic, and French. His first second language is Spanish. Thus, Andrew not only has a solid background in linguistics, he also has an intimate understanding of the processes

it takes to learn a language. David, a post-baccalaureate student in Education, was a classmate of Melosia's in an upper division undergraduate course on first and second language acquisition offered through the College of Education for ESL and Bilingual Endorsement. David, though not fluent in Spanish, is a native of New Mexico. In fact, his family settled in the territory during the time of Cortez's expeditions. His mother is Hispanic and his father is Caucasian. Andrew's and David's backgrounds in linguistics, education, language learning, and family heritage enabled them to make informed observations regarding Melosia's English skills.

During the one-on-one interviews with Andrew and David, I asked them to characterize Melosia's English skills. Both Andrew and David gave her high praise. Andrew, being a linguist, commented on her phonology, morphology, and syntax, but ultimately said, "very good." He then quantified his statement, ranking her skills a 7 on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being fluent. Finally, he specifically said that her grammar was "very good" but acknowledged that "she does have an accent..." When I asked Andrew if he taught differently because Melosia and other L2 speakers of English were in his class, he said he slows his lectures down a little. However, he followed up his statement saying that his expectations are the same for both NES and L2 speakers.

David, like Andrew, complimented Melosia's English, "she has very good English skills." Similarly, he finds that her pronunciation is the one area where she has room for growth, "Um, obviously there are going to be some uh some phonemes that the Mexican palate is just not going to ever make right." He goes on to qualify his perception of Melosia's English, saying,

It doesn't even strike me as being unusual much less a lack of fluency. Uh um, I would definitely say that you know she's not at the top of the ladder by any means. There's lots of vocabulary that she has yet to develop. Sometimes there are tense problems. But never anything that gets in the way of comprehension.

[DVD1INT410]

David completes his assessment of Melosia's English saying, "If she lacks the vocabulary she needs to express herself, she does possess the vocabulary to get what she needs."

David's observation suggests that Melosia's circumlocution skills are quite advanced, enabling her to express herself in situations where she might otherwise be silenced.

Table 6.12 not only generalizes the qualitative assessments of the third party commentators, it also illuminates some disconnects between skills, expectations, and NES perceived requirements for learning a second language. Table 6.12 also serves as a segue into the case study participants' emic perspectives.

**Table 6.12: NES's Qualitative Assessments of L2 English Proficiency**

Name	NES	Basis for Assessment	Expectation	Comment
Belita	<i>Andy</i>	Grammar Pronunciation	I treat her like every other student	She's got a great grasp of the language.
	<i>Lisa</i>	Grammar	NA*	Apparently she's doing fine. She's at a university.
Dao-Ming	<i>Jim</i>	Grammar Pronunciation	NA	I think she has very good English.
Marcos	<i>Paul</i>	NA	Students must be able to publish in English.	NA
Melosia	<i>Andrew</i>	Grammar	The same as for L1 English students.	Very good.
	<i>David</i>	Pronunciation Grammar	NA	She has very good English skills.

NA=Not available

With the exception of Paul, who did not make a direct comment on Marcos' English skills, it is clear that the third party NES all believe the participants have "good" English



skills and base their assessments on their perceptions of the participants' grammar and pronunciation skills. This may be understandable since grammar and pronunciation are readily identifiable and concrete representations of language that people can and do use when making L2 proficiency judgments. Yet, when I asked the third party NES's what they knew about learning a second language and what the main features of learning a second language are, they responded from very different positions.

1. **Andy:** To practice. You have to continually do it. It's a daily thing. The basic structure is more important than learning the grammatical aspects.
2. **Lisa:** I think dedication for one: Dedication, patience, and a good attitude. [Grammar, reading, writing, vocabulary] ... come naturally when learning.
3. **Jim:** So I think that learning a second language is about wanting to know more about that culture and community.
4. **Paul:** NA
5. **Andrew:** Probably the biggest single factor would be immersion... comprehension precedes production. Also, just being comfortable, familiar with other cultures.
6. **David:** You stand a much better chance if you have help. So I think that immersion is a really good idea. Vocabulary, grammar, syntax, but beyond that it seems to me that every language has a very particular feel to it.

Based on the comments above, it becomes apparent that the secondary case study participants make a distinction between "how," i.e. the production of their English L2 skills, and "what," i.e. what they are able to do with their English L2 in communicative situations, essentially reinforcing a competence-performance dichotomy. On the one hand, the NES's made their L2 proficiency assessments based on discrete linguistic features, i.e. grammar and pronunciation. On the other hand, they unanimously believe that practice, particularly immersion, is the best way to achieve L2 proficiency. Practice, immersion, dedication, help, and wanting to know more about the culture are all emphasized over discrete features or

general skills. So on one level, the secondary NES participants evaluate the case study participants' English skills based on purely linguistic tangible, identifiable skills, yet on a different level, the overwhelming generalization is sociolinguistic/sociocultural: social interaction, scaffolding, affective, dedication and cultural curiosity. Furthermore, of the teachers interviewed, none of them believed that it is appropriate to evaluate the L2 learners differently than the L1 speakers of English, yet there is open acknowledgement that *practice*, *dedication*, and *help* are required to learn a second language.

It is also important to note that the NES's comments regarding immersion reflect the common belief that to really learn a language, a person must fully immerse him or herself into a community where the L2 is the dominant language of that community. What none of the NES's acknowledge is the responsibility that the host community has in providing sustained, meaningful, empathetic access to the L2. In fact, in academia, they respond with the boilerplate response of maintaining the same expectations for L2 speakers of English as for their NES peers.

Finally, before describing the participants' emic perspective of their L2 learning processes and their assessments of their own English skills, a comparison of the 3<sup>rd</sup> party NES speakers' assessment of the participants' English grammar with actual utterances may illuminate yet another interesting phenomenon. Below are the case study participant utterances taken from the same transcripts used for the quantitative assessments presented earlier.

1. **Belita:** And I don't know but I think that in my interior I was like postpone *came to here can't* do all this all of this stuff that I I I am doing now because my brother always is like *previser* person I don't know what but if you need to study maybe two years *there they* get ready for this but I jump (hh) I don't know even I *was a prepare* many things (lines 780-783).
2. **Dao-Ming:** But um I have always wanted to come *to States* but I applied for a visa like in 2003 I was denied so I could not *all the* stuff and um so visa officer just took a look like uh 2 minutes and uh uh he rejected me in this arrogant way he was really *bad* impression (hh) (lines 1066-1068).
3. **Marcos:** To, *to came here*. And, and this, this, I *look at* it long time ago, but I didn't think about this because, I actually was in Spain, we have a grant something I can come here so, I let it sleep for awhile, but then *in this summer*, eh, he was awarded with a Prince of Estudios and XXXX, (lines 830-832).
4. **Melosia:** I am not just being quiet and *waiting that* something *happen so* grammar when I am writing my *essay are* the most *challenge* because I need to think 4 or 5 times more *than just talking* when you talk just only op- open the mouth (lines 1026-1028).

Reading through each of these utterances, it becomes clear that all of the participants are still challenged by certain grammatical constructions as indicated in italics in the excerpts, such as word order, pronoun agreement, lexical omissions, verb tense, or vocabulary. Yet, the secondary NES participants observed, their English skills are “very good.” The NES overall assessments suggest that even though they may have an imagined “standard” or an “ideal NES speaker” in mind as they critique the English skills of the case study participants, they obviously dismiss the “ungrammaticality” of the L2 speakers’ English when making their L2 proficiency assessments. This disconnect suggests that NES parameters of acceptability may be more flexible than the constraints of those proposed for the “ideal speaker.” That other interactional features present in one-on-one interaction, such as gesture, intonation, eye-contact, and pragmatics support verbal utterances in ways that permit successful co-operative communication to occur between native and L2 speakers of a language. It is these latter features of communication events (gesture, intonation, etc....) that

are not traditionally assessed on L2 proficiency measurement instruments such as TOEFL or morpheme acquisition counts.

### **Qualitative Assessment: An Emic Perspective<sup>22</sup>**

Up to this point, a comparative analysis of a variety of quantitative L2 proficiency measurements and qualitative NES L2 proficiency assessments has been given. This current section analyzes the L2 proficiency of the case study participants from an emic, or participant self-reflection, perspective. In other words, the section seeks to answer the following the question:

➤ *How do international L2 learners of English assess their own English skills?*

In analyzing the participants' self-assessment of their L2 English skills, it became apparent that it would not be possible, nor appropriate, to continue with a structure-based (grammar and pronunciation) assessment instrument. Based on the case study participants' comments and self-assessments of their L2 proficiency, a different assessment paradigm emerges. This section, therefore, re-conceptualizes L2 proficiency assessment from a sociolinguistic, sociocultural model, ultimately questioning the validity of relying on purely quantitative, statistical analyses of developmental patterns.

Certainly, each of the case study participants expresses a need to “understand the language responsively” and “manipulate it” (Li, 2007), but for the participants, these linguistic and academic language skills are a given, in which they readily acknowledge the importance of morphosyntactic, lexical, and phonological development. Furthermore, they

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<sup>22</sup> Transcript sources beginning with FS mean that the data samples were taken from the Focus Groups Sessions. The FS transcripts do not have line numbers since the transcripts were organized using the table function in Microsoft Word, making adding line numbers impossible. See the Methodology Chapter for a more detailed discussion of the Focus Group Sessions.

accept their responsibility as L2 learners of English to continually develop their spoken and receptive skills. Furthermore, they know that in order for them to improve, they require practice. So, discrete skill development is the baseline for the case study participants, whereas for the quantitative assessments and the secondary NES participant perceptions grammatical, phonological, and lexical development are the end line, or ultimate indicators of L2 proficiency. For the case study participants, other criteria are more salient, and arguably more challenging than discrete feature acquisition. The criteria that emerged from the self-assessments of the case study participants can be generalized as *Affective*, *Physical*, *Audience*, and *Pragmatic*. To successfully navigate these criteria in their L2 development, the participants relied on internal sources to sustain their levels of motivation and investment.

***The Affective.*** Each of the four participants, in their one-on-one interviews, their written responses, and/or in the focus group sessions, acknowledged the imperativeness of overcoming the fear of speaking. Belita and Dao-Ming both reflect on their first few days and months in the United States. They were scared and felt intimidated to use their English. Belita said that she would have rather walked an entire mall looking for something than to stop and ask for help.

*Excerpt 6.2: Belita (April, 2, 2010)*

- 152 B: But at the beginning I didn't ask even if I need walk all the mall I no ask where  
 153 is because I was afraid.  
 154 M: Umh okay you were afraid of the malls.  
 155 B: No of the speak [hh].  
 156 M: [Of speaking] (hh).  
 157 B: Some for speaking. [BTR4INT4210]

Dao-Ming corroborates Belita's statement with the following comment she made in a journal entry in which she was responding to Julia Alvarez's (2007) essay *My English*.

*Excerpt 6.3: Dao-Ming (May 12, 2010)*

When I first came to states, I still had problem communicating with people. I felt nervous, I felt unconfident, I stuttered. But day after day, I grew more and more confident and I seldom stutter now... I definitely have encountered some contempt about my “broken English,” but it didn’t really hurt me, and I am not keeping it in my conscious memory. I know as a new immigrant, my English is good enough, and I know that my English is going to be better and better.

[DMJrnl-MyEng1512]

Likewise, Melosia states the need to never give up when trying to communicate in English.

*Excerpt 6.4: Melosia (March 25, 2010)*

870 L: So I think people need perseverance to talk.

[MNC4INT32510]

In Focus Group Session 1, Belita emphasizes the importance of moving beyond fear.

*Excerpt 6.5: Belita (FS-April 4, 2010)*

I think that this is same we can for us that we are learning XXX and I think that the first thing that you need be able to s- to get out of be afraid of someone laughing at you because many times you you know what what you wanna say but you are afraid of saying good or bad.

[FSCGRP14410]

To summarize, therefore, coming to a point in which L2 learners are at peace with their English, regardless of the level of accuracy is tantamount. Thus, the first measure of L2 proficiency has to be attaining a level of comfort in the L2 to overcome fears that may prevent self-participation. After I commented that for me, “learning another language is like an out of body experience,” Marcos replied with the following:

*Excerpt 6.6: Marcos (FS-April 25, 2010)<sup>23</sup>*

Yes I I think that’s that’s maybe the problem I have study English for so many year and because I had the opportunity to use it that I feel it like part of mine but if I try to use some language tha- that I have been just only studying it for a a while for one year or so I think that you don’t feel on that comfort zone.

[FSCGRP242510]

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<sup>23</sup> Punctuation is included in some FS excerpts because the speaker’s utterance occurs across several lines, but the interlocutor’s utterances are functional discourse markers, such as *umh*, *um*, that serve to acknowledge continued participation but do not contribute to the content of the conversation.

**The Physical.** *The Physical* measurement of L2 proficiency may, in fact, be a misnomer as it refers to the mental strength required to move through day-to-day life interacting in the L2 for extended periods of time.<sup>24</sup> Yet, the brain is a muscle, and, like all muscles, it requires exercise if it is to remain healthy and viable. Likewise, muscles tire with exertion, requiring recovery time between workouts. The linguistic exercise of thinking, learning, and doing in an L2 certainly stimulates the brain muscle, but these activities are also physically exhausting. Dao-Ming discusses the physical energy she exerts when interacting in English.

*Excerpt 6.8: Dao Ming (March 31, 2010)*

- 363 D: It's your first language it's your native language it- it- it just flows out.  
 364 M: Umh.  
 365 D: But for me I need to think hard because Chinese um Chinese way of putting down a  
 366 sentence and American way of putting down a sentence is very different.  
[DNL4INT33110]

Dao-Ming states that because Chinese and English have different structures, she needs to “think hard” when using English. Marcos and Belita in Excerpt 6.9 liken learning English to controlling a big dog. Using Marcos’ metaphor, at times the big dog (English) behaves and responds to the master’s (L2 learner) tugs on the leash, but at other times, the big dog, seeing or smelling something of interest, overpowers the owner, at least for a short time, and runs-off. In effect, Marcos is claiming there are times when he feels relatively confident in his command of English, but at other times, he feels as if he has lost complete control of his English.

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<sup>24</sup> Olsen (1997) in fact lists physical exhaustion as one feature of her language shock definition.

*Excerpt 6.9: Marcos & Belita (FS- April 25, 2010)*

- R: English to me is like a big dog I have it hold but sometimes he (hh) sees another dog and goes there an (hh).
- B/M: (hh)
- R: Yes and if he want me.
- B/M: (hh)
- R: So I I think I kind of own it (hh) I only love whatever he wants he going to do it at least.
- B/M: (hh)
- B: This is good analogy (hh).
- R: That's that more or less the okay.
- B: (cough) um it owns me I don't know I don't feel it feels comfortable saying that I can speak English or it's my language but I think she seldom on- only question of time because uh at the beginning I need to think maybe twice before speak and now I can speak without thinking too much so maybe I can hold the dog for a little bit but he's a hard dog (hh).
- R: Uh I feel comfortable but I I can feel more comfortable.

[FSCGRP242510, pp. 43-45]

The metaphor of a dog exemplifies the physicality required of the L2 learners to continuously engage in English. For a while, the L2 is used in familiar settings and the language produced is almost an automated variety, but, like walking a dog along a familiar path who suddenly sees a rabbit and decides to chase it, an unfamiliar situation requiring novel language production and pragmatic skill may influence the L2 learner's control of the L2. Still, over time the physical becomes more manageable, even unconscious, as Dao-Ming expresses below.

*Excerpt 6.10 Dao-Ming (FS-April 25, 2010)*

Of course if I I started uh feel um somewhat like my native language uh when I read the article I do know constantly feel that I am reading a second language article sometimes um uh when I try to remember something and I try to remember did I get it from a like a phrase or sentence I try to I try to remember did it from my English reading or did I get it from Chinese reading I I feel that I got it from Chinese reading but actually it came from an English article uh so I guess it's uh it's it means that um I don't know like it's a my my brain my process of thinking uh is more and more uh I don't know um I guess uh I'm getting better at English. [FSCGRP242510, p. 42]



Dao-Ming's confusion about where she read something and in what language suggests that, even though the brain is being exercised, she is becoming conditioned to the L2, and thus, the amount of physical exertion is not as taxing, and therefore, not as consciously apparent as it once was.

***The Audience.*** That audience emerged as a criterion for assessing English L2 proficiency by the participants should not be surprising. However, if we look back at the quantitative assessments, it becomes clear that the measurement tools focus entirely on L2 learners' ability to manipulate syntax or morphology. Cognitive explanations assume that mastery of these discrete skills will lead to increased NES comprehension. Arguments from the perspectives of Language Socialization, SCT, Complexity Theory, and SLA-ID assert that the traditional cognitivist paradigm ignores the profound influences, both negative and positive, of native speaker interactions and the contexts in which these interactions occur on L2 development (Duff & Talmy, 2011; Lantolf, 2011; Larsen-Freeman, 2011; Norton, 1998; Norton, 2000; Norton & McKinney, 2011). Collecting and analyzing emic perspectives of L2 learners' language learning experiences helps to reframe the L2 proficiency argument from a monolingual, ethnocentric, nativist stance to a more holistic multilingual, multicultural view. This paradigm shift emphasizes social interaction, requiring mutual responsibility and participation by the L2 learner, native speakers, and the context.

Though each of the four participants, either explicitly or implicitly expressed the importance of audience comprehension in assessing L2 proficiency, Belita captures the concept best:

*Excerpt 6.11: Belita (FS-April 4, 2010)*

Because many times you you know what what you wanna say but you are afraid of saying good or bad and now that you are saying that you no can practice your Mandarin ah I come to realize that my English is better when now when I go this thing or something I ask for something and she say then respond me in Spanish because at the beginning maybe I say I'm sorry this doesn't take a chairs and they uh stop to speaking to me in Spanish so I know that they really know that I c- that it's more easy for me or something uh so now the people are able to respond me in English and then they have changed me the language I do better because I say (hh).

[FSCGRP14410, p. 39]

In Excerpt 6.11, Belita reflects on her English L2 development. At first, her interlocutors would default to Spanish when hearing her accent. With time, though, people began responding to Belita in English. For her, this marked a turning point in her English development, demonstrating to her that her English was getting better. Yet, it is not difficult to see in the statement above that Belita's English remains difficult to penetrate. Thus, if Excerpt 6.11 above accurately represents Belita's control of the discrete features of English, it becomes clear that a great deal of work is required of NES's to comprehend and respond appropriately, demonstrating the inextricable relationship of the NES and L2 speaker in the meaning making process.

Subsumed in the *Audience* measure of L2 proficiency is that of respect, or as Bourdieu (1977) delineates, people naturally yearn to be "...believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished" (p. 648) when speaking. In occasions when these desires are dismissed by the interlocutor, identities may be questioned, thus, renegotiated. At times, and depending on the social context, the failure of the interlocutor to demonstrate respect may result in silencing the speaker. At other times and in different social contexts, the dismissal by the interlocutor may in fact be the empowering catalyst for exercising the right to speak. Belita, relaying her frustrations with her stepbrother, exemplifies how the desire to be respected by the audience

can be an empowering force for creating opportunities to speak, resulting in opportunities to not only develop L2 proficiency, but to measure one's own L2 development.

*Excerpt 6.12: Belita (March 31, 2010)*

- 186 M: Um when you go home what's the language.  
 187 B: Hh I /əspik/ (speak) English wit- with him.  
 188 M: Umh with=  
 189 B: =With the son of Peter.  
 190 M: Umh.  
 191 B: He name is Dennis.  
 192 M: Right okay.  
 193 B: I /əspik/ (speak) English Dennis because I wanna show him like I am not stupid so I  
 194 can understand=  
 195 M: Umh.  
 196 B: =Everything that he say and for the only good thing for me is that I practice more.  
 197 M: Umh umh.  
 198 B: Because I make like the interrogation for my mom so why why he go where he go  
 199 and everything.  
 200 M: Umh.  
 201 B: But now it's English but when for example yesterday tha- that I was so XXXX.  
 [BTR3INT3310]

Excerpt 6.12 is pulled from a conversation Belita and I had about her distrust of her stepbrother. She believes Dennis was taking advantage of her mother and step-father, Peter. Belita, in line 193 not only wants David to know that she understands him, but she also exemplifies Bourdieu's claims that people wish to be "respected:" "I wanna show him like I am not stupid." She goes on to claim that this desire to demonstrate her intelligence by speaking English to her stepbrother provides her the opportunity to "practice more" (line 195). Thus the audience, and a desire to be respected, becomes a vehicle for Belita to use her English.

Melosia and Dao-Ming also describe the importance they place on gaining the respect of their NES peers, and how this can facilitate opportunities to use their L2 English, which in turn becomes a self-guiding measurement of their L2 development. Below, Melosia

describes in a reflective essay, her initial intimidation of being in classes with NES's but how, through her increasing English skills, she strives to gain their respect.

*Excerpt 6.13: Melosia (January, 2011)*

In the area of my academic life ...: College of Education I feel accepted the way that how I am. One of the things that made me feel uncomfortable were the assignments that I needed to do in groups. The reason was and is still is that I feel that I still need to have a complete control or domain of my second language, with things such as essays, circle discussions and debates. Even though I do not have issues expressing my ideas and saying my points of view. I still believe that I don't want people to think that I lack in knowledge or abilities just because I have a strong accent or I do miscues at the moment that I speak or write.

[MLRFLTCN0111]

Thus, Melosia, not wanting to be construed as lacking "knowledge or abilities," draws on her desire to be respected. Even though she may feel uncomfortable performing some academic tasks required of her, she knows that she has the ability to make herself understood. Recall that David, Melosia's classmate, made a similar observation, "she has the skills to communicate what she needs even if she does not have the vocabulary."

Dao-Ming, though exceptionally modest in her English assessment, echoes the sentiments of Belita and Melosia.

*Excerpt 6.14: Dao-Ming (March 10, 2010)*

- 1016 D: Um like with uh my Chinese friends=  
 1017 M: Umh.  
 1018 D: =They would soon recognize that I I'm educated person because I I talk to /Iwen/  
 1019 (even) in my careful conversations I talk in a different way I didn't uh uh you  
 1020 know um uh I didn't do on purpose-  
 1021 M: Umh.  
 1022 D: -It's just a it's carried in my /coiys/ (choice) o choice of words.  
 1023 M: Umh.  
 1024 D: So the same thing here uh uh because I have very uh simple narrow vocabulary so  
 1025 people would notice that um=  
 1026 M: Umh.  
 1027 D: =I'm not very well educated in English.

[DNL3INT31010]

Like Melosia, Dao-Ming is concerned that others will perceive her as lacking in education, therefore, will not afford her the respect that she desires. Unlike Melosia, though, Dao-Ming measures her L2 development, not simply on the ability to participate and to express ideas, but on the level of sophistication with which she can participate. Sophistication, for Dao-Ming, is measured by the range of vocabulary to which she has access.

*Excerpt 6.15: Dao-Ming (March 31, 2010)*

I want to because I have this experience writing in Chin- in Chinese I have speak good Chinese and I can study understand how how um however sophisticated Chinese language is there's no Chinese conversation I don't know I don't understand even like they speak in like very poetic or um like um ancient Chinese language I could still understand because I had education and uh um but s- and I will recognized somebody with very little education. [DNL3INT31010]

Dao-Ming concludes the comment in excerpt 6.15 stating, “So uh I’m very conscious uh when I talk to people in English.” For Dao-Ming, demonstrating her ability to use sophisticated English vocabulary is her way of earning the respect of others.

Belita, Melosia, and Dao-Ming, though, describe various ways in which they respond to the L2 proficiency variable, *Audience*. Belita and Melosia find motivation to create opportunities to speak and interact in English, using these opportunities to grow and develop their L2 skills. Dao-Ming, on the other hand, uses the same source as a motivation to continue developing a larger range of English vocabulary, but approaches interactions with NESs with caution and trepidation.

To generalize then, it can be said that L2 learners measure their L2 proficiency by the amount of respect that the native English speakers display for them. Furthermore, respect

also becomes a motivating factor for continuing to develop their L2 skills as well as a mechanism for creating opportunities to interact in the L2.

### *Pragmatics*

Pragmatics is the study of communication – the study of how language is used. This study is based on the assumption of a division between knowledge and the way it is used, and the goal of pragmatics is taken to be that of providing a set of principles which dictate how knowledge of language and general reasoning interact in the process of language understanding, to give rise to various different kinds of effects which can be achieved in communication.

The starting point for studies in pragmatics is the mismatch, often a big one, between what words “mean,” which is encoded in the rules of the language, and what speakers “mean” by using them, which may be much richer (Kempson, 2003, p. 396).

As Kempson states above, pragmatics is the study of language and how it is used in communication, which requires not only understanding lexical denotations but also context dependent connotations. For native speakers of a language, the gap between language and language-in-use may go largely unnoticed because of the rules of interaction that are learned through a lifetime of cultural participation. The rules are often opaque and taken for granted by native speakers due to the frequency of interaction. To become aware of the various rules of interaction within a culture may require stepping outside of the culture and to experience a different way of doing things. “Understanding one’s own cultural heritage, as well as other cultural communities, requires taking the perspective of people of contrasting backgrounds” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 11). There is no question that pragmatics exemplifies and is inextricably linked to the cultural heritages in which languages have developed. For these reasons, the case study participants identified pragmatics as being a measurement of L2 proficiency. The interviews reveal four broad categories (though undoubtedly there are more) that fit under the

pragmatic umbrella: complaining, web-based communication, explicitness, and academic rules for communicating.

Dao-Ming and Belita relayed experiences in which they were not taken seriously by NESs in situations of conflict. In Excerpt 6.16 below, Belita describes the differences in the ways Guatemalans and Americans complain. In Belita's explanation just before Excerpt 6.16, Belita describes how, even after calling a telemarketer eight times to request a refund on a product with which she was not satisfied, the telemarketer was still not respecting her request. Thus, she asked her stepfather to intervene, and when he did, she noted that English speakers must use strong language if they wish to be treated fairly. In the end, Belita learned that it is important to "...learn to complain" like an American.

*Excerpt 6.16: Belita (FS-April 25, 2010)*

And it's like in in my country we no are used to speak strong you always say please but when he was in the phone he was speaking so angry and so disappointment and using a lot of words and they he no stop uh talking it's not like me that I need think first so two days after the money was in my house and everything was good and he say me need use more strong English and you need use different words for say that you are really angry so I think that we need to learn to complain.

[FSCGRP242510, pp. 75-76]

Dao-Ming concurs:

*Excerpt 6.17: Dao-Ming (FS-April 25, 2010)*

Uh (.03) I don't know I think there was situation because I used to work with Jim and uh I like if I want to complain about something I always let Jim to complain because they would treat native speakers seriously more seriously and uh um I just get this feeling that they wouldn't treat you feel serious if like you sound like immigrish uh immigrant.

[FSCGRP242510, pp. 72-73]

Thus, learning how to complain in the L2 is an indicator of increased L2 development for L2 learners. To be certain, complaining requires more than pragmatic knowledge.

Having a certain level of competence with vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation

undoubtedly is necessary. However, having the confidence to comprehend and respond appropriately in real-time during an emotionally charged situation also requires developed speaking and listening skills; skills that are dictated by pragmatics as much if not more so than by discrete linguistic features.

Marcos, highlighting the degree of specificity U.S. speakers expect compared to that of Spain, made the following observation.

*Excerpt 6.18: Marcos (February 8, 2010)*

And that's a little thing that that bothers a little bothers me a little bit here in in English is that here English you have to be so explicit you have to ask everything to to the last to the very last point in Spain you don't have to ask so much you can leave it there and they know what you are talking about you have to be very concrete here and sometimes you well in Spain sometimes you ask the question and you ask him for XXXX and and all and all the things he replies you ask a little question and they answer you the big picture but here in in America they just answer you what you ask about.  
[MRO2INT2810]

In Excerpt 6.18, Marcos is responding to his frustrations at the Laundromat the previous day. Rather than learning how to distinguish the detergent from the softener in the soap vending machine, the lady he asked proceeded to tell him how to operate the machines instructing him to add the detergent first, then to add the softener later in the wash cycle. Marcos learned from this that in order to get information in the United States, it is necessary to ask specific questions, rather than more general questions. Thus for Marcos, learning to ask for information in a culturally appropriate manner and being specific when making inquiries is a way of gauging L2 proficiency.

Turning to digital forms of communication, Dao-Ming emphasized that there are cultural differences that must be learned when posting comments on websites.



*Excerpt 6.19: Dao-Ming & Michael (FS-April 25, 2010)*

- D: Like uh I know how to post I know the rules to post on Chinese website.  
 M: Umh.  
 D: Like public bulletins and I know the rules how to write like a an English bulletin you know.  
 M: Umh.  
 D: Uh what kind of uh comment not appropriate.  
 M: Umh.  
 D: I like that yeah double identity (hh).  
 M: Okay so so they're different rules for posting for what you can say what can't say.  
 D: Uh I you can say anything on internet just uh like uh you don't want to uh (hh) cause I don't know people to curse behind you and uh you want to be pleasant you want to um voice out your opinion and you don't want to uh be un- unpleasant so you need to know the uh rules I guess. [FSCGRP242510 p.52]

That there is an etiquette for communicating via web-based media is well known.

Dao-Ming, in Excerpt 6.19, indicates that the etiquette differs from culture to culture and that it takes time to learn the differences. Learning the rules of posting a comment on websites, therefore, becomes a way to measure one's own L2 proficiency level. In many ways, Dao-Ming's observation in excerpt 6.19 is similar to her comments about learning how to complain in English. There is an art to having your voice heard, while not offending others.

Finally, in the context of academia, Belita and Dao-Ming note the differences in academic writing expectations and the frustrations with trying to learn these differences when a letter grade is at stake. Belita, in particular, became very animated when discussing the pragmatics of academic writing.

*Excerpt 6.20: Belita (FS-April 4, 2010)*

I get a D and I was so upset (hh) but then I the only thing that that I did is put the topic sentence at the beginning and now I have a a (hh) maybe you need more thinking of the process and not only the idea but is this kind of thing that teachers more grade the idea or put this is wrong or it's this is the same but they won't respect you but it's only that the process of the a you put and then if you cause even if you are develop that idea that maybe you are wrong maybe can't transfer.

[FSCGRP14410, p. 13]

In Excerpt 6.20, Belita claims the only change she made in the essay she had written was to move the topic sentence from somewhere in the middle of the paragraph to the beginning. With this simple adjustment in her essay, the teacher changed her grade from a “D” to an “A.” She continues by acknowledging that organizational styles may differ, and thinks teachers should focus on content and the development of ideas, rather than paragraph format, i.e. topic sentence, supporting sentences, conclusion. As Belita says above, it may be that the student has formulated the concepts incorrectly and she asks the question: Which is more important, ideas or format?

Belita, through this experience with her composition teacher, has learned that NESs place great importance on the organization of academic written discourse, but she is visibly upset that more emphasis is directed toward organization than the expression of ideas. Thus, learning the pragmatics of academic communication indicates L2 development.

*A researcher’s emic perspective.* Thus far, this chapter has attempted to define the contentious issue of L2 language proficiency by examining various quantitative and qualitative measures and linking them to the English L2 skills of the four case study participants. The focus has necessarily been on the case study participants’ production of English via grammaticality assessments, standardized L2 proficiency exam scores, native speaker perceptions, and case study participant self-reports. For many of the SLA research hypotheses, i.e. the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), the Output Hypothesis (Canale & Swain, 1980; Swain, 1985), and Processibility Theory (Pienemann, 1998), these perspectives would be sufficient for describing the case study participants’ English L2 proficiency. However, successful communication is predicated on interlocutors sharing in the co-construction of communication events (Chalhoub-Deville & Deville, 2005; Young, 2011);

therefore, I would be remiss if I did not analyze the native English speaker's participation in the interviews. If an L2 learner is proficient, then it is possible to postulate that the native English speaker will comprehend the L2 speaker's utterances and respond appropriately, with minimal conversational repair sequences and vice-a-versa.

The challenge of accurately representing the participants' L2 proficiency via a two dimensional format (writer to reader) has been no small undertaking. Even by extracting extensive passages from multiple transcripts recorded over multiple interviews and settings, their English L2 abilities may remain opaque. I attribute this partially to the difficulty of representing, two dimensionally, the four dimensional construct of *interactional competence*, "...the pragmatic relationship between participants' employment of linguistic and interactional resources and the contexts in which they are employed" (Young, 2011, p. 428). L2 proficiency is four dimensional in the sense that there are at least two interlocutors involved in the interaction, the language shared between the interlocutors, as well as the extra semiotic linguistic features, including gesture, facial expression, intonation, and the social context. In addition to discrete linguistic features such as syntax, phonology, and lexis, successful communication is predicated on interlocutor cooperation.

...successful interaction presupposes not only a shared knowledge of the world, the reference to a common external context of communication, but also the construction of a shared internal context or "sphere of inter-subjectivity" that is built through the collaborative efforts of interactional partners (Kramsch, 1986, p. 367).

Readers of this study have, undoubtedly, struggled with comprehending some of the excerpts that the case study participants produced. If, what Kramsch states above is true about successful communication, then many comprehension difficulties can be attributed not to the lack of sharing world knowledge or sharing a common external context, but because of

the lack of intersubjectivity. In other words, the reader may not be able to access and rely on the multiple shared interactional resources present at the time of the verbal exchanges (Young, 2011, p. 430). Readers of this dissertation were not physically present during the interviews; therefore, they do not have access to the semiotic features of gesture, facial expressions, or intonation. Furthermore, the readers do not have access to the shared historical knowledge that the case study participants and I built across the duration of the study. In other words, the case study participants and I co-constructed our relationship, hence our communication, over time relying on the five principles of ethnomethodological CA: indexicality, documentary method of interpretation, reciprocity, normative accountability, and reflexivity (Seedhouse, 2004). We were able to draw on these principles, both historically and in the moment, to co-construct meaningful interactions. The shared internal context is co-constructed not through words and structure alone, but is supported with gesture, facial expressions, intonation, gaze, and pragmatic knowledge. Thus, continuing with Young's definition of interactional competence, he claims that interactional competence "...is co-constructed by all participants in a discursive practice and that IC varies with the practice and with the participants" (p. 428). Kasper (2006) concurs, "For learners and their coparticipants, interactional competencies are both resources and objects of learning. In both of their roles as in the learning process, interactional competencies are only available to participants and analysts in concrete, local, situated activities" (p. 87). That interactional competence and social interaction are recognized to be participatory phenomena, to assess the case study participants' English L2 proficiency without analyzing the interlocutor's participation, i.e. me as the interviewer in the interviews, ignores a crucial piece of the communication cycle.

Grice (1975) suggested that conversation wants to cooperate, and when there is trouble in a conversation, people have strategies to repair the trouble so that the conversation can continue. Some conversational repair strategies include, clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks (Long, 1981). Specifically, interlocutors will ask that utterances be repeated, elaborated on, or summarized to ensure understanding. Pica (1994) conflates these three delineations calling them *signals*, since Long's repair strategies overlap in definition to some degree, and since all three essentially signal a problem during the natural exchange of information in the conversation. The kind of conversational problem is not Pica's concern, only that there is a problem. These signals serve to notify the speaker that the interlocutor needs additional information or requires clarification if the conversation is to proceed. These repair strategies are often realized through "repeating, elaborating, or simplifying the original message" (Pica, 1994, p. 497). These strategies are not specific to native speaker-non-native speaker (NS-NNS) interactions but are common conversation management strategies between native speakers. However, as Pica states, these negotiation strategies are "...significantly more abundant among NS-NNS, even more so during NNS-NNS interaction" (p. 497).

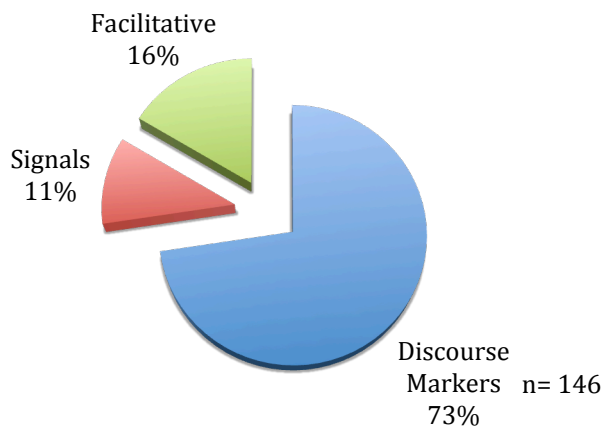
The purpose of Long's and Pica's research has been to determine the effectiveness of these strategies for L2 acquisition. In other words, do conversational signals assist in immediate uptake and long term internalization by the L2 learner? It is possible, however, to use these same conversational signals to determine the co-constructed achievement of L2 proficiency. By doing so, it is possible to more fully represent the interactional competencies of the L2 learners, thereby providing a more complete analysis of the participants' English L2 proficiency. Furthermore, by analyzing the native speaker's conversational turns for

Pica's signals, Norton's (1995) call to include the role of native speakers in the learning process is addressed.

Using the same transcript excerpts as I used for the quantitative measurements of L2 proficiency presented earlier in this chapter, I analyzed all of the conversational turns, looking for signals that were initiated either by me or by the case study participants. Signals, as defined by Pica (1994) are conversational turns which display "... features of negotiation [that] portray a process in which a listener requests message clarification and confirmation and speaker follows up these requests, often through repeating, elaborating, or simplifying the original message" (p. 497).

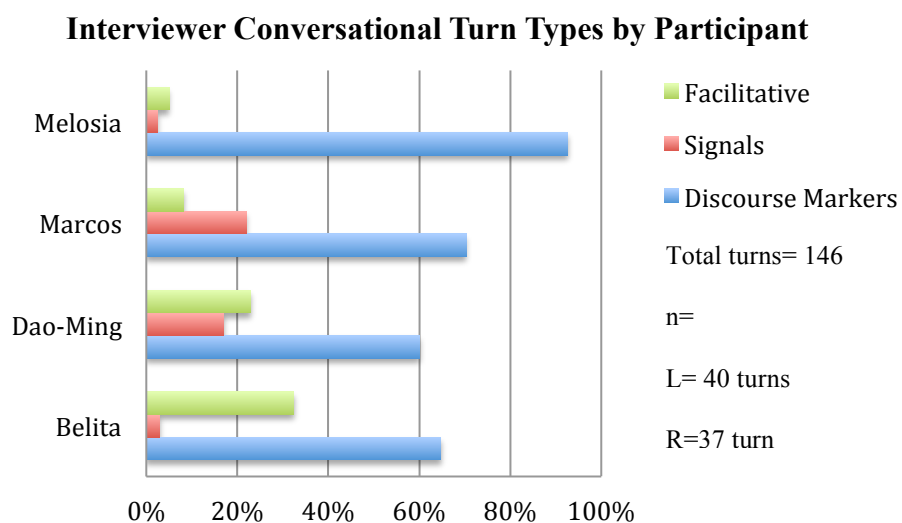
There were a total of 302 conversational turns across all four transcripts. Of those 302 conversational turns, I initiated 146 or 48.3% of the conversational turns. Figure 6.1 breaks down the conversational turns I take across the four transcripts by discourse marker, signal, and facilitative turns. It is assumed that discourse markers and facilitative turns do not interfere with interlocutor comprehension or comprehensibility. Figure 6.2 breaks out the various types of conversational turns I take by case study participant.

### Interviewer Conversational Turn Types



**Figure 6.1: Interviewer Conversational Turn Types**

Figure 6.1 shows that discourse markers and facilitative turns overwhelmingly dominate my conversational turns at 73% and 16% respectively. Only 11% of the turns are signals in which I initiate a repair sequence. If repair sequences are taken as representative of the comprehension-comprehensibility dyad, then my ability to comprehend the L2 speakers and their ability to comprehend me is roughly 89%.

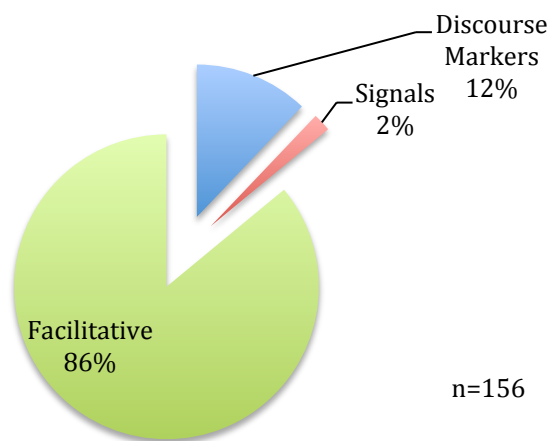


**Figure 6.2: Interviewer Conversational Turn Types by Participant**

Figure 6.2 shows the types of conversational turns I took during the individual interviews for the transcript segments analyzed. According to Figure 6.2, I entered into repair sequences with Dao-Ming and Marcos nearly 20% of the time during the interview segment analyzed, whereas with Melosia and Belita, repair sequences mounted to less than 5% of the time. It is interesting to note that the greatest percentage of repair sequences occurs with the two case study participants who scored highest on their respective standardized English L2 proficiency exams (TOEFL and/or IELTS).

Remembering that conversation is co-constructed across conversational turns between interlocutors, it would be an incomplete analysis if only my conversational turn types were analyzed. Furthermore, observing the type of conversational turns the case study participants take may indicate their level of comprehension. In other words, if the case study participants initiate a signal turn (clarification request, confirmation check, and/or comprehension check), it may be because they did not understand a portion of my utterance. Charts 6.3 and 6.4 below indicate the type of conversational turns the case study participants take with me.

**Percent of Conversational Turn Types by Participants**



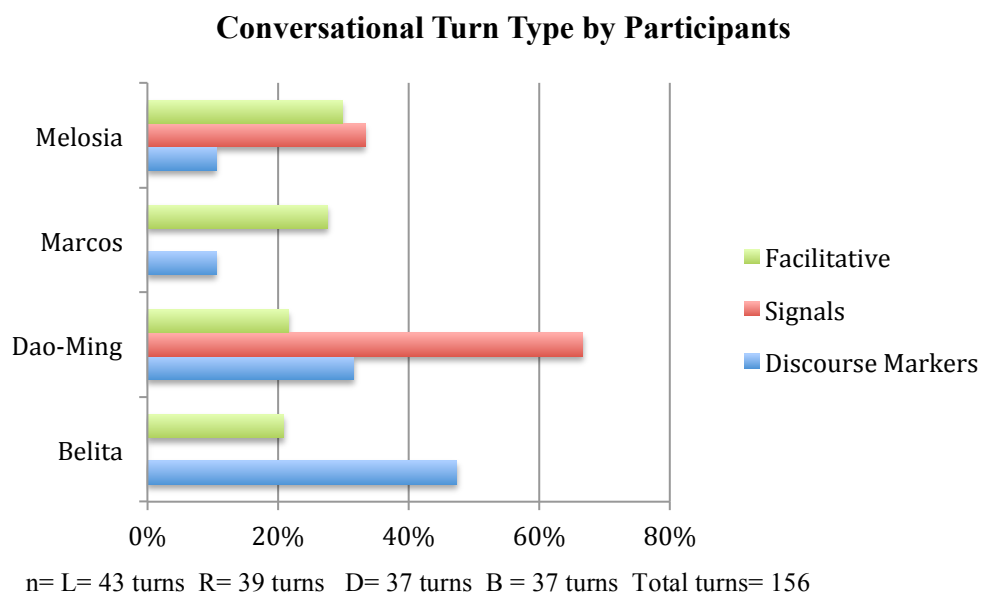
**Figure 6.3: Percent of Conversational Turn Types by Participants**

Figure 6.3 indicates that, from a total of 156 conversational turns across all four transcripts, the case study participants were responding to my utterances with facilitative turns 86% of the time. This suggests the case study participants were extending the conversation forward, rather than stopping to confirm comprehension in some way.

Figure 6.4 breaks out the conversation turn types taken by case study participant. Like Figure 6.3, Figure 6.4 shows that overwhelmingly the case study participants invoked



facilitative turns and that discourse markers were used only sparingly. Furthermore, only Dao-Ming and Melosia initiated signal type conversational turns, two for Dao-Ming and one for Melosia. The transcripts reveal that Dao-Ming initiated two confirmation checks (lines 1062-1064 and 1101-1103) while Melosia invoked a clarification check (line 47).



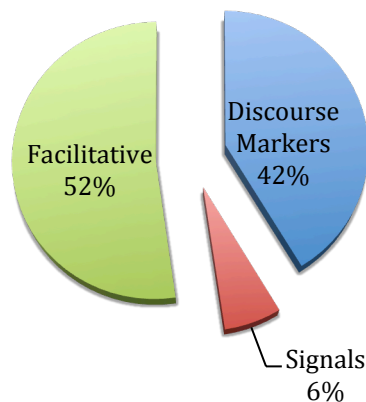
**Figure 6.4: Conversational Turn Types by Case Study Participant**

Finally, Figure 6.5 shows the overall percentage of facilitative, signal, and discourse marker conversational turns taken by either the case study participants or me. As indicated in the chart, 52% of the conversational turns taken by the case study participants and me are facilitative in nature and 42% are discourse markers. Only 6% are turns that indicate some type of conversational repair was necessary.

The fact that 94% of the conversational turns are non-problematic indicates that the interlocutors were mutually intelligible and that flow of information continued along a

productive path. This suggests that the input and output cycles were not inordinately disrupted by the need for comprehension, clarification, or confirmation checks.

### Types of Conversational Turns Overall



**Figure 6.5: Overall Conversational Turn Types**

Before concluding, I want to devote some time demonstrating the communicative power of intersubjectivity: in many ways, superseding grammaticality in the co-construction of comprehension. The following utterances are taken from the interaction between Belita and myself and from the same transcript excerpt used throughout this chapter.

What you gonna do when I think of that you gonna be the first person that knows but no ask more (lines 861-862).

Taken by itself, Belita's utterance is virtually incomprehensible. The grammatical structure is such that it embeds a question, an adverbial clause, an independent clause and uses a stage 2 form of negation, omits the determiner such as *any* and the auxiliary verb *do*. Yet, in the lines that follow, I respond with a discourse marker and a facilitative conversational turn, not with a request for clarification. What permits comprehension? If we look at Belita's

previous utterance in combination with the one above, we are provided with some indexical clues,

So the maybe one month ago I say to my father “Please don’t ask me again. What you gonna do when I think of that you gonna be the first person that knows but no ask more (lines 859-862).

Here Belita indexes her father, *my father*, and that she told him something, *don’t ask me*.

With this indexing, the second utterance becomes a little more comprehensible because Belita provides a time frame, *one month ago* and to whom she is addressing her comments, *my father*. Again, my conversational turn between these utterances is one of laughter, a kind of discourse marker, but one that indicates full comprehension of Belita’s utterances.

Continuing up the transcript, Belita adds still more indexical information:

So it’s a really */estresful/ (stressful)* when people say “What you wanna do” and I I say “I don’t know” (hh) I don’t know So the maybe one month ago I say to my father “Please don’t ask me again. What you gonna do when I think of that you gonna be the first person that knows but no ask more (lines 856-862).

In this string of utterances, we learn that Belita is stressed, */estresful/ (stressful)*, about her future, *What you wanna do*. Throughout all these utterances, Belita’s grammatical, even phonological structure, remains difficult to penetrate, yet she successfully communicates her irritations with being asked about her future plans. How is this accomplished?

Belita indexes the topic of her future and then goes on in a rhetorically expected way by describing details about the sources of her stress, her father asking her what she is going to do. This string of utterances closely resembles that of a paragraph with a topic sentence followed up with supporting details. A rhetorical pattern that we are both familiar with.

Again, my utterances are either discourse markers or facilitative throughout.

Again, continuing up the interaction we get more background on the sources of Belita's stress. She understands that if she does not learn English, then she cannot do anything in her new country of residence, but at the same time she also sees several different avenues she can pursue, such as moving to California or Miami where it may be easier for her to get her dentistry license than in her current state of residence.

- 842 B: I really don't know yet what I wanna do with my life [(hh)].  
 843 M: [(hh)] It's okay Belita I  
 844 don't either (hh).  
 845 B: I don't know if we I wanna be a master in pro- prosthetics cause I really like.  
 846 M: Umh.  
 847 B: Or pediatrician or if I wanna stay like a XXXX dentist.  
 848 M: Umh.  
 849 B: I don't know I don't know (hh).  
 850 M: But that's exciting.  
 851 B: Yeah.  
 852 M: Yeah you know the world's out there hunh.

In line 843, I acknowledge that I am not only understanding Belita's dilemma, but that I empathize with her in some way, *It's okay, I don't know either*, ending with a small laugh. At the beginning of the utterance our laughing overlaps. By ending the utterance with a laugh, a kind of solidarity is expressed. Toward the end of this interaction (lines 850-852), I again respond with facilitative utterances that are intended to be consoling but also hopeful, *But that's exciting. Yeah you know the world's out there hun*. Thus indexing the excitement of life in general and the unknown paths it takes us down. What is not indexed is the intersubjectivity that Belita and I co-constructed through previous interactions. This intersubjectivity scaffolds the conversation for Belita and me, but not for the reader. Belita and I share similar educational paths. Belita is returning to school after being a professional dentist in Guatemala for 10 years. I returned to school after being a professional ESL teacher in intensive English programs for 15 years. We are both non-traditional students and have

returned to school out of necessity. We both empathize with the challenges non-traditional students face when returning to school after several years in the workplace.

Space does not allow for the reconstruction of each utterance up to the point where conversational topic of future plans is introduced, but the point is clear. Belita, responding to my initial question, *Um do you think someday you'll go to another state where they have a dentistry school? (lines 825-287)*, is able to provide the indexing necessary for me to comprehend and contribute to the conversation where appropriate. Furthermore, not evidenced in the transcript is the fact that Belita and I had talked about what she might do in the future on previous occasions.

Thus, even with the correlations of researcher conversational turns and case study participant conversational turns presented in Figures 6.1 through 6.5, the data still does not adequately capture the level of interactional competence that the case study participants displayed during our face-to-face interviews. As stated before, the interviews were not videotaped; therefore, the semiotic features that the case study participants and I drew on to support the spoken utterances are absent from the analysis. Furthermore, even if the interviews had been videotaped, analyses would remain incomplete because the intersubjectivity that the case study participants and I co-constructed across multiple interviews, emails, texts, written documents, informal conversations, and social gatherings helped to sustain and inform the face-to-face interactions. Evidence for this intersubjectivity is present between the case study participants and me, but is possibly invisible to the reader. This finding leads to the questions: Can interactional competence, including documenting intersubjectivity for the purposes of determining L2 proficiency be achieved? If so, can this

sort of assessment be mass-produced and “standardized” like TOEFL or IELTS? Finally, should it? These are all questions for future research.

### **Conclusion**

The current chapter has dissected the issues embedded within second language learning and L2 proficiency. The four perspectives of L2 proficiency that have been outlined in this chapter provide, at best, a snapshot of L2 proficiency. I have demonstrated that even though advancements in technology have allowed for more holistic assessments of L2 proficiency, standardized L2 proficiency exams such as TOEFL and IELTS still fall short in providing an accurate assessment of the communicative abilities of L2 learners. Likewise, the qualitative assessments provide a narrow view of what it means to be proficient. There is little question that each of the case study participants possesses the linguistic, pragmatic, and interactional skills necessary to achieve the goals they set for themselves. Some of the participants clearly demonstrate greater structural accuracy than others, while some exhibit greater fluency. Ultimately, the question of L2 proficiency comes down to what has greater value, linguistic accuracy or communicative competence, manifestations of the central debate in SLA: cognitive processing versus sociolinguistics. I think the re-construction of the conversation between Belita and me illustrates the communicative power of indexicality over grammatical accuracy. Yet, I do not believe that it is necessary, nor fruitful, to insist on one perspective (quantitative or qualitative) or the other. All of the perspectives have their faults. TOEFL and IELTS are decontextualized and rely on static forms of interaction to assess productive skills. The native speaker and case study participant emic perspectives are highly subjective, raising questions of validity and reliability. Finally, the research perspective based on conversational turns is problematic as there is no empirical evidence that

conversational turns, specifically repair sequences, are indicative of L2 proficiency.

Furthermore, there is no clear and systematic method for incorporating intersubjectivity in L2 proficiency assessment measures.

Clearly, accuracy is important. Each of the secondary native speaker participants, intuitively, based their assessments of the case study participants' L2 proficiency on discrete linguistic features, demonstrating that adhering, at least loosely, to the structural parameters of the L2 is important. By the same token, though, each of the native speakers claimed that the case study participants had good English and were doing fine in school, suggesting that on some cognitive level, the NESs and the case study participants achieved their own intersubjectivity. Returning to the statement by Li (2007) that began this chapter, (reprinted here for convenience)

If you understand the language responsively and are able to manipulate it, you pass; if you have access to the more highly valued form of that language, you gain a more prestigious identity. In other words, to construct an identity that allows access, you need to master the language first (pp. 261-262).

the terms *understand*, *responsively*, *manipulate*, *valued form*, *prestigious*, and *mastery* become, at once, highly subjective and suspect. What does *understand* mean in the context of L2 proficiency? What does *highly valued* or *master* mean to the learner and to the native speaking community. Ultimately, the various connotations can only be determined by what the L2 learners want to do with their L2 and what the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1982) permits as acceptable. These questions are central to our understanding of the relationship of identity, investment, and access to SLA.

## L2 Proficiency Data

Belita: (February 15, 2010) [BTR2INT21510]

- 770 M: Okay um I think I already know the answer to this but why did you choose this university and  
771 when did you come?  
772 B: I think this was my destiny (hh).  
773 M: [(hh)].  
774 B: When I uh came here for visiting my mom maybe 9 months after I (...03) after I really decided to  
775 where I gonna move.  
776 **(End of Tape Side B: Counter # 608 4:30 PM)**  
777 M: Just before you decided to come you.  
778 B: Umh.  
779 M: Came up here.  
780 B: And I don't know but I think that in my interior I was like postpone came to here can't do all this  
781 all of this stuff that I I I am doing now because my brother always is like previser person I don't  
782 know what but if you need to study maybe two years there they get ready for this but I jump  
783 (laugh) I don't know even I was a prepare many things.  
784 M: Okay.  
785 B: So eh when I take my mind "Okay I wanna move."  
786 M: Umh.  
787 B: I I am putting newspaper and radio the selling of my things she said okay here it it's easy you can  
788 get a visa I have a tourist visa but an I think that she was afraid too if uh if she say me that this is  
789 hard or something I don't wanna move so she always say "no it's easy it's easy" but she know um  
790 get all the information so I came here with a tourist visa for 6 months and I was really afraid.  
791 M: Umh.  
792 B: Because I no have anything now in Guatemala and I anything here so I spend two weeks like in  
793 vacation and my brother was say me "did you went to the university did you know what gonna do  
794 or something" and I say that (sigh) "maybe the other week."  
795 M: (hh).  
796 B: And then I decide came to here but I say to one friend of my mom that maybe she can came with  
797 me because I don't know anything and she working the university and she said okay "let's go" I  
798 looking information the CEL- CELAC department and everything and I came to here one paper  
799 but I CELAC English program and I found that they can make all the arrangements for my visa  
800 here so I walk here in front of the building and then a:::fter::: that day I decide that I need to be  
801 here.  
802 M: Umh.  
803 B: So I sent all my application I wait maybe 3 weeks and I say "I really believe in God" and I say "If  
804 if you wanna I /estei/ (stay) here you need you need fix all this stuff for me because I no can do  
805 anything and after two weeks I receive the visa student so I say okay (hh) if no return XX to  
806 Guatemala again.  
807 M: Okay.  
808 B: Uh (hh).  
809 M: Amazing.  
810 B: (hh).  
811 M: I love hearing these stories.  
812 B: (hh).  
813 M: You know such courage you know and bravery I mean it it really.  
814 B: Uh thank you.  
815 M: Yeah yeah.  
816 B: But oh my God I think that sometimes I do thins without really thinking all the consequence.  
817 M: Umh umh.  
818 B: And maybe why I risk myself.  
819 M: Umh.  
820 B: For things like that.



- 821 M: Umh, this university did not have a dentistry school a a dental hygienist.  
 822 B: Umh.  
 823 M: Program but not a dentistry school.  
 824 B: Umh.  
 825 M: Um do you think someday you'll go to another state where they have [a denti]stry=  
 826 B: [I really]  
 827 M: =school  
 828 B: I am thinking en move to maybe Miami because I have friends there.  
 829 M: Umh.  
 830 B: But everybody say me the same "What are you gonna do you wanna start a dentist there's a place  
 831 that you are and everything but actually this first summer and semester I only focusing learning  
 832 English.  
 833 M: Umh.  
 834 B: Because if I no learn English I no can do anything.  
 835 M: Right.  
 836 B: So I no I don't worry about all this stuff I am just focusing on English but now I am applying to  
 837 get the board board for practice here.  
 838 M: Umh.  
 839 B: Or XXXX maybe three different persons say me that California and Miami more easy to get this  
 840 board.  
 841 M: Okay okay okay.  
 842 B: I really don't know yet what I wanna do with my life [(hh)].  
 843 M: [(hh)] It's okay Belita I don't either (hh).  
 844 B: I don't know if we I wanna be a master in pro- prosthetics cause I really like.  
 845 M: Umh.  
 846 B: Or pediatrician or if I wanna stay like a XXXX dentist.  
 847 M: Umh.  
 848 B: I don't know I don't know (hh).  
 849 M: But that's exciting.  
 850 B: Yeah.  
 851 M: Yeah you know the world's out there hun.  
 852 B: It's exciting but I am use to be like a plan person for example I need to say "I gonna finish this at  
 853 that month and I finish."  
 854 M: Umh.  
 855 B: So it's a really /estresful/ (stressful) when people say "What you wanna do" and I I say "I don't  
 856 know" (hh) I don't know.  
 857 M: Umh.  
 858 B: So the maybe one month ago I say to my father "Please don't ask me again.  
 859 M: (hh).  
 860 B: What you gonna do when I think of that you gonna be the first person that knows but no ask  
 861 more."  
 862 M: Umh.  
 863 B: Because it's so stressful that everybody eh "what are you thinking is that XXXX you are no" so.  
 864 M: Yeah okay no more about questions [about that topic].  
 865 B: [no more questions].  
 866 M: I'll wait I'll wait in May and then I'll ask you again.  
 867 B: [No I XXXX (hh)].  
 868 M: [(laughing, laughing)].  
 869 B: No I need to after May.

Dao-Ming (February 22, 2010) [DNL2INT22210]

- 1060 M: Okay alright okay so the- wh- wou- (stuttering) what a different direction I thought that um so  
 1061 your boyfriend didn't have any (...02) um (...02) say in your wanting to come to the United States  
 1062 D: Uh uh I think I probably uh wouldn't XXXX state wasn't for him.  
 1063 M: Okay.  
 1064 D: Yeah I came to XXX- This city because of him.  
 1065 M: Because of him okay.  
 1066 D: But um I have always wanted to come to States but I applied for a visa like in 2 2003 I was denied  
 1067 so I could not all the stuff and um so visa officer just took a look like uh 2 minutes and uh uh he  
 1068 rejected me in this arrogant way he was really bad impression (hh).  
 1069 M: [Yeah].  
 1070 D: [Of the] States and then and they did that an- and um uh the boredom- boarder control and a lot of  
 1071 other stuff just uh uh there's foreign people very bad impression you read all that people get  
 1072 harassed and at the cus- customs.  
 1073 M: Okay.  
 1074 D: And uh n- and there I wasn't I di- I didn't apply for visa again.  
 1075 M: Umh.  
 1076 D: For 5 years uh because I was really discouraged by that.  
 1077 M: Yeah.  
 1078 D: But uh officer I I was very friendly and my XXXX that I could um uh like get a um um a  
 1079 residency in a a immigrate- immigrant status XXX after a year.  
 1080 M: Umh.  
 1081 D: And uh you know uh I would usually still come to the States to visit but I probably I would go to  
 1082 Australia it's easier and more friendly way.  
 1083 M: Yeah.  
 1084 D: And uh but um uh XXXX um uh I decided to come to this city and I went through a lot of stuff  
 1085 and uh again at the airport uh uh because CNMI still kind of U- US territory but uh in- we will still  
 1086 need a visa from.  
 1087 M: Um.  
 1088 D: To from CNMI to here or some travel documents.  
 1089 M: Okay.  
 1090 D: So I was very I was harassed at the airport by that uh CBP guy uh Culture and Border Control and  
 1091 uh Border Protection that was that guy was talking to me you know in very condensing way.  
 1092 M: Okay.  
 1093 D: And they it made me furious but uh I couldn't do anything about it so that's why um I I was uh  
 1094 planning to go to Australia but uh I came here anyway.  
 1095 M: Okay okay.  
 1096 D: Yeah.  
 1097 M: Now this agent was that in California Hawaii in CNMI.  
 1098 D: My visa uh yeah uh yeah XXXX[X dam].  
 1099 M: [The] the the Customs Agent [that was very condens]=  
 1100 D: [Oh in CNMI].  
 1101 M: =In CNMI.  
 1102 D: In CNMI.  
 1103 M: As you were leaving CNMI.  
 1104 D: Yeah an XXX Boarder Control uh because I I wen- I didn't have a visa I don't have a visa and uh  
 1105 I have just a visa /wivər/ (waiver) because CNMI is technically US territory an- (...03) I I can't  
 1106 apply for visa in CNMI.  
 1107 M: Umh.  
 1108 D: I can't there's no if your government does not uh listed here so I can't I need to go to another  
 1109 country to apply for a visa then come back.  
 1110 M: Umh.  
 1111 D: It's all uh just ridiculous so I went to uh this uh office and actually XXX office but XXX was  
 1112 really nice.

- 1113 M: Umh.
- 1114 D: And I think an I'm going to this university I'm going to study but I need to go out of the country  
1115 to apply for a visa and then ca- can you just save me the pain and uh like give me the /wivər/  
1116 (waiver) he gave me a /wivər/ (waiver) he didn't um he won't waive my application fee.
- 1117 M: Okay.
- 1118 D: So he was really nice.
- 1119 M: Yeah right.
- 1120 D: So I had all this so I think I would be fine so when I my airplane uh was going to take off in an  
1121 hour this agent this uh agent was talking to me in a very condensing way like I was trying to  
1122 smuggle into US or something "Where's your visa" I said I don't have visa I have a visa /wivər/  
1123 (waiver) "No that's not enough" but uh I said "but you're director told me that's enough" "I don't  
1124 care what's the director said" I said "um you work for the director" (hh) an (hh) you not care what  
1125 he say" [(hh:::):].
- 1126 M: [(hh) Good for you].
- 1127 D: And um anyway he went to the- I have to refer you and then he grab my document when he took  
1128 after and uh when came back he was mumbling a lot of F-words.
- 1129 M: Ah.
- 1130 D: But he let me go and um I was r- really embarrassed because he uh you know I wa- a lot of people  
1131 were looking at me and uh.
- 1132 M: Sure.
- 1133 D: I was really humiliated and uh I was last ta- passenger to board and uh but I didn't get harassed  
1134 again in um Guam .
- 1135 M: Yeah.
- 1136 D: And Hawaii th- they were friendly just XXXX you know.
- 1137 M: Okay.
- 1138 D: In CNMI.
- 1139 M: Okay uh so hmph fascinating um so when did you come here to this university.
- 1140 D: Yeah.
- 1141 M: Umh.
- 1142 D: Month and a half ago.
- 1143 M: About a month and half ago right an- okay um (...04) okay um how are we doing on time do you  
1144 have a=
- 1145 D: =I have more time
- 1146 M: *(I'm fumbling for my cell phone to check the time).* Alright um we've actually been here about an  
1147 hour.
- 1148 D: XXX.
- 1149 M: So um why don't we stop there.
- 1150 D: Okay.
- 1151 M: Um (cough) you've answered many of these questions already here.
- 1152 D: Umh.
- 1153 M: I think uh so why don't we kind of stop there.
- 1154 D: Umh.
- 1155 M: If you'd like you know I can buy you know.
- 1156 D: Oh no no I have no no no no no.
- 1157 M: A biscuit or so.
- 1158 D: I have XXXX.
- 1159 *(There's a break here. I turned off the tape recorder but then turned it back on. I offered to buy*  
1160 *her some food or drink but she refused. She has never accepted my offers to buy her food or*  
1161 *drink. Is she being polite, watching her weight, or is she afraid that I'm trying to get too familiar)*
- 1162 D: I like in the uh in the class and the uh there was this word bar mitzvah what's that.

Marcos: (February 8, 2010) [MRO2INT2810]

- 789 M: Okay um so why did you choose this university I mean there are a lot of engineering schools how  
790 did you land here in the Southwest United States?
- 791 R: It's like this university chose me?
- 792 M: (hh).
- 793 R: Yeah now yeah I was working with my master advisor.
- 794 M: Umh.
- 795 R: And my master advisor was there.
- 796 M: Umh.
- 797 R: He made his Ph.D. there.
- 798 M: Your advisor in Spain?
- 799 R: Yes.
- 800 M: Got his Ph.D. [here at this university].
- 801 R: [Yes in] 1991 I think so.
- 802 M: Okay.
- 803 R: My advisor's advisor (hh) from Spain did the Ph.D. and they are just like the 2 biggest the biggest  
804 fish in the /apartment/ (department).
- 805 M: Okay.
- 806 R: One of them was the the boss of the university there I don't how it's called the dean no.
- 807 M: The president?
- 808 R: Yeah the president of the university.
- 809 M: Okay.
- 810 R: In in that's the two biggest fish and they were the two came there.
- 811 M: Uhn.
- 812 R: So, so.
- 813 M: There were from this university, both of them.
- 814 R: They are they are from Spain well they're [from Spain].
- 815 M: [from Spain] okay.
- 816 R: But they came here to do their Ph.D.
- 817 M: Ah, I see.
- 818 R: They came here to do Ph.D. well first came I then went back to Spain then took another one and  
819 I'm like the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation I think.
- 820 M: Okay.
- 821 R: So you know those are two two people that want to be like them.
- 822 M: Okay.
- 823 R: You really want.
- 824 **(END OF SIDE B, TAPE 1, COUNTER # 612)**
- 825 M: And they were incredible?
- 826 R: Yes they are incredible they are just nice people not just good teachers they are nice people.
- 827 M: Umh.
- 828 R: And I think that eh it was very good for me.
- 829 M: Umh.
- 830 R: To to came here and and this this I look at it long time ago but I didn't think about this because I  
831 actually was in Spain we have a grant something I can come here so I let it sleep for awhile but  
832 then in this summer eh he was awarded with a Prince of Estudios and XXXX.
- 833 M: Umh.
- 834 R: And that was given to this university so they they have 3 blanks open.
- 835 M: Okay.
- 836 R: To come here for /estudants/ (students) so so he told me because I was going to start the Ph.D.  
837 with him in Spain.
- 838 M: Umh.
- 839 R: Well I have 3 place open and you can you can go here XXXX can apply and let's see how it how  
840 it goes because it's not just his decision,
- 841 M: Yeah.

- 842 R: It's a committee so you know so can apply.  
 843 M: Umh.  
 844 R: And and what you know there was a apply I was XXXXX because that's a that's a long time here  
 845 and I have a girlfriend so so mainly this was the most difficult decision because on the other side I  
 846 was like go go go again.  
 847 M: (hh).  
 848 R: You know I really wanted this because I wanted to came I have always wanted and that is the  
 849 biggest /ɔpɔrtnti/ (opportunity) I know I am going to learn a lot I'm going to work with  
 850 incredible professionals I'm going I'm going to be with with or now I'm going to keep the  
 851 tradition and=  
 852 M: Umh umh.  
 853 R: And an an I think it's everything is good is the only down the rest is that you know and you just  
 854 can so no.  
 855 M: No no so the only down size is being away from your girlfriend um.  
 856 R: Yeah mainly and then from parents but my parents not so much because I I already was away from  
 857 them those 4 years I used to well I guess once in a month right now it's once have to go once in 4  
 858 or 5 months so well it's it's gonna ta:: and you're not there you can always you got a bus and I am  
 859 home in 5 6 hours.  
 860 M: Umh.  
 861 R: Right now it's hum miles away there's the ocean between us so.  
 862 M: Umh.  
 863 R: So if something happens that's one of the things you have to consider when you you are going  
 864 away for years but.  
 865 M: Yeah.  
 866 R: And I thought about it but.  
 867 M: Umh.  
 868 R: (...04) but I I want to come here.  
 869 M: Yeah yeah okay alright um if you hadn't you probably would have regretted you know if you had  
 870 stayed in Spain and just gotten your Ph.D. without coming here even though it had been your  
 871 dream since you were 15 or=  
 872 R: Yeah.  
 873 M: =That opportunity might have=  
 874 R: Probably.  
 875 M: =regretted [Yeah yeah yeah].  
 876 R: [Probably surely surely] I will have regret and I think that's that's what my girlfriend  
 877 told me "I don't want you to come here" (hh) in on one side "but I don't want to remind later  
 878 either [(hh)=  
 879 M: [(hh:::)].  
 880 R: =I could have gone] I could.  
 881 M: Yeah yeah please don't want your girlfriend to come here.  
 882 R: Yes I'm I I'm reminded no but she didn't want me to.  
 883 M: I see okay.  
 884 R: And s- she didn't want me on side.  
 885 M: Umh.  
 886 R: Because you know there's a lot time being away.  
 887 M: Yeah yeah.  
 888 R: But eh in the she say she say that it was a really good opportunity and that that I have to take it  
 889 because maybe because of this cause if not it I'm going to have to regret [um and].

Melosia: (March 4, 2010) [MNC3INT30410]

- 46 M: So um life here at this university.  
 47 L: Life here uhn.  
 48 M: Umh so why did you decide to come to the United States.  
 49 L: (cough cough) there's about I always had a dream.  
 50 M: Umh.  
 51 L: When I was uh /jʌŋə/ (younger) when I was in high school I always talk about the possibility to  
 52 /əstʌdi/ (study) another city.  
 53 M: Umh.  
 54 L: I never thought about am- other country never in my life.  
 55 M: Umh.  
 56 L: But then when I saw the opportunity for my college to study a summer in the United States.  
 57 M: Umh.  
 58 L: For me like was a /hɑ-/ huge dream I was I I wasn't the only who thought about taking the chance of  
 59 course there were many other students who who felt the same and then when I came and I saw the li-  
 60 campus life.  
 61 M: Umh.  
 62 L: Fraternities /sʌsɔrɪtɪs/ (sororities) things that I have I have heard.  
 63 M: Umh.  
 64 L: But I have never like met someone from those kind ac- activities or groups.  
 65 M: Umh.  
 66 L: Then I then I went to this office for students and I saw all these people who help other student an  
 67 Judy my roommate she who is Mexican an also she came by the same program.  
 68 M: Umh.  
 69 L: She kind of motivate me cause she's a woman.  
 70 M: Umh.  
 71 L: When I met her the first time she was well she /əstʌdɪn/ (studying).  
 72 M: Umh.  
 73 L: Her masters.  
 74 M: Umh.  
 75 L: She's a woman: she have her career: she has um scholarship: and she met so many people and I felt  
 76 like identify uh with her.  
 77 M: Umh umh.  
 78 L: But for me were like a motivation.  
 79 M: Okay [okay].  
 80 L: [Yeah].  
 81 M: Um so what other countries did dream about you said not the United States.  
 82 L: But Japan but not to study just to know the culture.  
 83 M: Okay.  
 84 L: Japan like maybe Fren- (French-France).  
 85 M: Umh.  
 86 L: Um I don't know I think that also Latin America.  
 87 M: Okay.  
 88 L: But um in the United States I always felt that why people come here you know why people love uh  
 89 United States they have so many problems with um um I don't know um::: police officers you know.  
 90 M: Right.  
 91 L: Uh violence.  
 92 M: Umh.  
 93 L: Um::: people there I thought that there were cold.  
 94 M: Okay.  
 95 L: An-  
 96 M: In the United States.  
 97 L: /yɛf/ (yes) yeah in the United States so then I came here and I get in love of people.

- 98 M: Umh.
- 99 L: Uh the first week I have friend.
- 100 M: Okay okay.
- 101 L: Yeah but »maybe because« of my personality.
- 102 M: Umh.
- 103 L: Extroverted.
- 104 M: (hh).
- 105 L: An I always /əspok/ (spoke) with everybody and I think that they can see me an they see they say  
106 like you don't have a double face.
- 107 M: Okay.
- 108 L: You always are like that.
- 109 M: Okay.
- 110 L: So I think that that's happen.
- 111 M: Okay.
- 112 L: /yæp/ (yap).
- 113 M: ((*tape malfunction*)) good good um um can talk about that decision process.
- 114 L: Yeah.
- 115 M: To come to the United States.
- 116 L: Well I a- I am the oldest.
- 117 M: Umh.
- 118 L: On in my family and I knew that my dad he was gonna be the first challenge that um at the  
119 beginning of my process chosen a career he didn't want me to he didn't want to support me in my  
120 decision to move to another city.
- 121 M: Umh.
- 122 L: So for me I knew that it was gonna be hard to convince him that I like to be in the United↑ States.
- 123 M: Umh.
- 124 L: I mean if he didn't want me to support living another city in my same country it would be hard to  
125 harder to convince him to come here another country another city that he know he didn't he know he  
126 doesn't know=
- 127 M: Umh.
- 128 L: =How this city is.
- 129 M: Umh.
- 130 L: And her brother is living here.
- 131 M: Right okay.
- 132 L: So I I can imagine his vision with my dad so when I went back to Mexico a:: after coming here the  
133 first thing I thought was was like telling them like incred- incredible experience the everything that I  
134 develop in that short time=
- 135 M: Umh.
- 136 L: =Of period all that my dreams.
- 137 M: Umh u[mh].
- 138 L: [I] think that the thing that he loved at the beginning was my the tone of my voice.
- 139 M: Okay.
- 140 L: Like I I /əspok/ (spoke) with so ambitious with so energy so passion to come back here an I think  
141 that he felt the same.
- 142 M: Umh.
- 143 L: And that's why at the beginning he agree but then he was like /jʌs/ (yes) no [/jʌs/ (yes) no /jʌs/  
144 (yes) no /jʌs/ (yes) no].
- 145 M: [(hh:::)].
- 146 L: An then he saw that I was moving I didn't stop.

## Chapter 7

### Access, Investment, Identity

#### Introduction

Sociocultural theory, then, puts language production in a ‘star role,’ so to speak. Speaking (and writing) are conceived of as cognitive tools—tools that mediate internalization; and that externalize internal psychological activity, resocializing, and recognizing it for the individual; tools that construct and deconstruct knowledge; and tools that regulate and are regulated by human agency (Swain, 2005, p. 480).

Accessing L2 resources is integral to the process of developing fluency in the L2. As noted in Chapter 2, just how input and output combine to facilitate the learning process remains a question. What we do know, though, is that people require opportunities to practice the L2 if they wish to develop facility with the language. Swain’s statement above summarizes the cyclical nature of the L2 learning process from a sociocognitive perspective. Engaging in L2 use through speaking or writing stimulates the internalization cognitive processes. This, in turn, facilitates externalization in the form of production. Production then encourages responses from interlocutors, which become input exemplars. Simply stated, access to the L2 creates opportunities for the input and output cycle required in SLA. The questions, therefore, do not center merely on access, but on the type and quality of access that L2 learners have contact with, how they gain access, and the larger community’s role in permitting access.

As noted in previous chapters, the contexts of access to the L2 can be differentiated broadly in terms of controlled and uncontrolled access, and each of these contexts can benefit the L2 learning process. Solely analyzing access, though, leaves L2 research with an incomplete, partial account of the L2 learning process. For a theory steeped in socioculturalism, therefore, it is incumbent on the research to fold in to the access framework



the role that identity and investment play in the process of gaining access to valued L2 learning resources. “A focus on the learning context, however, needs to be complemented with the identity and human agency of the language learner” (Norton & Toohey, 2001, p. 312).

Adults learning a second language have presumably already mastered their L1 and can function appropriately in their communities. Adults have the linguistic and pragmatic skill base required to acquire food, shelter, and clothing in their L1. Learning how to perform day-to-day tasks in an L2 can create shifts in a person’s identity as he/she is learning an L2. In other words, what may have become an automated practice in the L1, must now be re-learned in the L2, which in turn, can interact with one’s identity. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) suggest nine stages in this process of loss and (re)construction while learning the L2.

*Initial stages of loss:*

1. Loss of one’s linguistic identity
2. Loss of all subjectivities
3. Loss of the frame of reference and the link between the signifier and the signified.
4. Loss of the inner voice
5. First language attrition

*Recovery stages:*

6. Appropriation of other’s voices
7. Emergence of one’s own new voice, often in writing first
8. Translation therapy: reconstruction of one’s past
9. Continuous growth ‘into’ new positions and subjectivities (pp. 162-163).

L2 learners may initially require L2 instruction and guided practice while learning the basics of the L2. Eventually though, the L2 learners may desire to experiment with the L2 outside the language classroom, but the L2 learner may not be ready for complete unsupported L2 immersion, i.e. the real world. Thus, an intermediary place may be necessary for L2 learners to develop confidence in the linguistic features of the language and to learn about the cultural expectations of the larger community. In short, L2 learners may desire a place where they can experiment and ask questions without fear of retribution from members of the larger community. Pratt (1991) calls these spaces *safe houses*, and defines them as "...social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings, and temporary protection from legacies of oppression" (p. 40). Safe houses, as conceptualized by Canagarajah, are not limited to L2 learners of English, but rather are places where anyone who possess a vernacular that is different from Standard American Academic English can go and feel safe to explore, discover, challenge, and come to understand dominant epistemologies. Yet, safe houses can also be conceptualized as places for learning the L2 where the learners have come together for the purpose of increasing their L2 skills and knowledge of the L2 culture. These places may be like the English Clubs in China (Norton & Gao, 2008) or they might be an ESL classroom in a university IEP or even a college composition class designated for ESL students. The common denominators are that students come to the safe house with a high degree of trust, shared understandings and experiences with learning English, and feel protected temporarily from external criticisms. Furthermore, safe house members recognize that creating and having access to L2 English

resources will help them develop their L2 skills, and therefore recognize that an investment in the L2 is an investment in their identity.

### **Home Country Access**

Linked to the concept of safe house is access. As described in Chapter 4, I have delineated between controlled and uncontrolled access to English. How are these different types of access realized in EFL settings and in ESL settings? Both types of access can be found in either a home country (EFL) context or a US (ESL) context to varying degrees. Figure 7.1 represents the various contexts and types of access L2 learners potentially encounter.

	<b>Home Country</b>	<b>US University</b>
<b>Controlled</b>	A	B
<b>Uncontrolled</b>	C	D

**Figure 7.1: L2 Learning Contexts and Access Type**

Quadrant A, for my case student participants, includes mandatory English lessons beginning in elementary or middle school and progressing through high school. In three of the four cases, taking English at the tertiary educational level was also mandatory. Belita, from Guatemala, did not have to take English for her dental program. Based on the descriptions the participants provided of their language learning experiences in school in their home countries, they experienced a wide array of English language teaching pedagogies, as described in Chapter 5. Table 7.1 represents the type of language instruction the participants were exposed to in their home countries.

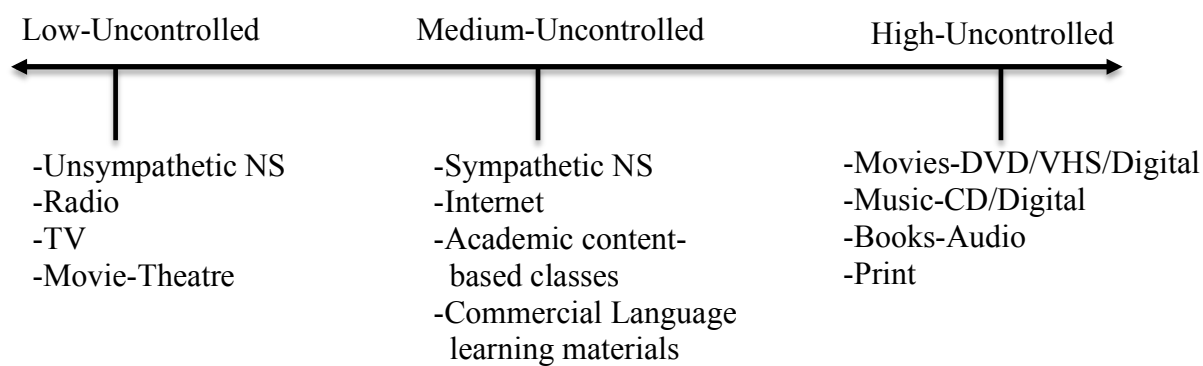
**Table 7.1: Language Instruction**

	Grammar Translation	Direct Method	Audiolingual	Communicative Language Teaching	Content-Based
Belita	X		X		
Dao-Ming	X				
Marcos		X	X	X	X
Melosia	X	X	X	X	X

As summarized and described in Chapter 5, Belita and Dao-Ming primarily received their English instruction via Spanish and/or Mandarin while their teachers focused on presenting English grammar and vocabulary through the English language textbook. Marcos was exposed to a variety of English language teaching methodologies throughout his educational career, with the instruction becoming more focused on structure and more academic in nature as he climbed grade levels. Marcos claimed that all of his teachers were NES except one, but that this teacher had lived in England for several years. From Melosia's descriptions, it appears as if she experienced the English language teaching gamut. Like Marcos, her early English language instruction was grounded more in Audiolingual and Communicative Teaching Language epistemologies, yet as she progressed through her middle and high school classes, her controlled access shifted to more Direct Method and Grammar Translation pedagogies. Finally, both Marcos and Melosia stated that they had classes that were taught in English during their undergraduate academic programs, but that these courses, rather than focusing on English language features, concentrated on the content of the subject area, i.e. engineering and computer science respectively.

A similar continuum for uncontrolled access may also exist. On one extreme, L2 learners may encounter unsympathetic native speakers, who expect their L2 learner

interlocutors to be able to understand them and who make no linguistic adjustments to facilitate comprehension. On the other end of the uncontrolled access continuum, L2 learners may interact with native speakers, who, recognizing their interlocutor is an L2 learner of the language, may go to extremes to adjust their own speech in order to facilitate a comprehensible exchange. This extreme may be referred to at times as “foreigner talk” when the native speaker slows his/her speech rate, enunciates clearly and precisely, and possibly models non-native structures, such as not conjugating verbs for 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular (Krashen, 1981). As an English language teacher in Taiwan from 1987 to 1988, strangers would frequently approach me on the street or in coffee shops. Using their best English L2, the Taiwanese individual would attempt to engage me in English conversation. Sometimes the individuals would ask if I were an English teacher and ask if I could teach them. At other times, the Taiwanese speaker would simply ask if I knew the time, compliment me on my broken attempts at Mandarin, or other similar type comments. Thus, the Taiwanese individuals who approached me or any “foreigner” for the purpose of practicing their L2 languages, were creating an opportunity to practice their L2 English skills in an uncontrolled context with a native speaker of English. The Uncontrolled continuum from Chapter 4 is reprinted below (Figure 7.2).



**Figure 7.2: Uncontrolled Access Continuum**

Undoubtedly, the items listed under each uncontrolled category are incomplete. Furthermore, the lists are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather representative of the types of uncontrolled access, from low-uncontrolled to high-uncontrolled, that potentially exists in foreign language contexts. The point is that sources of uncontrolled access to the L2 in a foreign language context, particularly with a language such as English because of its global influence, are many and variable. Furthermore, the ability of the L2 learner to revert back to his/her L1, regardless of the degree of uncontrolled access, is a possibility in the foreign language context. Being able to rely on L1 resources for L2 learners in an ESL context, however, may or may not be a reality. If it is a reality, this may in fact serve to close avenues to uncontrolled access that might otherwise be open. In other words, if a group of Chinese L1 speakers is having lunch in a university cafeteria in the United States, they may be preventing NESs from approaching them and trying to engage them in English conversation.

Table 7.2 represents the types of resources that the case study participants had in their home countries according to what they reported to me during the interviews.

**Table 7.2: English Resources**

Name	Resources									
	L2 Class	TV	Radio	CD	DVD	Internet	Print Media	Movies	Tourists	Academic Classes
<b>Belita</b>	X							X**		
<b>Dao-Ming</b>	X				X*	X*	X			
<b>Marcos</b>	X	X		X	X	X			X	X*
<b>Melosia</b>	X	X								X*

\* In college \*\* with L1 Subtitles

As already noted, Table 7.2 shows that all of the case study participants had access to English via formal instruction. What is interesting in Table 7.2 is the relative lack of English resources outside of the classroom. Belita, for example, claims that the only sources of

English beyond a school context came in the form of American movies with Spanish subtitles. Thus, even if Belita had been invested in learning English in Guatemala, she would have been hard pressed to access various forms of uncontrolled English resources. Table 7.2 also shows the apparent abundance of resources available to Marcos. That he took advantage of these resources as early as 9 years old, is indication of his early and continuous investment in himself as an English language learner. Dao-Ming's claim that she did not have access to uncontrolled forms of English until college does not necessarily mean these sources were not present when she was in elementary and secondary school. It could be that these were present and that she was unaware of them or that it was difficult for her to gain access to these sources because of her parents' concern for her safety or because of government controls. In fact, Belita and Melosia may also have had additional resources outside of class that they were not aware of in their respective countries. Finally, what is not displayed in Table 7.2 is Dao-Ming's eventual contact with speakers of English and other sources of English while in the CNMI.

Without question, the sources of English, controlled and uncontrolled, increase exponentially upon arriving in the United States and entering the university context. It is not hard to imagine that all of the categories and more in Table 7.2 would be filled in for all of the case study participants. The questions, then, become: how are these resources accessed, what sort of investment do ESL students have to make, and what is the role of the NES and the target language community in mediating access?

### **U.S. Access**

Theoretically, it has been proposed that going to a country where the L2 is used as the primary language of communication by the larger community, and thus, immersing oneself in

the language and culture is the best way to learn the L2. As described in Chapter 2, Spolsky (1989) outlined six “opportunities” that L2 learners have access to in natural language learning contexts that they may not have in a classroom setting. To recap, the six opportunities are 1) analysis, 2) synthesis, 3) contextual embedding, 4) matching, 5) remembering, and 6) practice (pp. 167-170). That these opportunities benefit the learning process is not disputed. Rather, the assumption that these opportunities are available and attainable has been scrutinized in the literature recently. Research (Block, 2007; Kinginger, 2011a, 2011b; Miller, 2004; Olsen, 1997) suggests that gaining access to these opportunities may be mitigated by sociocultural factors and that, even though the L2 is the dominant language, L2 learners may not be able to sustain consistent and meaningful contact with the L2.

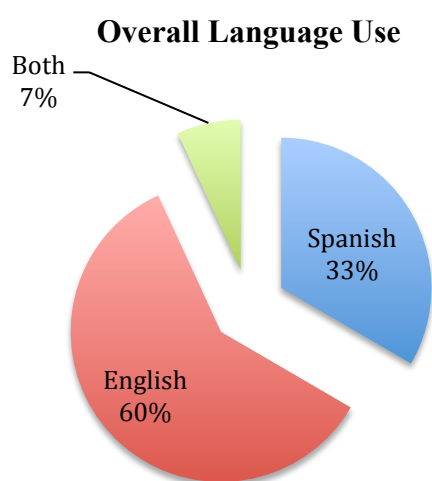
How much access to NESs, controlled and uncontrolled, do the participants actually have in the United States, and how does their investment intersect with the type, quality, and amount of access they have with linguistic resources? My hypothesis was, and the literature suggests (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Spolsky, 1989), that students would have extensive exposure to academic English in their university classes. Furthermore, I theorized that the participants would have ample access to academic uncontrolled English, and that this academic uncontrolled access would primarily draw on their English listening, reading, and writing skills for academic purposes. Beyond an academic context, however, they would not become active members of communities of practice where they could access uncontrolled social English. My hypothesis was grounded on several observations and assumptions about the community in the United States where they had chosen to come. First, Spanish is widely spoken in this area of the Southwestern United States. Although the Spanish spoken in this



area is of a different dialect than what Belita, Marcos, and Melosia speak, it is largely mutually intelligible. In respect to Dao-Ming, there is a large and active Chinese student organization on the university campus, thus, providing Dao-Ming a social and linguistic support group. Furthermore, as an IEP instructor for 20 years, I have repeatedly witnessed students leaving their intensive English classes for the day with their L1 speaking friends, in effect creating a micro-community of L1 speakers that prevents English from entering. This same group phenomenon has been documented of Americans during their study abroad experiences (Block, 2007; Kinginger, 2011a, 2011b). This is also my personal experience while living in Oaxaca in 2006. Finally, it is not uncommon to see and hear groups of people who share the same L1 congregating in public places such as the library and student union across the local university campus. Groups of any kind, whether multilingual or not, serve important social functions that provide people with communities of practice in which to participate, but they can also become barriers that prevent newcomers and linguistic resources from entering. In terms of L2 learning, L1 groups can serve as barriers to uncontrolled social interaction with NESs. For example, a group of four or five native speakers of Spanish at an English dominant nightclub in the United States may prevent NESs from trying to interact with the group. The group of Spanish speakers may intermittently interact with the waiter/waitress, but this interaction may only be superficial, requiring very little English skill. Thus, I theorized that the case study participants would be restricted in their access to uncontrolled social varieties of English. The data generated from the Language Logs suggests a different pattern. The following figures represent the self-reported use of English for three of the four participants.

In the Language Logs, participants were asked to keep a record of their daily language use including time, place, activity, language skill(s) used, and language – L1 or English. There was also a place for the participants to write comments about a particular entry if they wished.

Figures 7.3 through 7.8 display the patterns of language use the case study participants engaged in, including spoken and written language skills, over a one-week period in the United States. It should be noted that Dao-Ming only made five entries in her Language Log, one entry for each day that she recorded her language habits over a one-week period; thus, due to the lack of data produced, Dao-Ming’s language habits are not included in the results represented in the graphs.

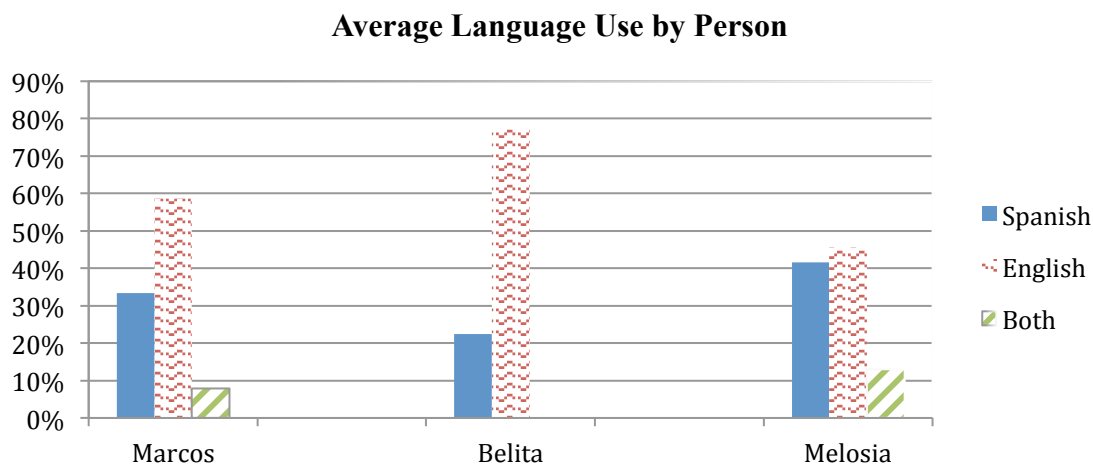


**Figure 7.3: Overall Language Use**

Figure 7.3 breaks out the overall use of languages, Spanish, English, and Both<sup>25</sup> according to the self-reports in the Language Logs. Figure 7.3 includes both oral and written skills.

<sup>25</sup> Both means that the case study participant indicated in the language log that he/she used both Spanish and English in a single context.

Figure 7.3 demonstrates that overall English was used 60% of the time, while Spanish was used 33% of the time during the data collection period. Finally, the case study participants were in contexts where they were using both languages 7% of the time.



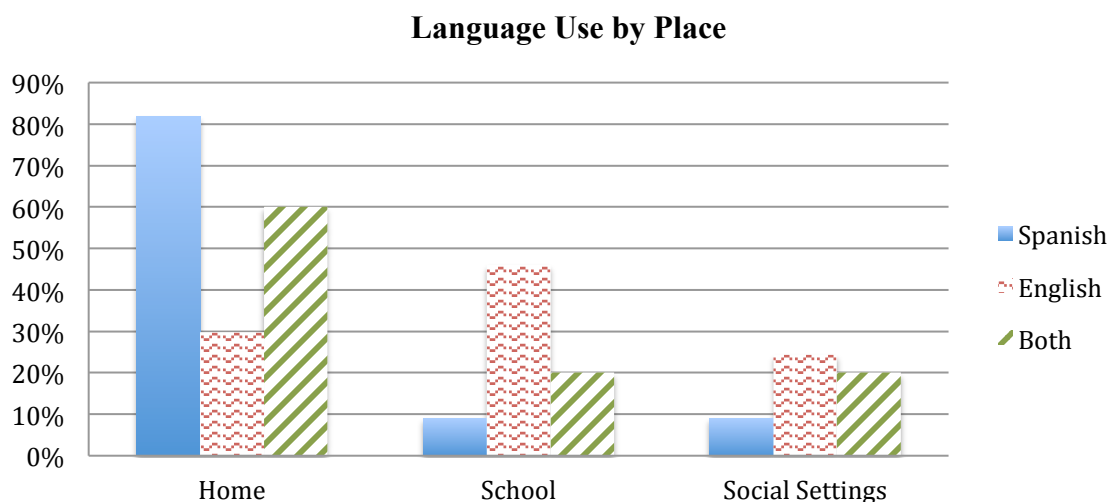
**Figure 7.4: Average Language Use by Person**

Figure 7.4 shows the individual use of Spanish, English, and Both languages by the case study participants. English appears to be used more than Spanish in general (Figure 7.3) and across individuals (Figure 7.4). Interestingly, Figure 7.4 shows a remarkable consistency between speakers in their use of English. All appear to be using English approximately 60% of the time. Marcos shows that he used English about 60% of the time and Spanish a little more than 30% of the time, while he engaged in situations where Both languages were used less than 10% of the time. Belita indicates that she uses English nearly 80% of the time, while only using Spanish 20% of the time. Finally, Melosia appears to engage with English and Spanish almost an equal amount of time at 45% and 42% respectively.

The category Both, where the case study participants are moving between languages, appears to be inconsistent between participants. Marcos indicates that he used both

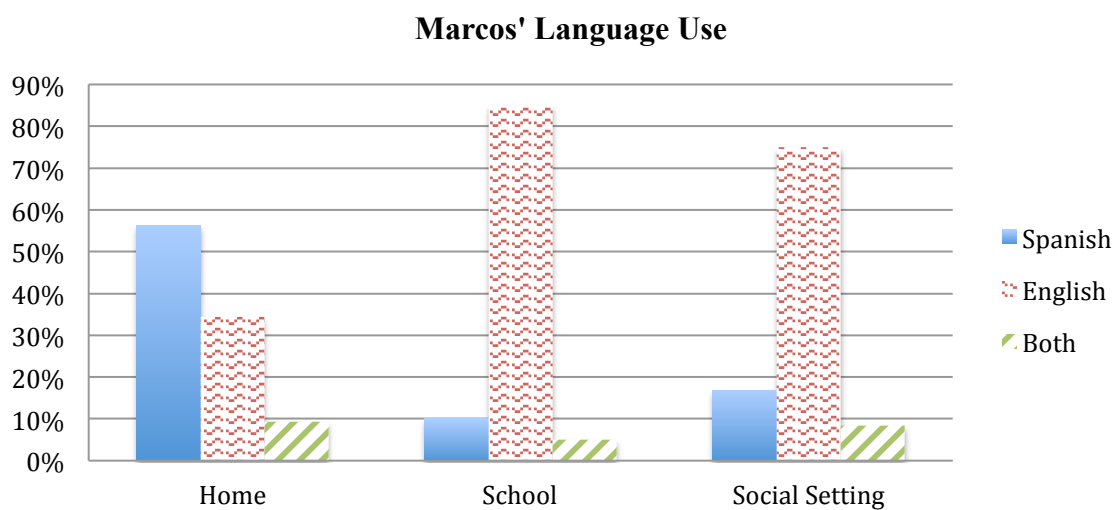
languages in a single context between 8% and 10% of the time, whereas Melosia shows that she used both languages in a single context about 18% of the time during the week of record keeping. Belita claims to have never used both languages in a single context during the same time-period. That Belita does not document the use of both languages in a single context does not mean she did not participate in situations where both Spanish and English were being used. She may not realize that she is moving from one language to the other, or her method of recording her language use may explain the absence of the Both category for her.

Figure 7.5, however, represents the participants' use of their languages by place. Not surprisingly, English is the primary language used in the School context, whereas Spanish is the language of choice in the Home context. Interestingly, language use is more evenly distributed in Social Settings, defined as contexts away from the university campus and not at home, such as parties, church, business, shopping malls, and dining.

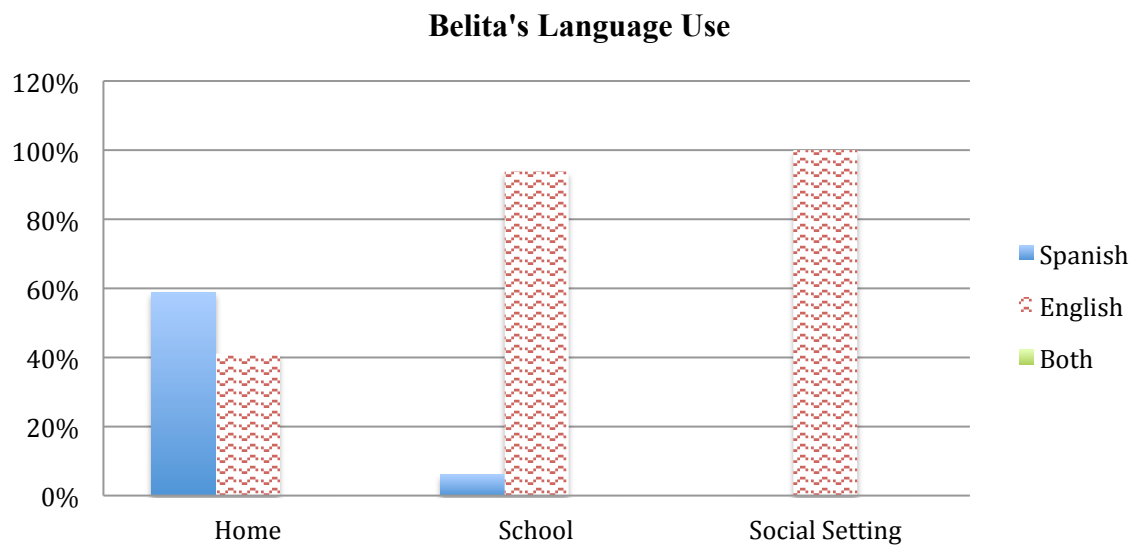


**Figure 7.5: Language Use by Place**

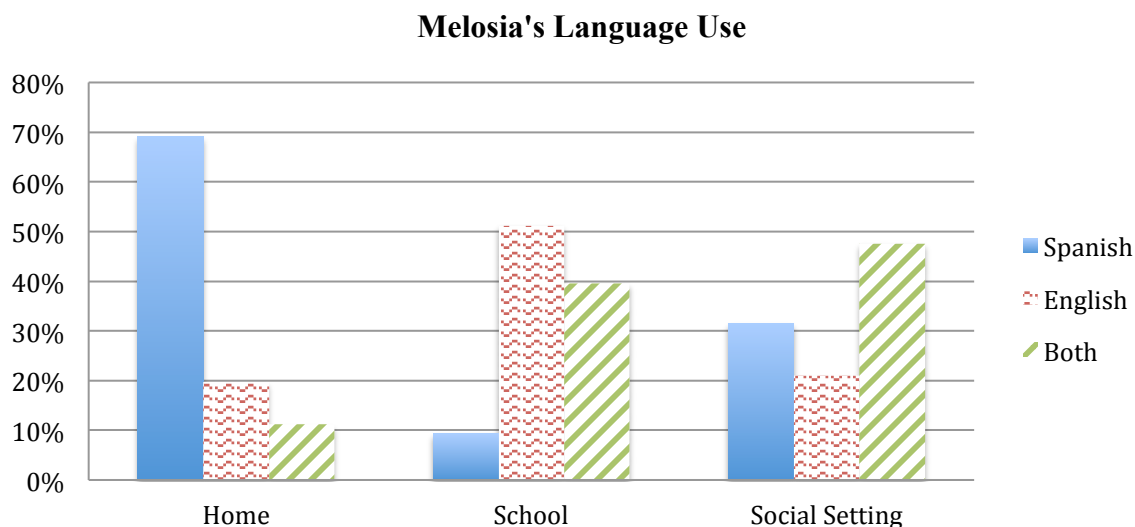
Figures 7.6 through 7.8 show the individual patterns of language use according to the participants.



**Figure 7.6: Marcos' Language Use**



**Figure 7.7: Belita's Language Use**



**Figure 7.8: Melosia's Language Use**

What is most striking is that Spanish is the language of preference at home, while English is the language used at school and in other social contexts. Marcos and Melosia appear to demonstrate greater diversity across contexts, both showing the use of English in a variety of contexts beyond academic environments. Belita, on the other hand, demonstrates the greatest contrast, with Spanish being used nearly 85% of the time at home, while English is used almost entirely at school. These patterns of language use by individual demonstrate agreement with the comments each participant made during the one-on-one interviews. Marcos claims that English has not prevented him from doing anything he wanted. For Belita, her “English” day begins once she arrives on campus. Melosia, being a very social person and working in a university office that primarily serves the university Hispanic population, demonstrates a great deal of switching between Spanish and English throughout her day, regardless of location.

Combined, the graphs demonstrate that the three native Spanish speaking participants enter and leave a variety of contexts in which one language is more prevalent than the other. Furthermore, they graphically represent that the participants have access to and are accessing English on a regular basis while in the university context. What Figures 7.6 through 7.8 do not reveal, though, is with whom the case study participants are interacting while on the university campus. Marcos' classmates and most of his instructors are also L2 speakers of English, so his access to English on the university campus is not necessarily with native speakers. This is in contrast to the native English speakers that Marcos had contact with while in Spain. It seems ironic that Marcos appears to have had more contact with native speakers of English while living in Spain than on a university campus in the United States. Belita did participate in small group discussions and projects in her speech communication class, but only during class time. Outside of class, Belita tended to interact with the friends she had made while studying in the IEP, other non-native speakers of English. Thus, even though the case study participants had access to English speakers on the university campus, the evidence suggests that this access came in the form of non-native speakers of English. This is not to say that interacting with other L2 speakers of English is not beneficial. On the contrary, the argument could be made that L2 speaker-to-L2 speaker of English interactions on a university campus are more indicative of global realities than L2 speaker-to-NS interactions. Furthermore, it may be that L2 speakers of English feel more comfortable interacting with other L2 speakers of English. This is clearly what Belita and Dao-Ming indicated. This L2 speaker-to-L2 speaker of English interaction within a larger community of native English speakers may suggest another form of *safe house* that L2 speakers of English have created, consciously or unconsciously.

The seven graphs presented here describe patterns of language use across place and skill overall as well as across each individual. The data collected from the language logs, though problematic, give credence to the benefits of L2 immersion. However, they do not describe the affective effects that gaining access to L2 sources of English has on the individuals, their perseverance, or how these contribute to the construction of their identities. Examining the qualitative comments that the participants entered in their language logs regarding some of their interactions is illuminating.

Interestingly, Marcos and Belita focused their comments on their interactions in English and their subsequent emotions. On the other hand, Melosia's comments reflect an appointment book genre, as her comments were on whom she was going to meet and for what purpose, rather than on her use of language, such as "Night for singles, bore San Valentine, flirt," "I need a dress to look pretty," "I need to learn this chapter", or "Return the dress." In some ways, the fact that Melosia's entries are directed toward her activities rather than her feelings or reactions to her use of English, reflects Melosia's social personality and her comfort level with English. For Melosia, therefore, it may be safe to say that English has become a tool for her to accomplish what she needs to in the context of an English speaking community. This attitude about English is also exemplified in the data displayed in the figures above, as well as comments she made during the one-on-one interviews. In Excerpt 7.1, Melosia readily acknowledges that she makes mistakes in English, but that this is not her main concern. She has achieved a level of maturity in which she knows that to make mistakes is part of the learning process and that speaking is essential to continued L2 development.



*Excerpt 7.1 (February 11, 2010)*

- 1014 L: But but conversation is not my problem.  
 1015 M: [Yeah].  
 1016 L: [Even] now I know that I could lo- speak with someone uh with fluency.  
 1017 M: Umh.  
 1018 L: But of course with mistakes.  
 1019 M: Right okay.  
 1020 L: Mistakes or no mistakes I I I am talking. [MNC2INT21110]

In general, Marcos' comments express confidence and a sense of "normalcy" in his interactions in English. "A high percentage of the time that I am with the computer I am using English. I am very accustomed" and "Back in Spain I used to listen to radio in English so I am accustomed." His only real frustrations fall under two categories: understanding accents and level of explicitness. In terms of accents, he recognizes that he has difficulty understanding the English accents of people from India. "I usually struggle with Indian's pronunciation, but professor J. is easy to understand." Later he states, "There's an American guy that talks with such laziness that is hard to follow. Indian people too." Conversely, Marcos also acknowledges that his lab-mate, from Lebanon, is easy to understand, but that "he doesn't understand me that well."

The most interesting comments Marcos recorded were his interactions with a local UPS office in which Marcos was trying to locate a package that had been sent to him from Spain.

Timeline: January 29, 2010

Time	Language	Purpose	Comments
3:30PM	English	Call from UPS for package delivery	My phone sounds awful. Hard to understand English and Spanish too.
4:00PM	English	In the UPS story, asking where to pick up package	You have to be very explicit when asking questions in the US.
4:00PM	Spanish	Call to UPS, keep asking for my packet.	On the phone, I'd rather speak Spanish. Not enough information in this call.
4:15PM	Spanish	Call again to know where in the two places is my packet.	I finally get the answer.

Marcos first comments, “My phone sounds awful. Hard to understand English and Spanish too.” The next entry, made a half hour later, is “You have to be very explicit when asking questions in the US.” Immediately after this comment, he writes, “On the phone, I'd rather speak Spanish. Not enough information this call.” Finally, at 4:15 PM, fifteen minutes later, he enters “I finally get the answer.” Looking at the languages he was using during this forty-five minute interaction, he uses English to initiate the questions about the whereabouts of his package, but by the end, he has reverted to speaking Spanish, which is when he learns where he can go to claim his package. Thus, Marcos runs into what appears to be both a linguistic and cultural barrier, which could have been exacerbated by the telephone.

Being new to the United States and to the local city, Marcos undoubtedly was confronted with not understanding specific information that a person who has lived here for a longer period of time might be assumed to know. In other words, Marcos confronted pragmatic miscommunication. Yet, by 5:30 PM that evening, after having received his package, Marcos writes that his interaction in English was “Very helpful. Communication was perfect.” Later that evening at 11:00 PM, Marcos makes the following entry in his language log. “I have always watched series with Spanish subtitles, but I think it's about

time to stop doing it.” The fact that he makes this entry five and a half hours after his struggles with the UPS office suggests that the experience served to remind him that he is still learning English and that he needs to begin pushing himself. The interactions with the UPS agent, it can be argued, may have served as a motivating experience in which Marcos discovered that he needed to continue investing in English. Thus, the interaction with the UPS representative and Marcos’ later reflections on his English exemplify the learning potential of three of Spolsky’s (1989) “opportunities” for language learning, a) opportunity for analysis; b) opportunity for matching; and c) opportunity for practice (pp. 167-170).

Though there are a few entries that refer to off campus business interactions, Belita’s comments tend to focus on her confidence level in academic contexts. On the first day, Belita writes, “Small group so I feel more confident,” but later in the week, for the same small group she states, “they speak too fast.” These contrasting language log entries demonstrate the variability of group dynamics, where on one day the group appears to be a place where Belita feels comfortable. Yet, the fact that Belita feels overwhelmed in the second entry, “they speak too fast,” also suggests that the small group can also be a place of frustration. It is impossible to know for certain the dynamics that led to the second entry but possible explanations are listed below.

1. The group had completely accepted Belita into the community and therefore was treating her as an insider.
2. The group was unaware that their rate of speech and the topic of conversation were alienating Belita.
3. The group was aware of their rapid English but did not care that Belita was struggling to understand.

What is known is that Belita's identity as a legitimate speaker of English was being co-constructed by her and her group during the small group discussions.

The comments Belita and Marcos record in their language logs suggest that the English speaking community and their reactions to the L2 speakers directly influence the confidence level, investment, and identity of the L2 speakers. Not only is there a direct correlation of uncontrolled access with investment and identity construction evidenced in the language logs. Additionally, the negotiation of identity and investment is ongoing and subject to extreme fluctuations on a daily basis. Marcos, though ultimately successful in his interactions with the UPS representative, struggled with his identity, "you need to be very explicit when asking questions in the US," and later that evening, his decision to stop watching TV with Spanish subtitles exemplifies a heightened investment as he recognizes that he needs to continue strengthening his English skills. In the context of an academic classroom, Belita too struggles with her identity as an English speaker and with her right to speak and contribute to the group discussion. Furthermore, that she feels comfortable one day but alienated the next day demonstrates the volatility of identity and investment. During one of the one-on-one interviews, Belita spoke of the frustrations with being marginalized by some of the other group members. In the end, though, she succeeded in asserting herself, as the group recognized that Belita had good ideas and that she was competent enough to take on a larger speaking role for their class presentation.

Both Marcos' experience with the UPS representative and Belita's experience with her small group in her speech communication class exemplify Norton's (2000) claims that L2 learners are forever redefining who they are and their relationship with the external world. Marcos acknowledged that he needed to continue challenging himself with English if he

wanted to develop stronger English skills, and Belita had to find a way to reframe herself as a legitimate group member and speaker of English in order for the other group members to hear and respect her.

Even though Dao-Ming did not complete the language log in the manner it was intended, it is nevertheless important and necessary to discuss the kind of access to English she most likely had on a daily basis.<sup>26</sup> Upon arriving in the United States, Dao-Ming immediately began living with her boyfriend, Jim. Thus, there was never a time when she was living alone or with other native Mandarin speakers. Furthermore, during the one-on-one interviews with Dao-Ming, she only mentioned going to one social event, a Chinese New Year's party. She claims to have spoken only a little Mandarin while at the party and Jim confirmed this during his interview. Additionally, when I asked if she ever patronized any of the local Chinese restaurants, her response was surprising.

*Excerpt 7.2 (March 10, 2010)*

- 256 D: No try there I I'm not interested in Chinese restaurants so you know why?  
 257 M: Why?  
 258 D: Because those are small Chinese restaurant.  
 259 M: Umh.  
 260 D: Uh they can't really afford to um process you know for labor and immigration=  
 261 M: Umh.  
 262 D: =A real chef from China.  
 263 M: Umh.  
 264 D: And uh they /rul/ (will) /ruli/ (usually) hire people that who uh who came here um  
 265 not as a chef maybe as a uh any profession an- and then they need a job they an- they  
 266 will think what can I do oh I can cook Chinese food.  
 267 M: Umh.  
 268 D: So they're really not really well trained.  
 269 M: Umh.  
 270 D: And uh I had bad experience with their food (hh) and to me they're not Chinese food  
 271 so I don't eat.  
 272 M: Okay.

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<sup>26</sup> My comments are based on my observations and my knowledge of Dao-Ming gleaned from the one-on-one interviews with her and her boyfriend/husband.

273 D: In Chinese restaurant.

[DNL3INT31010]

Her stated reasons for not going to Chinese restaurants in the United States, on the surface appear to emanate from the idea that because the cooks are not “real” chefs the food in Chinese restaurants in the United States is not good. Lines 264-266, though, suggest that Dao-Ming is really making more of a socioeconomic rather than culinary statement, observing that many Chinese immigrants find themselves working in Chinese restaurants in the United States rather than in an occupation for which they received formal training because they need a job. What is not indexed in her comments, but that I came to learn through my conversation with Jim, is that Dao-Ming was politically active in China. With this knowledge, Excerpt 7.2 takes on a different connotation. It can be inferred that by not going to Chinese restaurants she is not contributing to the essentialization of Chinese immigrants into the United States. Thus, she is not only demonstrating her solidarity with fellow countrymen, but she is also displaying her identity as a politically astute woman. Once she feels more secure with her immigration status and confident with her English skills, she may become more publically active.

In summary, Dao-Ming does not participate actively in the Chinese student organization, does not eat at Chinese restaurants, and does not shop at the local Asian markets, of which there are several in the community. Thus, Dao-Ming, through her own orchestrating, does not appear to have consistent contact with other native speakers of Mandarin.

Based on Dao-Ming’s living situation and what she and her boyfriend/husband told me at different times, it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of Dao-Ming’s days off campus were spent interacting in English. On campus, she attended English classes in the

university IEP in the mornings and was taking two university classes, a dance class and Anatomy and Physiology. She claimed that she was the only non-native speaker of English in these classes. On the days when she was not in these regular university classes, Dao-Ming said that she would spend time in the library herself and when I would see her walking across campus from the IEP to the library, she was always alone.

Dao-Ming and Jim invited me to dinner one evening, so I had the opportunity to see their house and to observe their interactions. Dao-Ming spent the evening in the kitchen cooking, while Jim and I sat on the sofa in the living room visiting. Dao-Ming would not allow us in the kitchen. At one point during my conversation with Jim, the topic of computer software came up. He was telling me about a voice recognition computer program that he thought might be helpful for me when transcribing. At one point, he led me to the computer in their house to demonstrate the software. When opening the computer, the Internet was connected and the website that was open was in Chinese. Thus, Dao-Ming did interact in Mandarin, but it is impossible to determine how much or how often she did so, for what purpose, and when, as she consistently denied using Mandarin when asked. What is known is that she controlled her access to her L1, just like she controlled her access to English. Mandarin did not find her nor did she allow it to encroach on her life as an English speaker. Therefore, it is relatively safe to say that Dao-Ming spent the majority of her days interacting in English, by way of conversations with her boyfriend/husband, IEP teachers, and me. She also read medical text books and watched horror movies. Dao-Ming, in short, controlled the type and amount of language that she was exposed to at all times.

### **Investment/Identity**

The discussion on the type and quality of access in the case study participants' home countries and in the United States highlights the similarities and differences between the two language learning contexts. Yet, having access to controlled and uncontrolled sources of the L2 only becomes significant when considered within the framework of investment and identity. How L2 learners make use of the L2 access they have is, necessarily, predicated on their investment in themselves as language learners, and thus, their identities as legitimate speakers of the L2.

Briefly, investment is conceived of as the degree of engagement the learner has with learning an L2 for the purpose of gaining access to perceived cultural capital that the L2 community possesses. The learner understands that an investment in the L2 directly relates to their identities as legitimate speakers of the L2. Thus, an investment in the L2 is also an investment in identity (Norton, 2000; Norton Pierce, 1995). Furthermore, it has been established that identity is a dynamic human construct, shifting throughout the day as we enter and leave various situations and as others engage with us in these situations. As our identity shifts, so, too, does the power relationship. At times, we are perceived as authority figures, and thus, garner more agency to speak, whereas at other times we are considered to be peripheral participants, thus restricting our voice. Native English speakers in a U.S. context may go through the day without noticing subtle shifts in power relations and their influences on personal identity because they share a common language. It can be argued, however, L2 speakers of English in an ESL context may be more sensitive to power differentials and their shifting identity. Yet, at the same time, L2 learners of English may be able to draw on these emotions and shifting power dynamics to gain access to the linguistic



resources that they need. Excerpts 7.3 and 7.4 demonstrate how different social contexts can empower or disempower the learner to use the L2, and, therefore, gain or be denied access to the L2.

*Excerpt 7.3 Belita (March 3, 2010)*

- 186 M: Um when you go home what's the language.  
 187 B: Hh I /əspik/ (speak) English wit- with him.  
 188 M: Umh with=  
 189 B: =With the son of Peter.  
 190 M: Umh.  
 191 B: He name is Dennis.  
 192 M: Right okay.  
 193 B: I /əspik/ (speak) English Dennis because I wanna show him like I am not stupid so I  
 194 can understand=  
 195 M: Umh.  
 196 B: =Everything that he say and for the only good thing for me is that I practice more.  
[BTR3INT3310]

In Excerpt 7.3 Belita is describing her relationship with her stepbrother, Dennis. Dennis knows some Spanish according to Belita, but he is more comfortable speaking English, his first language. Belita told me that she does not trust Dennis and believes that Dennis, who was unemployed at the time of the study, was taking advantage of her stepfather and mother. The language logs indicate that Belita primarily uses Spanish at home. Yet, when she engages with Dennis, she uses English. Using English serves several functions for Belita. It demonstrates to Dennis that she is intelligent (line 193). It also signals to Dennis that Belita does not trust him and that she intends to protect her mother and stepfather. Furthermore, it also communicates to Dennis that he is the one with the linguistic handicap since his Spanish is limited to only a few rudimentary phrases. Finally, as Belita acknowledges (line 196), Dennis provides her the opportunity to practice her English. Thus, the home context, her identity as a responsible, caring daughter, and her investment in herself permits Belita to be more assertive and to use her English. Excerpt 7.4 shows just how

sensitive investment and identity are to context. Belita is describing one of the interactions she had with her group in her Public Speaking class.

*Excerpt 7.4 (April 2, 2010)*

- 791 B: So she no /əspik/ (speak) me an I think that she's a little upset maybe because she  
 792 /espik/ (speak) a lot of for example comedians of clothes of /hyir/ (her) o today she  
 793 was talking about we need like choose one topic and then do a speech for ten minutes  
 794 and she was talking about *Family Guy* an what is the other for children that is  
 795 somebody say an:::  
 796 M: Ah *South Park*.  
 797 B: An I never hear this show so=  
 798 M: [Okay].  
 799 B: =[I no] can say something.  
 800 M: Right.  
 801 B: And I was only listen she was like oh my god that XXX you don't see TV or  
 802 something an sorry I can't your show.  
 803 M: Yeah yeah and how does that make you feel?  
 804 B: /əstreɪnj/ (strange) [because]=  
 805 M: [It's an issue].  
 806 B: =Now I don't can a part to anything to the group.  
 807 M: Umh umh.  
 808 B: I don't know the topic. [BTR4INT4210]

Belita describes how her group alienates her from the discussion about a topic for their group presentation because she does not know the TV shows *Family Guy* and *South Park*. As she says, it makes her feel strange and that she cannot be part of the group because she does not know the topic (lines 800-804). Because she is unfamiliar with American pop culture and because she is berated for this lack of knowledge, she questions her identity as a legitimate member of the group. Furthermore, it causes her some stress since she does not know how much she will be able to contribute to the group presentation, which will certainly affect her class grade.

Excerpts 7.3 and 7.4 demonstrate the volatility of investment and identity and how these are mitigated through language and culture and power relations. Certain contexts and

relationships can empower and serve as a resource to speak and demand access to the language, whereas other contexts and relationships can prevent or hinder the ability to access the linguistic and cultural resources that learners seek. In the home context, Belita is certainly an insider and she uses this authority to engage in English. In the classroom group context, however, Belita feels and is made to feel like a peripheral member whose lack of cultural knowledge and whose accented English detracts from the group's ability to perform at their highest level; thus, access is effectively cut off. In Focus Group Session 2, Belita admits that she almost dropped her public speaking class twice.

It is not just the native speaking community that can have an effect on L2 learners' investment and identity. All the Spanish speaking case study participants, Belita, Marcos, and Melosia, encountered resistance from community members who also have Spanish as one of their languages. Marcos, as shown earlier, did not receive an answer to his questions about where his package was from the UPS representative until he spoke Spanish to the representative. Melosia claims that when she would go to the local grocery store, the employees would address her in Spanish, not English, and that she would have to assert her English speaking-self if they were to talk to her in English. Finally, Belita describes a frustrating experience while trying to get her driver's license. Upon seeing and hearing Belita, the employee at the license bureau assumed that Belita wanted to take the driver's exam in Spanish, even though Belita was speaking English to the clerk. Are the community members orienting to Spanish as a statement of solidarity, or do they use Spanish because communication is more efficient, or is there another reason that might explain this behavior? It is impossible to know for sure, but that all three Spanish speaking participants noted these conflicts suggests that the community constructed their identities as Spanish speakers first,

and English language learners second. Therefore, if they wished to be identified as English speakers, the Spanish speaking case study participants would have to aggressively invest themselves in this identity.

Melosia, the adventurer, describes how having English allows her to be perceived as exotic, which in some ways frees her from the cultural expectations of being a Mexican woman.

*Excerpt 7.5 (March 25, 2010)*

- 1874 M: [(hh)] uh um (.03) do you (.02) feel like you have a different identity when you're  
 1875 speaking English and when you're speaking Span[ish].  
 1876 L: [Yes].  
 1877 M: Yes.  
 1878 L: You know why.  
 1879 M: Why?  
 1880 L: You know why.  
 1881 M: XX  
 1882 L: Be- for example when I talking in Spanish bec- English sorry in English because  
 1883 with this foreign accent.  
 1884 M: Umh.  
 1885 L: The XXX people say like oh your accent I I like your accent [where]=  
 1886 M: [Umh].  
 1887 L: =You from [you know].  
 1888 M: [Umh].  
 1889 L: I- is I have another /aidənri/ (identity).  
 1890 M: Okay.  
 1891 L: /aidənri/ (identity) for any kind of perspective.  
 1892 M: Umh.  
 1893 L: I could be a little here.  
 1894 M: [Okay].  
 1895 L: [(hh)] [yes].  
 1896 M: [Right] right umh.  
 1897 L: I could be international student.  
 1898 M: Umh.  
 1899 L: I could be a Chicano.  
 1900 M: Umh.  
 1901 L: I could be a Colombian Venezuelan Mexica:::::n Cuban girl.  
 1902 M: Right right.  
 1903 L: Depends on of the person.  
 1904 M: Umh.

- 1905 L: I could be ignorant or I could be educated.  
 1906 M: Umh.  
 1907 L: So (.04) ((*checking her texts again*)) a different uh whole /wɔːd/ (world).  
 1908 M: Okay.  
 1909 L: Or possibilities.  
 1910 M: Ok[ay]  
 1911 L: [Wh]en I'm talking in English.  
 1912 M: Umh.  
 1913 L: But when I am talking in Spanish I am just Latin. [MNC4INT32510]

In Excerpt 7.5, Melosia is describing how when she speaks English, her accent tells her interlocutors that Spanish is her first language, but they do not know where she is from; thus, she could be Peruvian, Argentinian, Colombian, or from any other Spanish speaking country. Melosia seemed to thrive on her ability to create this mystique about her. It drew attention to her and it allowed her to be perceived as someone special. Spanish, on the other hand, labeled her immediately as Latin and therefore, not special. Thus, for Melosia, an investment in English is also an investment in her identity as an independent woman, who was not going to be held to a set of pre-defined expectations: labels she viewed as confining.

Dao-Ming's investment in learning English is manifested in her desire to speak a sophisticated English. Yet, rather than seeking opportunities to speak English, she prefers to be quiet, listen, read, and study the spoken English of native speakers. Thus, it is not so much the actions of the native English speaking community that prevent her from speaking or that position her as an outsider as much as it is her own perceptions of herself as a speaker of English. Thus, she is invested in cultivating a level of English that will permit her to enter communities that perceive her as an intelligent and sophisticated person, worthy of membership in an elite society, a goal for many Chinese nationals.

According to Norton and Gao (2008), “English is not only associated with the target language culture, but an imagined community of ‘Chinese elites’” (p. 111).

### **Discourse Markers, Fillers, and Identity**

Spoken language contains, among other things, lexical items that serve to communicate ideas, intentions, and beliefs. Yet, spoken language also contains items that do not contribute to the meaning of utterances. These items can be removed from an utterance without changing or affecting the meaning of the utterance. Take, for example, an utterance spoken by Dao-Ming<sup>27</sup>.

1081    And uh you know uh I would usually come to the States to visit but I probably would  
1082    go to Australia it’s easier and more friendly way.

In the utterance above, there are three fillers: two non-lexical expressions, *uh* and one lexical *you know*. If these three items were to be removed from Dao-Ming’s utterance, the syntactic integrity of the utterance remains intact, thus comprehension of the utterance is not impaired. However, if a lexical item, such as *would* were removed from the utterance, then the meaning of the utterance itself is altered. Notice the difference between the utterances below.

Example 1: (fillers removed)

And I would usually come to the States to visit but I probably would go to Australia  
it’s easier and more friendly way.

Example 2: (modal auxiliary removed)

And uh you know uh I usually come to the States to visit but I probably go to  
Australia it’s easier and more friendly way.

In Example 1, the meaning of Dao-Ming’s utterance is not altered significantly. In fact, it could be argued that the meaning is clearer and more fluent with the removal of the fillers.

Example 2, however, changes the meaning of Dao-Ming’s utterance. In the original

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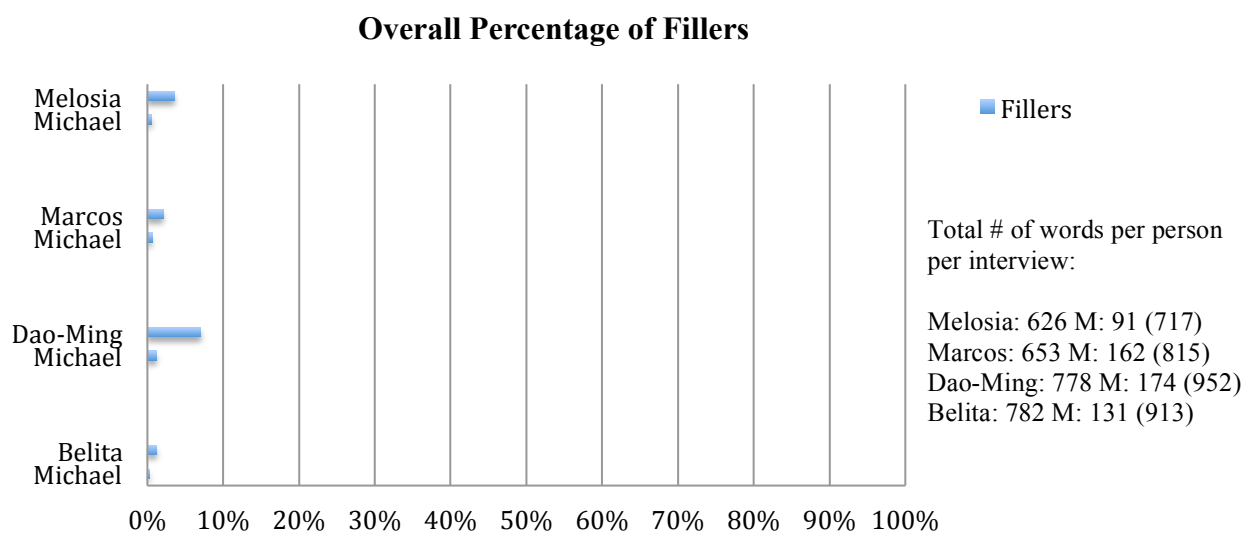
<sup>27</sup> Utterance take from the same transcript segment used to calculate L2 proficiency development Chapter 6.

(Example 1), the interlocutor understands that Dao-Ming is talking about a hypothetical situation in which she might come to the United States to visit, but she also might go to Australia, where *it is friendlier and easier*. In Example 2, with the modal auxiliary removed from the utterance, the tense aspect of the utterance changes from a hypothetical situation to one that is a recurring event. The use of the present tense *come* and *go* communicate that Dao-Ming routinely visits the United States and Australia and from her experiences, she appears to prefer Australia because *it is a friendlier and easier* country. Discourse fillers, such as the non-lexical and lexical just explained, are a part of normal, everyday, mundane spoken English. However, discourse fillers are not part of any English L2 teaching curriculum that I know of. In other words, discourse fillers are not taught, and yet L2 learners of English learn them and use them in their spoken English.

On observing a short, one page segment of Dao-Ming's English, Blommaert (2010) claimed that Dao-Ming's use of non-lexical fillers, such as *um* and *uh*, displayed her acculturation in that she produced fillers precisely where a native speaker of English would. Blommaert went on to state that this sort of talk-in-interaction is not taught. Others have observed the same phenomenon in L2 learners of English. Hellerman and Vergun (2007) observe that L2 research has focused primarily on the acquisition of linguistic forms. They go on to claim that the use of lexical fillers may indicate the degree to which L2 learners have acculturated into the L2 community. This is essentially the same claim that Blommaert made. However, the fillers that Hellerman and Vergun studied were lexical, i.e. *you know*, and *like*, not the non-lexical fillers such as *uh*, *um*, that are abundant in Dao-Ming's speech and the ones that Blommaert was noting.

In an attempt to verify the claims of acculturation based on the use of lexical and non-lexical discourse markers, I conducted several searches for studies address discourse markers and L2 acquisition. Other than the Hellerman and Vergun (2007) cited above, I found no such published research.

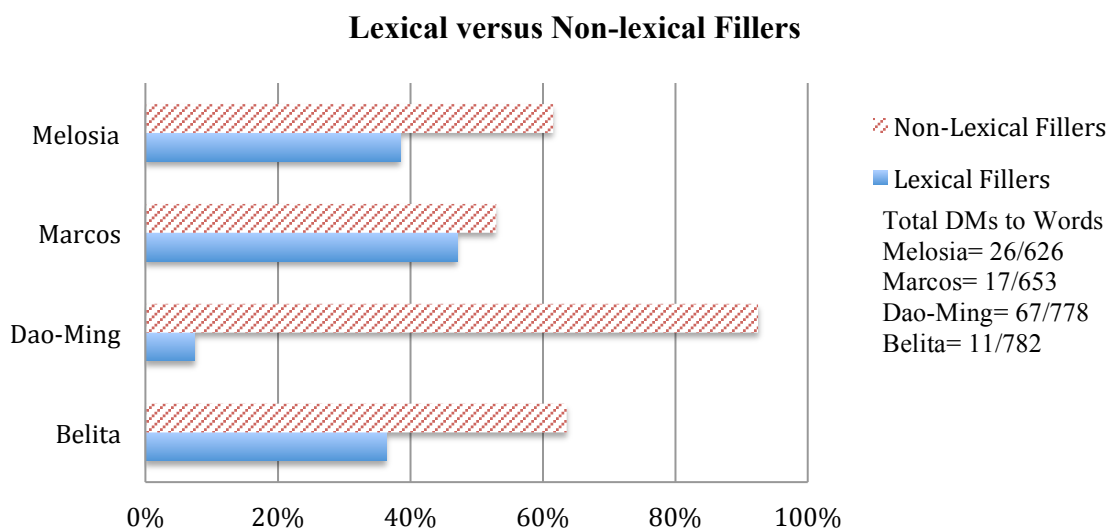
Using the same 100 lines of spoken text that I used for the quantitative L2 proficiency measurements and discourse marker analysis in Chapter 6, I counted the total number of words, intra-sentential fillers, lexical and non-lexical, each participant and I produced in our interactions, and then calculated the percentages for each type of filler. It should be noted that the discourse markers I counted in Chapter 6 occurred across conversational turns. In other words, they were produced as part of the give and take of a normal conversation between interlocutors. The fillers, on the other hand, occur intra-sentential, where the item is produced within an utterance by a single interlocutor as demonstrated in the example of Dao-Ming's production of fillers above.



**Figure 7.9: Overall Percentage of Fillers**



Figure 7.9 shows the overall percentage of fillers that both the case study participants and I produced during our interactions. Belita produced 782 words and I produced 131 for a total of 913 words. Out of those, it can be seen that Belita's production of fillers make up only 1.2% of Belita's total utterances. Dao-Ming, who produced 778 words to my 174 words for a total of 952, produced fillers 7% of the time. Marcos and I produced 815 total words, 653 for Marcos, and 162 for me. Two percent of Marcos' words were fillers. Finally, Melosia uttered 626 words to my 91 for a total of 717 words. Of Melosia's 626 words, 3.6% were fillers. Thus, overall there does not appear to be a great deal of difference between the case study participants' overall production of fillers. Dao-Ming's production is more than the others, but it is not enough to substantiate Blommaert's (2010) claim that she is more acculturated than Belita, Marcos, or Melosia.



**Figure 7.10: Lexical versus Non-Lexical Fillers**

Figure 7.10 reveals a significantly different pattern of usage regarding lexical and non-lexical fillers. All of the participants, as noted in Figure 7.9, produced fillers; however,

it can be seen in Figure 7.10 that Dao-Ming produces significantly fewer lexical fillers than Belita, Marcos, or Melosia. Likewise, Dao-Ming's non-lexical fillers comprise 92% of her total fillers, while the other case study participants only produce around 55% to 60% non-lexical fillers. Conversely, Belita's, Marcos', and Melosia's average use of lexical fillers is approximately 40%. Thus, according to the claims made by Hellerman and Vergun (2007), Belita, Marcos, and Melosia, because they produce significantly more lexical fillers, may actually be more acculturated than Dao-Ming. This possibly suggests that Belita, Marcos, and Melosia are more comfortable with their identities as L2 speakers of English than Dao-Ming. However, it is difficult to make this claim with any degree of certainty. There are myriad factors that may explain the dis-fluency that Dao-Ming exhibits compared to the relative fluency of the three case study participants. The three native Spanish speaking case study participants may have similar types of intra-sentential lexical discourse markers in their language, thus, Figures 7.9 and 7.10 may be an indication of L1 patterns of usage transferring to the L2. This is probable since Spanish is a multi-syllabic language, whereas Mandarin is a monosyllabic language. That Mandarin is monosyllabic may also explain why Dao-Ming produces an inordinate number of non-lexical fillers. In other words, this may be a phonological transfer where Dao-Ming is employing an epenthesis strategy that matches the phonological structure of Mandarin and transferring this to English.

Another possible explanation for Dao-Ming's over production of non-lexical fillers may be stuttering. In one of Dao-Ming's written reflections, she states that she knows she stutters, "I grew more and more confident and I seldom stutter now." What we do not know is if Dao-Ming stutters in Mandarin. If she does, then Dao-Ming's English speech pattern could be a result of language transfer from Mandarin to English. If she does not stutter in

Mandarin, but does so in English, what are the reasons for this? Is she nervous when speaking English, or is she searching for vocabulary or English grammatical structures? That she produces non-lexical fillers in what appear to be natural insertion points suggests that she is not employing a stalling strategy as she searches for lexical items or syntactic structures. Therefore, the evidence again points to Dao-Ming's relative discomfort with interacting in English with native speakers, something that is well documented in the data.

Finally, the types of access that the case study participants had in their home countries and later in the United States may be influencing the spoken English language styles the case study participants display. As suggested in Chapter 4, one's communicative competence may develop according to the communities that people interact with, i.e. their access to a particular variety of linguistic and cultural resources may influence the speech patterns that they develop as L2 learners of English. As noted, Melosia is a highly social individual; thus, it is reasonable to conclude that she has developed a style and rhythm in her English that reflects her social activities with NESs. Belita and Marcos are also relatively social people and also produced more lexical than non-lexical discourse markers. This possibly substantiates Duff's (2007) claim that communicative competence develops via the type of exposure L2 learners have access to. By the same token, Dao-Ming is not a highly social person, but is drawn toward academia and intellectual growth. Do academics tend to produce more non-lexical discourse markers than non-academics? I do not have an answer for this at this time, but it appears that this is a promising line of research for SLA. What seems clear, however, is that the case study participants appear to be orienting toward a particular speech pattern.

In the end, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine if Dao-Ming's use of non-lexical discourse markers is an attempt to sound more native-like, as Blommaert (2010) suggests, if the *ums* and *uhs* are evidence of a phonological transfer, if Dao-Ming is orienting toward an academic rhythm due to exposure and desire (Duff, 2007), or if she stutters. These questions can only be answered with more extensive research and analysis. What we do know is that Dao-Ming tends to favor non-lexical discourse markers, while Belita, Marcos, and Melosia tend to favor lexical markers.

### **Safe Houses and Access in the United States**

Dao-Ming and Belita, at different points during the study, describe how the university IEP and the specially designated ESL composition classes became safe houses for them.

#### *Excerpt 7.6: Dao-Ming (March 31, 2010)*

- 208 M: When when like when your dance instructor uses some of these terms do you after  
 209 class ever ask=  
 210 D: =No=  
 211 M: =A classmate and say what did she mean=  
 212 D: =No=  
 213 M: =What does this no [no].  
 214 D: [No].  
 215 M: No.  
 216 D: No.  
 217 M: Why not?  
 218 D: Um I'm kind of embarrassed=  
 219 M: Okay.  
 220 D: =I talk uh uh um very little.  
 221 M: Umh.  
 222 D: Uh in in the classes.  
 223 M: Okay.  
 224 D: Yeah very little I talk a lot in the IEP because I feel comfortable and everybody is  
 225 like me or worse [(hh)].  
 226 M: [(hh)] or worse [(hh)]  
 227 D: [Yes but my] like in my class when uh the um the  
 228 native native speakers speaking I I I'm a um very self conscious and uh I talk very  
 229 little. [DNL4INT33110]

Dao-Ming (Excerpt 7.6, line 224) claims she feels “comfortable” in the IEP because she is equal to or better in English than her classmates, but that she talks “very little” in her classes with native speakers (line 228) because she is embarrassed (line 218) and self-conscious (line 228). That the native speakers of English in Dao-Ming’s regular university classes do or do not overtly criticize or marginalize Dao-Ming is unknown, since Dao-Ming admits that she does not talk in the classes and she did not allow me to observe her in these native English speaking academic contexts. Yet, the fact that she does not assert herself in a native speaker academic context suggests that Dao-Ming perceives these contexts as potentially hostile toward “accented English,” thus preventing her from participating orally in class. Taken together, it is clear that the IEP context is a safe house for Dao-Ming, where she feels free to express herself without fear of being criticized by the larger, native English speaking, community.

*Excerpt 7.7: Belita (March 3, 2010)*

- 261 B: But almost the the whole time is the same people  
 262 M: Umh  
 263 B: I don’t know why so XXX with with my classmates of the other classes I never go  
 264 out only for a group work or something but I always go out with IEP friends I  
 265 don’t know  
 266 M: Okay  
 267 B: If I feel more confident or something  
 268 M: Umh okay what’s the IEP I mean y- you don’t have to name names but where are  
 269 they from  
 270 B: Uh:: Bolivia Colombia uh Japan uh Arabic (*tape malfunction*)  
 271 M: Saudi Arabia  
 272 B: Uhn Saudi Arabia an only it’s some of the same people Saudi Arabia an Latin  
 273 people I don’t know have XXXX  
 274 M: An I Japanese. [BTR3INT3310]

Belita (Excerpt 7.7), talking about socializing outside of an academic context, states when she does go out, it is with her friends from the IEP, not with her classmates from her

other classes (lines 263-265). Certainly some of the reasons for Belita's social group being from the IEP are because they are all second language learners of English and because they spent a great deal of time together in the IEP. The classmates in regular university classes, on the other hand, only see each other for a limited amount of time each week. Furthermore, the native English speakers may have other obligations, such as work and family, which prevent them from developing a closer social bond with fellow classmates. Belita (line 267), though, says that she "feels more confident or something" in the company of other non-native speakers of English. With Belita's comments, the concept of *safe house* within a dominant English speaking context is extended from a brick and mortar structure to a fluid social context, where L2 learners of English can participate peripherally in the social and cultural activities of the larger community, while insulating themselves from the sort of ridicule Belita experienced in her speech communication class.

The comfort level that Dao-Ming and Belita express in Excerpts 7.6 and 7.7 allows them the space they need to feel free to speak, to make mistakes, and to learn from these experiences. The comfort level comes from all "being international students" and all being the same, or even as Dao-Ming observes, that their English is worse than hers (Excerpt 7.6, lines 224-225). The point is that university IEPs, as well as specially designated ESL sections of freshman composition, may serve as safe houses for international English L2 students, in which they are insulated from the larger, native English speaking community. Conversely, these institutional safe houses may restrict access to uncontrolled L1 English interactions.

The experiences that Dao-Ming and Belita describe suggest a conundrum for L2 learners of a language and for the native speaking community. On the one hand, L2 learners

may be ridiculed, labeled, and disrespected. Yet, L2 learners know that the best way to develop their L2 skills is to gain access to the L2 and to interact with native speakers of the language. Belita's comments in Excerpt 6.8 summarize the Catch-22 of safe houses on a university campus. "If you don't know anything about [the culture], you no can get it." Canagarajah (1997) explores the conundrum in which he questions the practical benefits of having a place to protect oneself from "legacies of oppression" (Pratt, 1991, p. 40) versus having unfiltered access to the language and culture. In other words, when is it appropriate and under what circumstances does it become necessary to remove the scaffolding that is inherent in a safe house in the United States?

*Excerpt 7.8: (FS-April 25-pp. 69-70)*

	<b>Dao-Ming</b>	<b>Marcos</b>	<b>Belita</b>	<b>Michael</b>
=>	Yeah because I also feel more comfortable in the IEP because everybody's international.		I know that you speak with uh and or XXX so maybe he told you that I am so quiet in the class but so it's because I'm afraid of of say something and don't say in the right way but this happen only in the university classes because	
		=>	when I am in the IEP I always I am always speaking.	
	Uh no native speakers even the teacher no (hh).			Right (hh) even the teacher (hh) um so speaking in the IEP is there's no anxiety there.
	Umh.		Umh ((nodding yes)) Yes and when we need a work in work in in group	
			Ah I was so afraid.	Umh.
			Because even you can	Okay.

choose the people that you  
see that are nice or

Umh.

So he say even with with  
that so.

Umh umh.

And this is why it is  
important know about the  
culture in that class every  
example that he put in  
about music or movies or  
=> or important persons here  
and if you don't know  
anything about that you can  
no get it.

[FSCGRP242510]



### **English as a Safe House**

Having already demonstrated that a safe house can be conceptualized concretely – the classroom, and abstractly – L2 social networks, it is not a huge leap to think of English itself as becoming a safe house, where studying the language in an ESL context offers protection from possible deportation and opens up opportunities that might be closed, such as romance. It is worthy to note that all three of the female case study participants married either during the data collection phase or within a year after data collection ceased. What does this mean to this study and to the concepts of investment and identity? One explanation is that it is just a coincidence and that there is no connection. I believe differently though. Two of the women, Belita and Dao-Ming, entered the United States on temporary visas. Belita came to the U.S. on a tourist visa and later changed it to an F-1 student visa, and Dao-Ming entered via a visa waiver. Thus, both women were under pressure to find a more permanent solution to their stay in the United States. Even though Belita was on an F-1 visa, she was not taking classes toward a degree. Rather, she was taking classes to maintain her F-1 visa status while she waited for her dental credentials from Guatemala to be delivered to the U.S. That her dentistry school in Guatemala was delaying these records was causing Belita problems and costing her money. In fact, she was facing the harsh reality of having to return to Guatemala at the end of summer 2011 if she did not declare a major or demonstrate active progress toward licensure. Recalling what Belita said about her “home” no longer being in Guatemala, that it was with her family and that she had sold everything before moving to the United States, returning to Guatemala could have been devastating. Furthermore, Belita revealed in one of the interviews that she believed her chances of marrying were greater in the U.S. than in Guatemala. She felt that because she was a professional woman and in her

30's that she would not find a suitable partner if she remained in Guatemala. For all of these reasons, Belita had to face learning English again. Thus, her investment in learning English was also an investment in herself as a single, attractive, 30 something woman looking for a husband, and waiting for her dentistry credentials from Guatemala.

Dao-Ming knew Jim before moving to the United States, and I have no doubt that they had planned to marry long before she entered the country. Nevertheless, Dao-Ming was able to solve her immigration conundrum by marrying an American. Thus, her investment in learning English was also an investment in her membership into her imagined community of an educated, professional elite (Norton & Gao, 2008), where she has the potential to express herself without fear of serious political consequences.

Melosia, as stated before, felt that by coming to the United States she was able to escape from her community's expectations that she graduate from college, get married, and begin a family. She wanted more and she wanted to prove to her friends, ex-boyfriend in Mexico, and family, that she could do and be more than a married woman living in Mexico. Thus, her investment in English allowed her to free herself from the cultural constraints of Mexico and to explore new worlds. Marrying an American was the ultimate act of establishing her inbound trajectory in the community of ex-patriots living and working successfully and legally in the United States. This act communicates to her family and friends in Mexico that, though she is Mexican, she enjoys a dual identity as Mexican and as a married speaker of English, and the respect that she receives in the United States is more than what she experienced in Mexico.

## Conclusion

That learning English has affected the lives of the case study participants is not a question. Throughout this chapter and the preceding two, I have tried to present a balanced and fair description of the participants' experiences, their English L2 proficiency, and the quality of controlled and uncontrolled access to English they each had. I have also tried to show the shape of safe houses as they are realized in institutions of higher education in the U.S. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that they may serve as sites where English skills and cultural knowledge are scaffolded, as well as protection against legal authorities while immigration issues are worked out.

Through the participants' language logs, I have tried to demonstrate patterns of language usage for the L1 and L2, highlighting the increased access to academic English, while non-academic forms of English remain largely elusive. Finally, the chapter has attempted to establish direct links and interactions between identity, investment, and access as they are realized in the home country and U.S. university contexts. Chapters 6 and 7 began with quotes from Li (2005) and Swain (1998) who claim that social interaction in the L2 necessarily leads to increased L2 proficiency. In a short case study such as this, it is difficult to make assertions about the L2 linguistic development in adults. The data samples suggest, however, that while fluency may be reinforced, improving L2 structure may require more explicit and directed attention by both the L2 speaker and the L1 community. As Swain (1985) states, L2 learners may require being "pushed in output" (p. 249) if they are to develop facility in the L2 beyond their current levels. Just when to push L2 learners toward output and under what conditions remains an open question. I have shown that the safe house, both the physical classroom and social contexts, serve as vehicles for international L2

students to experience the L2 culture, learn culturally defined pragmatics, and develop confidence in the L2. It has also been noted that the safe house may also be a barrier to entering desired and necessary English L2 communities of practice. The concluding chapter will summarize what these processes have meant for the participants in terms of their continued trajectories.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

“Linguistic competence (like any other cultural competence) functions as linguistic capital in relation with a certain market” (Bourdieu, 1982, p. 651).

To conclude this study, it may first be helpful to look at the overarching research questions individually. Next, I discuss the limitations, potential implications, and future research directions. Finally, I end with some concluding remarks on the state of SLA, specifically focused on L2 proficiency, and the need for accepting alternate varieties of English.

#### Research Question 1

*In what ways do identity, motivation, and access intersect with the second language learning process?*

This is perhaps the most elusive of the four research questions in that clues to potential answers are more opaque, woven into the fabric of the case study participants' personal histories. Furthermore, acknowledging that identity is co-constructed, my interpretations and conclusions are hopelessly etic in nature, thus partial at best. Perhaps the clearest and most direct route to establishing a link between identity, motivation, and access for these case study participants is to reflect on the relationship labels ascribed to the case study participants in Chapter 5: Courage-Belita, Liberation-Dao-Ming, Opportunity-Marcos, and Adventure-Melosia.

These relationships with English sustained and guided the case study participants as they confronted the challenges and joys of learning English and adapting to life as international English L2 students in a university in the United States. Courage allowed Belita to overcome her dislike for the English language and her fear of speaking to NESs.

Her identity as a daughter intersected with her investment as an English L2 learner to motivate her to speak English with her step-brother, demonstrating to him that she was not stupid and that she understood him. Furthermore, her identity as a dentist and as a woman with life experiences allowed her to assert herself during small group work in her university classes and to deflect attempts to marginalize her because of her English L2 skills. Thus, she drew on courage to give her the strength to overcome her fear of English, and to persevere over social and familial situations that tried to silence her.

The promise of living life in a country where she could feel free to think critically and to pursue a medical career sustained Dao-Ming. By her own admission, Dao-Ming felt constrained by her lack of having acquired a “sophisticated” English. Yet, at the same time, English liberated her from the legacies of oppression that she experienced while in China. She acknowledges that she has “felt some contempt” because of her English, but her identity as a sophisticated intellectual served to sustain her investment as she struggled with the finer intricacies of the English language, such as differentiating between the minimal pairs *porn* and *pawn*. Dao-Ming also understands that by investing in English and her identity as a physician, she will ultimately be perceived by the NES community as a sophisticated intellectual. This imagined community that Dao-Ming is striving to enter is liberating for her.

Marcos vested himself in English as a young boy and teenager, recognizing the doors to opportunity that English could open for him. When the opportunity presented itself to come to the United States to study, he did not hesitate. His first few months in the United States revealed to him that he still needed to invest in English, realizing that his comprehension and production skills were not as good as he had imagined. Yet, he accepted

this realization as a challenge, not as a barrier. As Marcos acknowledged, “I am comfortable, but I could be more comfortable.” Yet, for Marcos, this did not mean he needed to invest in mastering the intricacies of English grammar, or in his words, “ticky-tacky” stuff. Rather, he needed to create opportunities to interact with others in English. By doing so, he would not only continue to develop his English L2 skills, but he would be exposed to people and different perspectives, which, in turn, would contribute to his understanding of the world in which he lives.

Melosia found herself through her adventures, and English added to this excitement, as she discovered that she could be whomever she wanted in English. Melosia recognized that she was not happy with her trajectory as it was being played out in Mexico. She had a degree in computer science but could only find employment as a data entry technician, a position far below her skills. Furthermore, she understood that she was expected to get married and begin raising a family in Mexico, perhaps even giving up her job in the process. This is precisely what her mother did, and she saw this same future for herself, a future that was constraining and unsatisfactory. She wanted more out of life. Her summer study abroad experience in the United States opened an opportunity for her to pursue her adventurous spirit. Thus, she invested her time, energy, and money into finding a way to return to the United States so that she could continue to nourish her adventurous spirit. Thus, her investment in English is also an investment in Melosia’s identity as a curious, intelligent, person who wanted more from life than a desk job, needy husband, and demanding children in Mexico. Melosia also acknowledges that her English is not perfect, but that is not important to her. What is important is recognizing this and using this awareness as a source

to work harder, so that she can gain the respect of her NES classmates, teachers, friends, and colleagues.

Thus, these relationships of courage, liberation, opportunity, and adventure were a source of strength and guidance as the case study participants' identities shifted while transitioning from their home countries into an academic context in the United States. These relationships served to sustain their investments in English and allowed the case study participants to negotiate the type and quality of controlled and uncontrolled access to English that they believed would be beneficial.

### **Research Question 2**

*What effect does emigrating from a home or foreign country to the United States into a university academic environment have on identity, motivation, and access for second language learners of English?*

Analyzing the benefits of immersion in a natural language learning context has been a central focus of this study. There is little doubt that surrounding oneself with opportunities to interact in the L2 is essential to the learning process. Yet, how these opportunities are created and/or capitalized on by international English L2 students, and how the host community receives or distances itself from the international English L2 student population are as variable as human behavior itself.

Marcos offers an interesting case in point. Throughout much of his childhood and early adult years, he sought out controlled and uncontrolled access to English in Spain. He bought music and studied the lyrics. He watched American football and basketball on TV. He scoured the Internet in English. He ventured into the tourist district where he could meet travelers with whom he could practice English. In Spain, he appears to be a social, gregarious, inquisitive, and assertive individual, invested in learning English and sincerely



curious about others and where they are from. It would be reasonable to assume this pattern of activity would continue in the United States; however, Marcos appears to have had less access to NESs than the other three case study participants. His Ph.D. program in engineering, where many of the professors and students are also L2 learners of English partially explains the limited access he has had in the United States. In his final written reflection of his first year in the United States, Marcos states:

*Excerpt 8.1 (January 19, 2011)*

I have spent too much time with people from Spain or Latin America, or even with foreigners from non-spanish speaking countries (i.e: China, Lebanon, India) and too little with native United States people, specially in this second semester, way much more than in the first. I used to read journal articles, books and watch TV in English back in Spain too, so I haven't improved by these means. And I don't have to write a lot in English, so my proficiency in this aspect hasn't improved either.

[MRCWrtrflctn2011]

In the excerpt above, Marcos acknowledges that he has not surrounded himself with NESs. He also confirms that he had more access to English produced by native speakers (written and oral) in Spain than he has had here in the United States. As mentioned above, this phenomenon may be partially a consequence of his degree program in engineering; however, other explanations are possible, such as his gender, his nationality, and his cautious personality.

Dao-Ming and Belita immigrated to the United States knowing that they intended to adopt the United States as their new home; thus, their investment in learning English and creating access opportunities is linked to their identities as L2 English speaking U.S. immigrants. Marcos, though curious about the United States and wanting to learn more about the culture and people, is vested primarily in earning his Ph.D. and returning to Spain. In short, Marcos does not feel as if he has to “reinvent” himself, whereas it can be argued that

Belita and Dao-Ming feel a sense of urgency in establishing themselves as members of their new country of residence.

Of course, it can also be argued that Dao-Ming had even less access to English than Marcos. Undoubtedly, she choreographed her access. She took academic and IEP classes. She spent hours reading in the university library and watched English movies on a regular basis. Finally, she identified her husband and me as her access to spoken interactions in English. In doing so, she actually created multiple and variable opportunities to access native English resources she believed would benefit her future trajectory as a physician in the United States.

Likewise, once Belita came to terms with her new life in the United States, with learning English again, and with her fear of speaking English, she sought out opportunities that would put her in contact with NESs. She took classes in the IEP where she felt comfortable experimenting with new vocabulary, pronunciation, and structures in English, but she also took language intensive academic courses, such as freshman and sophomore English composition and a speech communication class. She could have chosen to take courses in which interaction was more limited, such as general statistics, history, or biology. In addition to her academic context, Belita also ultimately married an American after data collection had ended. Thus, Belita also found ways to create opportunities to interact in English with NESs by using the institutional resources available to her.

Melosia presents a slightly different case than Marcos, Belita, or Dao-Ming. Melosia initially came to the United States as an exotic adventure. After several months, however, she began recognizing the opportunities that were available to her in the United States that she did not see for herself in Mexico. This realization inspired her to stay in the United

States, complete a degree, and find gainful employment. Creating opportunities to access NES English resources was not a problem for Melosia. As she stated to me, “talking is not my problem.” Her biggest problem was finding ways to finance her education in the United States and convincing her father that being in the United States was right for her future. Thus, Melosia took two and sometimes three jobs. She also strategized her interactions with her father, so as to remain in his good graces, while she pursued her dreams. In short, Melosia had to reinvent herself as a serious, conscientious, and responsible person, who was committed to her studies in Bilingual Education and to a career as a Bilingual teacher. One way of doing this was to get married and, although Melosia claimed in an early interview to not be interested in American men because they lacked the sensuousness and romantic nature of Mexican men, she ultimately married an American man.

Thus, the three women in the study, for reasons of necessity and desire, learned to assert themselves into different situations where they could increase their interactions with native English resources. Whereas Marcos, who asserted himself in Spain, did not, it appears, feel that need to continue with the same level of investment upon arriving in the U.S., or that social and institutional barriers curtailed his access to interactions with native English resources.

### **Research Question 3**

*What is the role of L2 proficiency in identity, motivation, and access and how is proficiency defined or determined?*

Question 3, the role L2 proficiency plays in identity, motivation, and access has proven to be a very productive question. Through the analysis of L2 proficiency from multiple perspectives, quantitative and qualitative, I have demonstrated that L2 proficiency is

local and co-constructed across meaningful interactions between interlocutors. Because of this and because international student enrollment in U.S. universities and colleges continues to increase, traditional L2 proficiency assessment procedures need to be re-evaluated to more closely resemble what is known about communicative and interactional competence. Furthermore, with the increasing numbers of multilingual students in university classrooms, it is necessary for administrators, faculty, and monolingual English classmates to acknowledge that there are varieties of English other than Standard Academic English, and that these varieties are productive and effective forms of English communication. I have shown that L2 proficiency may initially be a barrier to access, but once international English L2 students and NESs engage in meaningful interactions, the international English L2 students are able to demonstrate their intellect, critical thinking skills, and creative ideas, rendering linguistic skills as a secondary concern. Belita and Melosia both experienced frustration with working in small groups in their respective classes in the beginning, but were later accepted and given greater responsibility within their groups because their intellect, critical thinking skills, and creative ideas were validated.

Furthermore, the tension between L2 proficiency and access in academic classes appears to be a source of motivation for some L2 learners. Melosia described how important it was for her to be well prepared as the leader of her group discussion activity for her evening class. She claims that she studied harder and prepared more thoroughly because she did not want her group to appropriate her role as the evening's leader because her English skills are not "native like."

The tension between L2 proficiency and access can also have the reverse effect. Dao-Ming stated on more than one occasion that she would be embarrassed if she learned that she

were making mistakes in English when interacting with native speakers of the language. Yet, this fear motivated her to concentrate on developing a “sophisticated vocabulary” and refining her English pronunciation. It also motivated her to exert time and energy on mastering the finer details of English grammar.

While the various quantitative and qualitative perspectives of the case study participants revealed that none of the case study participants has achieved “native-like” L2 proficiency, I demonstrated, through the principles of ethnomethodological CA and interactional competence, that the case study participants possess the skills necessary to participate in meaningful, comprehensible interactions with NESs. As a result, the findings of this study lead to the following question: How can the principles of interactional competence, specifically indexicality and intersubjectivity, be embedded into an L2 proficiency assessment instrument? To develop such an L2 proficiency assessment instrument that is reliable and convenient to administer will require more research on how conversation establishes intersubjectivity when L2 learners of English engage with NESs, in what contexts, and for what purposes. Creating such an L2 proficiency assessment instrument will require the following:

1. Conducting longitudinal studies of L2 learners interacting with native speakers.
2. Specifying the ways in which spoken language, gesture, and pragmatics assist in establishing and maintaining intersubjectivity through indexicality, interpretation, reciprocity, accountability, and reflexivity.
3. Discovering how digital and web based technologies can be used to create reliable and efficient proficiency assessment instruments steeped in interactional competence.

Recognizing that L2 proficiency is a construct that, first and foremost, needs to be defined locally, it is essential that any L2 proficiency assessment instrument be constructed with the needs of the L2 learner for a particular trajectory in mind. Second, the community that the L2 learner wishes to enter must be considered. What are the L2 proficiency expectations and demands of the respective communities? Next, it is important to ask if these expectations held by the community are warranted. For example, it may be that an L2 learner of English seeking to enter academia as a professor, or a person wishing to be a television news journalist, or a lawyer requires highly sophisticated Standard American Academic English skills. Is the same level of L2 linguistic skill necessary for an auto mechanic, dentist, or entrepreneur? Thus, the field of SLA is confronted with an oxymoron: creating a standardized local L2 proficiency assessment instrument. Perhaps, this conundrum will lead test designers toward the creation of field specific exams, such as TOEFL-psychology, TOEFL-business, TOEFL-medicine, TOEFL-education, and so on. Only extensive research and pilot projects can provide answers to these challenges.

#### **Research Question 4**

*How much agency do L2 learners have, in what contexts, and in what ways does agency intersect with the variables of identity, motivation, access, and L2 proficiency?*

Question 4 is similar to research question 2 in that it investigates access and how the case study participants gained access. Yet, in analyzing the contexts of access, it became apparent that the traditional dichotomy between classroom language learning and natural language learning contexts shifts the focus from the learner to the environment. And though sociocultural theory has successfully reunited the individual with the external environment, in doing so, agency has been largely under analyzed in SLA. By re-conceptualizing access

as a phenomenon that L2 learners have varying degrees of control over, the focus shifts back to the learner while maintaining the integral link to sociocultural influences. In this way, L2 learners are afforded greater agency in the learning process, while also acknowledging that many L2 learning contexts are laden with unsympathetic power structures, i.e. mandated curriculum, teacher driven pedagogies, and/or antipathetic native speaker interlocutors – all contexts with which L2 learners have little to no control.

As summarized in question 2 above, each of the case study participants found ways to gain access to sources of English they could control. Marcos appears to have been most successful with gaining access to English resources in Spain, whereas, Belita, Dao-Ming, and Melosia demonstrated amazing creativity in successfully manipulating their situations in the United States to gain access to the English resources they believed would be most beneficial to them.

### **Limitations**

Like any study, the one presented here is not without gaps and limitations. The most obvious limitation is the lack of consistent data from all of the case study participants. For example, Dao-Ming did not complete a satisfactory language log and Melosia did not write reflections of the essays assigned for the Focus Group sessions. Also, because the study was conducted in the Southwestern United States, where Spanish is prevalent, the three native Spanish speaking case study participants may have had access to Spanish, even if they did not want it. Melosia, for example, recounted that she had to assert herself as an English speaker at the local grocery store because the employees would address her in Spanish. Belita encountered the same sort of situation at the license bureau, where she was asked if she wanted to take the driver's test in Spanish. Undoubtedly, the language logs would have

looked different if the study had been conducted in a different region in the United States. Furthermore, none of the case study participants kept consistent records of their language usage, creating an incomplete and partial record of when they used a particular language, where, and for what purposes.

Another obvious limitation is that there are only four primary case study participants and all of them are graduate students or at least post-baccalaureate. In the original proposal I had hoped to secure at least six case study participants and, as indicated in the methodology chapter, I initially had five primary case study participants, but one had to be dropped due to his inconsistent participation. Furthermore, the study only concentrated on adult university English L2 students, not adult learners of English in general. In other words, how do adult immigrants gain access to English resources? Norton's (2000) study addresses these issues more directly, but only for adult women immigrants.

Relatedly, the study was imbalanced in terms of gender. Three of the case study participants were female and only one male. Undoubtedly, gender differences play a role in the type and quality of access to English L2 resources L2 learners have. Just what these differences are is unclear and needs to be explored in greater detail. Furthermore, it is important to note that all three of the women eventually married native speakers of English and US citizens, either during the period of data collection or shortly thereafter. Were these marital unions orchestrated by the women and if so how and why? It is not the prelude of this study to conjecture such claims and it would be inappropriate to do so without further investigation and more pointed research questions. Yet, that the three women all married native speakers of English and US citizens suggests that gender has a direct role in the type and quality of access to native speakers of English.



On a slightly different note, another limitation is that the study includes an analysis of identity, investment, access, and proficiency of just two L1s: Spanish and Mandarin. Would the findings be different and would these differences be significant if the study had included Korean, Arabic, French, Portuguese, Japanese, German, or Russian L1 speakers? It is impossible to answer this question with the current study; however, given changes in political climates, ethnicities, and language families, it would appear likely that the experiences of L1 speakers from language backgrounds other than Spanish and Mandarin would be different.

Also lacking in the study are observational data. I did not observe the case study participants in social and/or academic contexts. Thus, I do not have contextualized interactional data of the case study participants using their English or L1 with host community members. Without this data, it is impossible to analyze how investment contributes to the co-construction of the case study participants' identities as legitimate speakers of English. Furthermore, observational data that captures talk-in-interaction in social and academic contexts is necessary if we are to understand the communicative power of interactional competence and to begin to design assessment procedures based on intersubjectivity and indexicality. Work is being done in this area in regard to analyzing the interactions during writing conferences between tutors or instructors and students (Davis, Hayward, Hunter, & Wallace, 2010) or between doctors and patients (Frers, 2009; Heritage & Maynard, 2006). The questions have centered around agency and the construction of meaning across interlocutors with the purpose of trying to better understand how to scaffold knowledge and/or how relationships are cultivated in these intimate interactions. In other words, a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) lens is used to analyze the negotiation of power relations in talk-in-interaction.

Young's (2000, 2011) work in interactional competence delineates the many different ways in which communication is co-constructed across interlocutors and how indexicality and intersubjectivity work to assist in the meaning making process. With the collection of observational data of L2 learners of English interacting in social and academic contexts with NESs and/or other L2 learners of English, perhaps it is possible to determine points in talk-in-interaction where indexicality serves to make salient and comprehensible utterances that initially appear to lack the structural integrity required for mutual understanding.

Another limitation of the study is differentiating between academic English and social English, a dichotomy that Valdes (2011) rejects, but one that, nevertheless, is perceived as relevant on a university campus. Though I collected written documents from the case study participants, I did not rely on them as much as I did the extensive one-on-one interviews in my analyses and in drawing my conclusions about the case study participants' investment, identity, access, and proficiency. One of the reasons for this is that the written documents were personal reflections, which do not require the same level of academic language that a formal research paper might. Thus, the reflections, though written, in many ways more closely resemble a social English usage than an academic English usage. Furthermore, like the language logs, the written reflections varied in depth and length. Some were only a paragraph, while others were two or three pages in length. Furthermore, I did not receive an equal number of reflections from all of the case study participants. Melosia, for example, preferred to talk about her experiences, rather than reflect on them in writing.

Written forms of communication, particularly academic genres, may prove to be informative regarding interactional competence. Questions such as what allows one piece of L2 writing to be more comprehensible than another piece could be investigated through the

processes of indexicality and intersubjectivity. Knowledge of these processes could not only inform L2 learners of English about the discursive conventions of academic written English, but might also serve as talking points for professional development workshops with faculty, administrators, and fellow classmates. For example, what features in a piece of academic writing produced by an L2 speaker of English assist the meaning making process? What strategies does the L1 reader employ to assist in the meaning making process? What features and/or strategies hinder this process? How do the L1 reader and the L2 writer, through the written page, establish indexicality and intersubjectivity?

Finally, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, I, the researcher, am a white, monolingual, middle-aged male, and US citizen. My positionality clearly influences the lens through which I designed the study, collected and analyzed data, as well as selected passages for inclusion in this dissertation. A different researcher would certainly identify different passages as significant for different reasons. This cannot be helped, nor should it be.

Qualitative research has long acknowledged the subjectivity of this type of investigation and has never claimed that research findings in qualitative research can be generalized to larger, decontextualized populations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; Duff, 2008). As such, my ethnicity, language background, gender, and age are only limitations in a positivist tradition.

### **Implications**

The best kind of research study is one that leads to direct, even immediate, application. Additionally, a good study should always open new questions that challenge the respective field to move in new directions. *EFL to ESL: A Case Study of International University English L2 Students in Transition* has identified critical junctures in this volatile

period of transition for international English L2 students and their host institutions. The dismantling of the TOEFL or IELTS tests is not likely, nor do I advocate this. However, I have demonstrated that L2 proficiency can and should be re-conceptualized as a fluid construct that is best defined locally, with the L2 learners' needs and trajectories in mind. Furthermore, U.S. universities need to begin embracing a definition of L2 proficiency that is more reflective of that adopted by scholars of World Englishes, who promote, justify, and celebrate regional variation (Berns, 2009), than traditional views of proficiency propagated by the likes of Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*. As Matsuda (2010) reminds us, we can no longer assume a homogenous monolingual English classroom in tertiary institutions in the United States. U.S. university and college classrooms are increasingly multilingual, consisting of international English L2 students as well as domestic English L2 students. As stated above, the field of World Englishes has long recognized that countless variations of English exist in expanding circle contexts (Kachru & Nelson, 1996). Yet, the lines demarcating the concentric circles of English are rapidly blurring, creating the need for increased tolerance and flexibility for varieties of English within inner circle contexts, especially ones that have traditionally been the gatekeepers of standard academic English. Clearly, teachers have a responsibility to teach their students and to guide them toward more standard English structures. Failure to expect L2 students to continue developing their English skills is setting the L2 learner up for disappointment, and potential catastrophic consequences upon entering the job market. However, failure to advance L2 students based solely on their English L2 skills and to not acknowledge their intellectual capacities in their chosen fields of study is akin to linguistic discrimination. Editorial services that focus specifically on the needs of L2 learners of English are a multimillion dollar a year industry

(Matsuda, 2012). On a more local basis, at the university where this study was conducted, in the graduate office there are not less than nine advertisements for copy editors, all of whom offer special ESL support. Thus, an infrastructure exists that can assist L2 learners of English beyond the classroom. What this editorial industry cannot provide is instruction in content areas.

L2 scholars, teachers, and L2 learners need to always and constantly keep the conversation of what it means to be proficient at the forefront (Cox, 2011). By continually advocating for flexibility and acceptance, it may then be possible to begin making inroads at the student, faculty, and departmental levels. Furthermore, advocacy may lead to retaining existing resources, such as ESL sections of freshman and sophomore composition classes and the maintenance of ESL specialists in writing centers. Keeping conversations of proficiency in the fore may also lead to opportunities for establishing additional resources, such as ESL classes for college algebra, or for the folding in of IEPs into university fiscal structures, rather than keeping IEPs on the university periphery as auxiliary enterprises that are forced to finance themselves. IEPs are equipped with the infrastructure to serve a wider population than international English L2 students who enroll in their classes, yet because IEPs have to charge exorbitant fees, they are frequently underutilized on university campuses. IEPs, in cooperation with writing centers, student services departments, specific academic departments, and other campus entities can work together to develop academic and social support programs that will bring international English L2 and NES students together in cooperative, shared-learning contexts; thus, creating access to linguistic as well as cultural resources for everyone. SLA professionals can provide professional development workshops, symposiums, and seminars that serve to educate and inform the academy of the

challenges international English L2 learners face and the benefits they offer to their classes. Furthermore, these professional development programs can provide faculty and administrators with the knowledge they need to help facilitate international English L2 learners' transitions into the academy in the United States.

This study also highlights the different kinds of access L2 learners can and do engage with. The study demonstrates that L2 learners have varying degrees of agency over these resources in different contexts. How can the concept of controlled versus uncontrolled access be utilized by the field of SLA? What kinds of uncontrolled access benefit the learning process for what sort of learner? Can forms of uncontrolled access, such as song lyrics, newspaper articles, the Internet, and other language rich resources be incorporated into a classroom setting and still be "uncontrolled?" Does the shift from uncontrolled to controlled matter and if so, how and why? If L2 learners and their instructors were aware of the controlled-uncontrolled continuum, would this empower them to seek out L2 resources and use them differently? These are just a few of the questions worthy of future research.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As indicated in the opening chapter, U.S. university campuses are becoming increasingly global. Globalization means increased diversity, as well as increased intersections of misunderstandings, naiveté, and conflict. Like all periods of change, the shifting demographics of college campuses will be accompanied with opportunities and challenges. This study has identified only a few of these contentious areas, but they are significant. International English L2 students, fellow NES classmates, teachers, administrators, and the larger English speaking U.S. community have choices as to how to approach these opportunities and challenges. Their decisions will have profound and lasting

effects for those directly involved in education and society in general. As I said in Chapter 1, this study touches everyone. I believe the preceding pages have demonstrated just how interconnected we all are, and that decisions to include or exclude, to accept or deny, to grow or stifle affect us individually and collectively.

Paraphrasing what an international English L2 student, a former student of mine, said to me, “You integrate. You have to. You have neighbors; you go to the store; you go to the movies; you have classes. Eventually you integrate.” How international English L2 students integrate and how this integration influences their identities as L2 speakers and writers of English, their access to English resources, and their investments in themselves and English is mitigated only by how international English L2 students are perceived and received by their host communities.

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