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Expanding composition's scope: Community-based literacy and second-language writing

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EXPANDING COMPOSITION'S SCOPE: COMMUNITY-BASED
LITERACY AND SECOND-LANGUAGE WRITING

PELAEZ-MORALES

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Expanding Composition's Scope: Community-Based Literacy

and Second-Language Writing.

(TITLE)

BY

Carolina Pelaez-Morales

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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ABSTRACT

There is little research from either Composition Studies or Second-Language Studies on the development of writing competence among English language learners, particularly adult learners outside academia. In response to this need, I conducted a case study of a small group of Spanish-native speakers as they learned English through a volunteer-based community program in a small Midwestern town. This project establishes the role writing plays in a community of second-language learners—primarily motivated by economic factors to learn English—and it shows ways in which the development of writing competence can enhance overall language proficiency. Also, this study calls for further research in community education settings while it challenges practitioners in the fields of Composition and Second-Language Studies to expand their disciplinary focus to include second-language writing.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to all the participants in this study, especially the adult language learners who welcomed me into their community and respected me as a mentor, a researcher, and a friend.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to my mentor and thesis director Dr. Terri Fredrick who agreed to embark with me on a project that challenged the boundaries of Composition Studies. Without Dr.

Fredrick's willingness to support my interest in the new field of inquiry of second-language writing, this project would not be what it is today: a thesis that acknowledges the need for the study of non-traditional populations and the development of written competence of second-language learners.

Dr. Fredrick, thank you for your patience, your professionalism, and your commitment to this project.

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Dr. Timothy Shonk for challenging my ideas and making me re-think some of the assumptions I initially had.

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INTRODUCTION

This study began thanks to my interests in the intersections between ESL education and Composition Studies. Historically, second-language writing has been ignored by both Composition and Second-Language Studies; nevertheless, second-language writing has recently re-emerged as an area of inquiry in response to the growing number of second-language writers in mainstream composition classes. As a former ESL teacher and a current composition instructor, I believe that the development of writing skills among bilingual populations has been a neglected area of study due to this division.

Most of the available research has focused on either ESL learners' overall language development or native-English speakers' writing development within academia. There is still little research on non-traditional populations such as adult learners and their development of writing competence. Therefore, in response to this need, I conducted a case study of a small group of Spanish-native speakers as they learned English through a volunteer-based community program in a small Midwestern town.

In addition to my personal and academic motivation to study this particular group of second-language learners, this project also stemmed from my initial experiences with adult L2 learners receiving instruction through the community service program I studied. For instance, Ana, a Spanish-native speaker, shared with me the practical impacts of not being able to use English. Ana needed to know English so that she "could respond to her children's teachers' letters," a writing task she could not complete due to her lack of English proficiency.

Even if Ana did not consider writing proficiency an essential part of her language acquisition process, she pointed out an issue deserving more research: the specific types

of writing skills adult ESL learners need. Ana did not need to know how to write academic essays or how to cite sources, but she indeed needed to acquire a functional writing competence. Like Ana, most adult language learners may not recognize such tasks as filling out forms, creating resumes, and reading and responding to letters from their children's schools as "writing," yet, as Ana's example shows, adult L2 learners do need to write in their second language. To examine more closely this often unacknowledged need for second-language writing competence in a community of learners whose main purposes for acquiring a second-language are economically driven, I set out to answer the following research questions:

1. What role does writing play in a context in which immigrant populations have a low level of linguistic competence in English and in which language is viewed merely as a tool to achieve economic means?
2. What role does writing play in second language learning acquisition processes? Can writing help to advance oral competence?
3. What are the boundaries between writing, spelling and/or word-by-word identification among non-native speakers whose levels of English are low?
4. What teaching strategies should tutors use to foster L2 learners' writing competence?
5. What role does self-motivation play in the learning of English?

This study addresses two neglected areas in current second-language and composition research: second-language writing and ESL community education. Because this thesis dealt with the writing development of a group of immigrants who have a low English level, it was important to consider that second-language writing has also occupied a dualistic position within the academy since most research on writing

development has focused on native-speaking students found in classroom settings, as opposed to L2 learners in community settings. Similarly, because language learning has generally had an oral focus and learners, in most of the cases, privilege orality over literacy, I looked at orality in relationship to both writing and literacy development. I, however, focused primarily on second-language writing and its position at the intersection between Second-Language Studies and Composition.

My study departs from traditional research since it works between the boundaries of two divisions: (1) between Composition and Second-Language Studies and (2) between the academy and the community. Although the division between Composition and Second-Language Studies has led to the separation of writers in native English and non-native English speakers, before the 1940s when there were fewer international students enrolled in U.S academic institutions, English writing in general—both for native and non-native speakers—was the concern of Composition studies. After the professionalization of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), writing for second-language learners stopped being the concern of composition practitioners, which led to the separation of both disciplines. In spite of the “division of labor” (Matsuda Composition 700) between Composition and Second-Language Studies, as a researcher interested in both disciplines, I find these two fields overlap in the area of second-language writing. Hence, with this project I attempt to help expand Composition and Second-Language Studies’ scopes to incorporate second-language learners’ development of writing competence. Moreover, since some of the theories Second-Language Studies’ practitioners have used can be implemented with all kinds of learners both inside and

outside academia, with this project I intend to bring ESL community-based education and second-language development theory back to Composition.

This study is divided into four chapters. Chapter one undertakes a review of available research on the subject of second language writing. This chapter analyzes both the linguistic and social issues that have an effect on second-language learners' language acquisition process. This chapter contains an overview of social and cultural effects on L2 learners' language acquisition process as well as concepts such as language identity, L1 stigmatization, linguistic identity, bilingualism, and biliteracy transfer. Also, this chapter concludes with a set of pedagogical strategies generally used by Composition practitioners to enhance students' writing competence.

Chapter two provides a detailed description of the project, participants, methods, and limits of the study. This chapter presents the general features of the study's participants and other factors limiting or modifying the direction of this study. Similarly, this chapter sets forth a description of each one of the writing instruments designed to test the research questions.

Chapter three presents the observations drawn from the data collected and the analysis of this data. Similarly, this chapter contains an analysis of the writing instruments' usefulness, as well as the participants' responses to writing activities and surveys. This chapter draws conclusions from both the observations of tutoring sessions and the results of the implementation of writing activities.

Chapter four presents some implications for research drawn from this study. This chapter includes suggestions for researchers working with community service programs and community program development suggestions for program sponsors and

coordinators. Similarly, this chapter invites researchers to work with community service programs while it acknowledges the possible constraints of working with these communities.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

In spite of the increasing demand for ESL instruction in American academic institutions after World War I, second-language (L2) writing has only within the last several decades started to receive attention from researchers. After the 1960s and 1970s, scholars began to acknowledge the importance of second language studies as more non-native speakers enrolled in regular composition classes. During the past decade in particular, researchers interested in second-language writing have attempted to address non-native speakers' writing needs by considering how these learners approach writing and the different social and linguistic factors impacting their writing development process. Researchers in this field have concerned themselves with a variety of topics that include the dualistic position second-language writing occupies in the academy, the influences of bilingualism and biliteracy¹ on L2 learners' writing acquisition process, L2 learners' motivation, and the teaching methodologies used to enhance L2 writing competence. This literature review provides a general overview of the existing research on second-language writing as well as research questions that need further investigation.

A cultural problem for researchers in second language studies is non-native speakers' lack of homogeneity. Because of this diversity, specific findings in the field of second language studies remain narrowly applicable. Moreover, because most researchers and practitioners in the field of Composition Studies focus their attention on meeting the needs of the mainstream population, writing specialists seem generally unprepared to fulfill L2 learners' unique learning needs when these students enroll in regular

¹ In this study, "bilingualism" refers to second-language learners' development of communicative language skills (speaking and listening) while "biliteracy" measures their written and reading competence in the L1 and L2. This distinction is important for my study since researchers interested in L2 populations have generally focused on the development of bilingualism as opposed to biliteracy, which is the focus of my study.

mainstream composition classes. L2 learners have distinct academic needs that set them apart from the mainstream population; also, because they are acquiring a second language, these learners face challenges of such non-academic factors as social and economic status, age, and motivation.

In spite of the practical difficulties in addressing L2 learners' needs in classroom settings, because the demand for ESL instruction continues to grow, some researchers have started to address L2 learners' needs in academia. Because L2 learners generally come from diverse backgrounds, researchers have used different terminologies to refer to this population. While most researchers—both in Composition and Second-Language Studies—have generally alluded to both non-native speakers and international students as ESL students, other researchers have found other more detailed classifications such as non-native speakers, and Non-English Language Background (NELB) students.

Although acknowledging the heterogeneity of L2 learners is an important part of effective research and teaching in Second-Language Studies, for the purpose of this thesis—and to minimize confusion over terminology—I, too, use “ESL” to refer generally to L2 learners. Also, since my study deals with the role writing plays in the language acquisition process of adult ESL learners outside traditional academic environments, I use the term “adult language learner” to refer specifically to any non-native speaker who takes part in this study.

Although my study focuses specifically on adult language learners outside formal academic settings, this chapter reviews findings from the field of Second Language Studies more broadly because these findings contribute to the understanding of how adult language learners approach and develop language skills, including writing. Because the

majority of the research on second-language writers comes from the field of Second Language Studies, I draw heavily on this field to come to conclusions about second language writing and adult education. Therefore, I draw findings from the theories of second language studies and adapt them to fulfill the needs of adult second language learners while exploring the role writing plays in such a community.

Connections Between L1 and L2

Social and economic trends such as immigration, open admission policies, and the U.S. position as an economic power have contributed to the increasing presence of bilingual communities in the country. Reacting to the increase in these bilingual populations, researchers have started to study bilingualism trends, including, but not restricted to, the cognitive connections between a learner's L1 and L2, as well as the social elements that can have an impact on a learner's language proficiency. Therefore, any attempt to acknowledge bilingual communities requires a more thorough analysis of the complicated relationship between a learner's L1 and L2.

Traditionally, a bilingual individual's L1 has been believed to interfere with his or her L2 development. In academic settings, for example, bilingual individuals' performance is often stigmatized since they display some of their L1 features in their L2. This process, commonly known as "interference," has generally been looked upon as a negative trait second language learners display. Robert Kaplan, for instance, in his studies in the field of Contrastive Rhetoric, proposes that "each language has distinct rhetorical patterns that pertain particularly to that language" (qtd. in Ferris and Hedgcock 11). Therefore, the transfer of features of the L1 into the L2 is a common trend in bilingual communities, in which L2 writers use organizational and structural patterns

from their L1 in their L2. A close of analysis of Kaplan's findings would allow educators to promote L2 learners' awareness of the differences and applicability of these organizational and structural patterns to either their L1 or L2, hence generating a more productive understanding of "interference."

Although a bilingual learner's L1 has generally been considered to interfere with his or her acquisition of a second language, other research shows a positive relationship between a learner's L1 and L2. For instance, several researchers, including James Cummins and Guadalupe Valdes, have recognized the positive impact the development of biliteracy in a learner's L1 can have on a learner's L2, hence, stressing the bidirectional nature of L1 and L2 cognitive processes as they overlap in a L2 learner's language development (qtd. in Valdes 36). Therefore, the possible transfer of literacy from second-language learners' L1 to their L2 allows these learners to develop better reading and writing abilities in the second language as well as better performance in traditional academic settings.

Focusing specifically on the acquisition of reading skills, Klaudia Rivera addresses the positive effects literacy in the L1 has on proficiency in the L2: "First language literacy development is strongly related to successful second language learning and academic achievement" (2). Similarly, Dana Ferris and John Hedgcock stress the importance of developing reading and writing abilities in a learner's L1, since these processes enhance the second-language acquisition process. Citing Stephen Krashen—the theorist who created the theory of second language acquisition most linguists currently use—Ferris and Hedgcock argue that better readers could learn a second language more efficiently since "reading can work as a primary input for the development of language

skills” (qtd in Ferris and Hedgcock 23).

As researchers in Second-Language Studies gain a better understanding of the influence of an L1 on L2 acquisition, their findings can be applied to the development of academic writing and reading skills among native-speaking students as well. Tony Silva, Joan Carson, and Ilona Leki have stressed the need to expand Composition’s scope by showing the benefit of approaching composition teaching as if students were second-language learners since in most cases, acquiring writing competence resembles the process of acquiring a second language—or academic writing competence. These researchers explore patterns a second-language learner displays, comparing them to the written patterns monolingual students in composition classes generally display. For instance, Silva, Carson, and Leki compare the kinds of “formulaic speech or language formulas” (5) L2 learners memorize to the kinds of expressions—usually language borrowed from academic discourse—mainstream writers use. Similarly, these researchers refer to the use of “fossilized elements”² and compare the presence of these elements in the writing of inexperienced monolingual students who use patterns they have previously learned without showing much improvement in their academic writing in spite of continuing instruction. Findings in the field of Second-Language Studies, therefore, are starting to be used with mainstream students in composition classes since these students can use similar techniques to improve their writing skills.

Both Composition and Second-Language Studies could expand their scopes by adapting findings from one another to enhance second-language writers' writing

² The term “fossilization” is defined by Tony Silva, Tony, Ilona Leki, and Joan Carson as “the failure to move toward native speaker norms, [or the lack of] progress toward proficiency in the L2 despite access to target or correct forms” (6).

competence. While Composition's scope could be expanded by acknowledging the value of other cultures' rhetorical patterns as well as each individual's purposes for writing, Second-Language Studies should find a place for writing beyond the mere repetition of grammar drills. Because most of the difficulties second-language writers face when placed in mainstream writing classes stem from their lack of regular exposure to writing activities during their ESL classes, Second-Language Studies' practitioners need to re-evaluate their over-reliance on the development of oral proficiency.

Although L1 and L2 cognitive processes have been shown to be transferable, some authors identify limits for this transferability between the L1 and L2. For example, Ferris and Hedgcock question the assumption that L1 and L2 skills can "automatically" be transferred from one language to the other, arguing that a learner's L1 literacy can be transferred into his or her L2 only in cases in which there is either an intermediate or high level of second language proficiency. Even when L2 learners are literate in their L1, the cognitive abilities in their mother tongue could be transferred only when these learners have sufficient proficiency in the target language. Therefore, proficiency in the L2 enables learners to use their L1 cognitive processes more efficiently (32). Similarly, the lack of literacy in a learner's L1 might hinder the later stages of development of both bilingualism and biliteracy. In addition to the cognitive connections between L1 and L2, there are also cultural factors that have different effects on a learner's understanding and acceptance of either the L1 or L2. As previously stated, second language learners not only need to cope with the linguistic differences between their L1 and L2, but also have to face the cultural differences between these two languages. For instance, cultural identification, L1 stigmatization³, and language identity play important roles in a

³ The term "L1 stigmatization" refers to a community's rejection of a learner's L1 based on the cultural and

learner's understanding and acceptance—and at times rejection—of his or her L1 or L2. Therefore, because these cultural factors could enhance or diminish motivation and change a learner's attitude towards the L2 language acquisition process, cultural aspects could have either positive or negative effects on an L2 learner's second-language proficiency.

Although each of the authors discussed here focuses on different ESL populations, taken together, these studies show how literacy development may play an important role in the second language learning process. Moreover, these researchers stress the relevance of a learner's mother tongue (L1) to a learner's subsequent development of language skills. Therefore, findings in Second-Language Studies can be applied to fulfill adult second language learners' needs. Not only should aspects such as L1 literacy and L2 language proficiency be considered when working with a population of adult language learners, but also other social conditions surrounding their language learning process should also play a key role. Due to the relevance of the social conditions affecting adult L2 learners' language acquisition process, a more detailed explanation of these aspects will be provided below.

Still, the applicability of some research may be contingent on the specific ESL population studied. For instance, even if one accepts Valdes's argument for the transferable nature of a learner's L1 cognitive abilities into the L2, I contend that these abilities are transferable only because the population she studies is made up of bilingual individuals who have interacted with the second language for most of their lives. Therefore, this analysis would support Ferris and Hedgcock's statement that L1 and L2 biliteracy is transferable only when learners have a high language proficiency level in the social perceptions associated with that language.

second language (L2). With adult language learners, it would be important to study, for example, how much of their reading and writing skills could be transferred into their L2 considering a complex scenario that may include low proficiency in the L2, low levels of schooling in the L1, and other social factors, such as amount of exposure and motivations to learn the second language.

Different Types of Bilingualism

Although the term “ESL learners” makes most people think of international students who come to the United States in search of education, this narrow definition is becoming obsolete in the current U.S. social and economic milieu as bilingualism has become a general trend in this country. Not only do new immigrants who settle in the country bring the complexity of their bilingualism, but also long-term residents, international students, second-generation born students, and minority students present a new challenge for educational institutions since each group brings different backgrounds and needs to the classrooms.

Academic institutions often fail to acknowledge the complexities of bilingualism by placing both international students and long-term residents in ESL classes while also assigning any other learners—often labeled as ‘native speakers’—to mainstream composition courses. Even when academic institutions have attempted to welcome people from diverse backgrounds into their institutions, most of these institutions offer few placement options that seem to either “homogenize” second language learners into the broad category of ESL—usually offering remedial language training—or underestimate their needs by placing them in regular composition classes for which they may be unprepared. Because bilingual individuals display different English proficiency

levels, educational institutions should consider the backgrounds these different groups of learners bring to the classrooms in order to better fulfill their needs.

Some researchers have explored the implications of bilingualism and biliteracy in L2 learners' language proficiency development. Valdes, for instance, identifies different types of bilingualism and the impact of bilingualism on individuals' learning processes. She classifies the kind of bilingualism a learner can develop according to both the social and economic circumstances causing the bilingualism and to a learner's L2 proficiency level. First, Valdes argues that the conditions surrounding language learning lead to either *elective or circumstantial bilingualism* (39-40).

Valdes argues that elective bilinguals become bilingual either because they enroll in English classes in their home countries or because they choose to reside in an English-speaking country for short periods of time. These bilingual individuals generally belong to middle and upper classes and attempt to acquire proficiency in a foreign language to gain better economic status in their home countries; therefore, they are able to "add" the new language to their mother tongue. On the other hand, Valdes argues that circumstantial bilinguals are those individuals who have been forcibly immersed in a foreign language and culture, individuals who need to acquire the second language to survive in a different environment. Because most adult second-language learners in community programs come to the country at an older age in an attempt to find better economic stability, these learners fall into the category of circumstantial bilinguals (34-42).

One of the most relevant contributions Valdes makes to the study of bilingualism is her understanding of the different proficiency levels circumstantial bilinguals can have

and the stages at which these levels develop. For instance, Valdes defines *incipient circumstantial bilingualism* as the primary period of acquisition of the second language (42), a period which is followed by a stage in which the L2 learner is able to use the L2 to function in society—*functional circumstantial bilingualism*.

Unlike L2 learners in college classrooms, adult second language learners in community programs generally remain in the incipient circumstantial bilingualism stage, and few of them move into a functional circumstantial bilingualism: “most adult second-language learners never reach target language proficiency” (Silva, Leki, and Carson 6). This inability to move “forward” in the second language acquisition process relates to two important aspects affecting adult second language learners: amount of exposure to the L2 and the possible fossilization of structures or phonemes. As research in the field of Second-Language Studies has shown, the more exposed an L2 learner is to the second language, the better and faster that he or she can acquire language proficiency. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that given the age at which adult L2 learners first encounter the foreign language—and therefore, the number of years they have been exposed to the L2⁴—they might experience the fossilization of syntactic, phonetical, and structural patterns in the L2, which might hinder their language acquisition process. What is more, the cognitive processes of navigating two languages become more complicated, so L2 learners might start losing linguistic competence in their L1 if they remain in the foreign country for many years. Valdes refers to this phenomenon as “subtractive bilingualism,” in which a learner’s L1 is gradually lost due to two social conditions: 1) the social stigmatization associated with the learner’s L1 and 2) the immediacy with which most

⁴ Due to current large communities within the United States in which other languages are spoken regularly, the amount of exposure a learner has to English should not always be measured by the number of years he or she has been living in the U.S.

adult second-language learners need to acquire an L2 that would enable them to achieve with better social and economic status. Although further research is needed to analyze the impact that continuous use of a learners' L1 in large communities sharing the same mother tongue can have on these learners' L2 proficiency, this phenomenon is more likely to happen in urban than in rural communities.⁵ Some of the cultural and social issues that might have an impact on an L2 learner's language development will be discussed in more depth in the following section.

A second important distinction between elective and circumstantial bilinguals is their sensory approaches to L2 language development. As both Guadalupe Valdes and Joy Reid have previously argued, these learners display different levels of language proficiency that seem to reflect the circumstances surrounding their L2 acquisition. While Valdes refers to L2 learners who have been abruptly immersed in a foreign language and culture as circumstantial bilinguals, Reid refers to the same learners as "ear" learners since these learners generally acquire the second language by interacting orally with members of the new community (77). The kinds of bilingualism circumstantial bilinguals and elective bilinguals display might help explain both the development of their language abilities and their academic performances. For instance, while "ear" learners tend to have much lower levels of reading and writing abilities, these learners can generally engage in oral communication more easily. On the other hand, "eye" learners generally acquire the second language through written input; hence, these learners have, in most cases, better writing and reading skills. Valdes and Reid's research complements one another since the former highlights the social circumstances influencing upon L2 learners while the other

⁵ Because the focus of my thesis remains on rural communities, this phenomenon will not be studied further as part of this project.

addresses the cognitive implications of these learners' bilingualism.

Consequently, a learner's type of bilingualism can affect not only his or her written performance, but also his or her acceptance or resistance to the development of writing skills. Elective bilinguals/eye learners may have fewer difficulties with writing since their previous language exposure has probably included written input, whereas circumstantial bilinguals/ear learners might find writing challenging, if not intimidating.

When faced with academic tasks, most adult second language learners will experience difficulties with formal instruction. Since adult language learners are typically circumstantial bilinguals, most in the incipient state of language development, they cannot easily engage in academic activities. As these learners have learned, or are learning, the language through what they "hear" in their interactions with members of the community, teachers cannot approach their language needs through regular academic instruction, which tends to be text-based. Not only do adult learners lack familiarity with formal education, but in most cases, other factors of their bilingual development can have negative effects on their L2 language development and L1 use.

Cultural Issues Associated with Bilingualism

As previously stated, second-language learners are involved in complex learning circumstances that include factors other than the academic challenges of learning a second language. Second-language learners' isolation originates not only from their inability to use the second language effectively, but also from the cultural and social stigmatization of their status as immigrants. Factors such as cultural identification, L1 stigmatization, and language identity could have an impact upon the development of second-language learners' L2 (Valdes 62). Learners navigating between two languages

generally encounter a discrepancy between their language proficiency and the identification with the culture that language represents. For instance, as Yuet-Sim D. Chiang and Mary Schmida have argued, second-generation born learners whose parents and relatives are generally immigrants, find themselves occupying a dualistic position between their L2 (heritage language) and their L1 (English). Although these learners are, in some cases, unable to acquire a linguistic competence in their heritage language, they identify with the heritage language's culture. Also, because identification with culture is impacted by language proficiency, these learners' participation in the heritage language is limited by low language proficiency. Although L1 stigmatization could take different forms such as the stigmatization caused by a person's lack of proficiency in his or her heritage language, L1 stigmatization in this study is defined as a community's rejection of a learner's heritage language, rejection caused by the negative social and cultural perceptions associated with that language in particular. Although most of the research on L1 stigmatization and language identity has focused on dialect learners in classroom settings—for instance, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) speakers—research has started to address stigmatization that stems from political and social circumstances associated with speakers of languages such as Spanish and Arabic as well. All of these aspects can negatively affect a second language learner's language acquisition process and adaptation to a new culture.

L1 stigmatization of learners outside academia—based on the cultural and social perceptions associated with their heritage languages—has not been the concern of many researchers, yet what has been found about the impacts of social stigmatization and language identity in college classrooms could serve a strategy to better understand L1

stigmatization in other places. For instance, Valdes explores the reasons for the low academic development that U.S. minority students—including non-native speakers and native speakers with a stigmatized dialect—display and the impact of social stigmatization on these students' writing. Valdes establishes that these students' low academic achievement in composition classes results from both their academic and socio-economic backgrounds. Hence, Valdes finds that most of these U.S. minority students have received previous unsuitable academic instruction, that they have been socially and academically stigmatized as "problems," and that some of these learners might have had little exposure to literacy in both their L1 and L2. By questioning the kind of previous instruction these learners received and by analyzing their low socioeconomic backgrounds, Valdes urges researchers and practitioners in the field of Composition Studies to further consider the complexities of bilingualism (Valdes 54-64).

In a study of long-term U.S. residents—or functional circumstantial bilinguals as Valdes would call them—Linda Harklau explores the impact of social stigmatization on a group of students who perform differently in two settings: high school and college. While learners in her study performed well in regular mainstream high school classes where they were perceived as "good" students who were "overcoming diversity," they had difficulties facing the academic demands of ESL classes at the college level, where they were stigmatized. These learners' acceptance of their role in regular high school classes stemmed not only from the positive feedback they received, but also from the way they were motivated by their teachers. Although learners in this study were long-term residents and, therefore, "ear" learners, once in college, they were misidentified as "international" students—a misunderstanding caused by the cultural perception of all

ESL learners as international students. Not surprisingly, these long-term residents had difficulties adapting to the teaching methodologies in their ESL classes since these methodologies were meant to fulfill the academic needs of elective bilinguals or “eye” learners.

Bilingual individuals dealing with the duality between their language identity and cultural stigmatization can also find ways to adapt to the social and academic environments by creating a new cultural identity. Although subjects in Chiang’s and Schmida’s study lacked confidence in both their L1 and L2 competence, these learners counteracted this identity conflict by using “broken English,” defined as the intermixing of a learner’s L1 and L2 (95). Similarly, African students attending a North American French school in Awad El Karim M Ibrahim’s study found themselves motivated to learn Black English—defined as English that includes AAVE dialectical features—as a third language as a means to acquire social and cultural identity. Learners in Ibrahim’s dealt with the issue of cultural identity by not only learning AAVE, but also by acquiring the social patterns other Black English speakers used, therefore, adopting a new identity as “blacks” (144-145).

Although a few authors are starting to recognize the importance of directly addressing the challenges of working with bilingual learners in classrooms, most academic institutions fail to acknowledge L2 learners’ bilingualism and diverse academic needs by offering few placement options. Similarly, because L2 learners have academic needs influenced by other non-academic aspects, more specific research on how L1 stigmatization and language identity affect bilingual individuals is needed to acknowledge learners inside and outside academic institutions.

Like most circumstantial bilinguals, adult second-language learners are non-traditional students facing a myriad of economic, social, and educational challenges as well. Due to a dearth of formal education both in their L1 and L2, many of these language learners have a low level of literacy in both languages, as well as a lack of motivation toward formal language learning. Unlike L2 learners in college classrooms, these learners' socio-economic restrictions in their native countries and in the U.S. force them to look at language learning primarily as a tool to achieve economic means.

Because these language learners view language skills mainly as a means to achieve economic stability and cultural acceptance, their motivations to acquire a second language differ from those of the mainstream population. As circumstantial bilinguals, these learners have been forcibly immersed in the new language and culture; therefore, their motivations to acquire the L2 remain economically driven. Similar to learners in Chiang and Schmida's study, these learners occupy a dualistic position generated by their cultural identity and their linguistic ability since they lack identification with the L2 culture and the linguistic abilities to participate in the societal language. These learners might feel threatened by the new culture and language, which might lead to low self-esteem; similarly, due to their living conditions, they also need to prioritize their economic survival over their academic development. Although for circumstantial bilinguals, the process of acquiring a second language becomes a matter of survival, these learners might also find themselves facing other obstacles leading to the unconscious rejection of the L2 language and culture. For instance, most adult second language learners generally avoid contact with native English speakers, relying on interactions with members of the same community who speak their L1. This type of "self seclusion," along

with the isolation caused by these learners' lack of language proficiency, has contributed not only to the discouragement and resistance to language learning these learners display, but also to their lack of integration into the "bigger" community.

Expanding Composition Studies' Scope: A more Inclusive View of L2 Writers

Both the United States' position as an economic power and the use of English as the preferred language for economic transactions around the world has made English the preferred second language of instruction in many countries. Although some authors have referred to English as an imperialistic language (Canagarajah 220), due to the position the U.S. and other English-speaking countries occupy, this language has and will continue to be relevant for most learners around the world.

Understanding and acquiring the rhetorical patterns used in English writing may be important for ESL learners, but educators and researchers should clearly establish that the purpose of learning English writing conventions is to belong to an English-speaking academic community. Yet writing specialists and instructors generally adopt English academic writing as the only appropriate type of writing, therefore perpetuating a cultural and linguistic hegemony that fails to acknowledge the presence of second-language writers in mainstream composition classes.

Due to the cultural diversity found in first-year writing classes where minority language users, long-term immigrants, international students, and native English speakers interact with one another, Composition Studies needs to become more flexible in order to better address all students' writing needs. As Tony Silva argues, Composition Studies should start implementing a more global and inclusive view of writing that is not merely based on a monolingual/monocultural approach to writing (360-361). Expanding

Composition Studies' scope in this way will require the adaptation of its theories so that they can be suited to different bilinguals' needs both inside and outside academic institutions.

Most of the research on second language writers, research conducted predominantly in academic settings, addresses not only the lack of acknowledgement for second language writers' distinctive needs and backgrounds, but also the need to expand Composition Studies' scope. For example, Silva calls into question composition teachers' demands that students perform writing tasks as if they were 'native speakers' by using English writing conventions such as citations or quotations (361). Similarly, Vai Ramanathan and Dwight Atkinson refer to the way in which the most common classroom activities such as process writing, peer review, critical thinking, or expressivism affect non-mainstream writers' academic development (160, 179). According to these authors, the implementation of culturally-specific teaching methodologies places L2 writers in inadequate academic environments while it puts them in politically and socially disadvantageous positions.

In order to expand Composition Studies' scope, researchers interested in non-mainstream populations will need to study carefully both the bilingual populations attending regular composition classes and other non-traditional populations, including adult second-language learners in community-based programs. In the case of adult second-language learners, practitioners will need to know that because these language learners conceive of language skills mainly as a means to achieve economic stability and cultural acceptance, their literacy needs differ from those of the mainstream L2 population found in classrooms (Valdes 39). Also, educators will need to understand not

only that L2 adult learners cannot generally access higher education due to their economic restrictions, but also that as “ear” learners whose language acquisition process has not been formal but rather empirical, these L2 adult learners lack the previous formal training most institutions expect of students, making current higher education programs unsuitable (Reid 77).

Adult second-language learners might not generally belong to the mainstream population found in classrooms, but these adult learners still have writing needs specifically related to their economic and social adaptation to the L2 culture. Hence, adult ESL learners intend to acquire a functional literacy that would enable them to carry out such tasks as communicating at work, filling out job applications, creating resumes, and reading and responding to letters from their children’s schools. As “ear” learners who generally have a low English proficiency, these learners do not need to be familiar with writing conventions such as knowing how to cite or quote source material. Nevertheless, these adult language learners could benefit from certain common classroom activities, such as journal writing—when using their L1—peer review, grammar drills, process writing as long as these activities are adapted to their needs—by choosing topics they might be interested in, by taking into consideration their low proficiency level in the target language, and by considering the anxieties their special social circumstances might cause.

Practitioners willing to adapt composition theories to better address non-traditional populations’ needs, including those of adult second language learners outside academic institutions, need to develop a better understanding of the potential problems in existing composition teaching strategies. By knowing the strengths, weaknesses, and

potential benefits of composition teaching strategies, educators will be more likely to both fulfill the needs of non-traditional populations such as those found in community service programs and expand Composition Studies' scope to include non-traditional learners.

While mainstream academic environments are unsuitable for many adult language learners, because most of the research in Composition Studies has taken place in academia, the overview of some of the most common composition and second-language teaching approaches that follows provides a starting place for thinking about how to integrate writing into adult language learners' English instruction.

Syllabus and Assignment Design

As I have previously argued, second-language learners both in academic and non-academic settings have special needs that set them apart from the mainstream population regularly found in classrooms. Therefore, when designing syllabus or class activities, teachers and tutors should take the following issues into consideration:

1. Clarity: To avoid ambiguity, language within the assignment and instructions on what is expected from learners should be clear. A few researchers, including Joy Reid and Barbara Kroll, have previously stressed the need for clear assignments since the lack of clarity in writing assignments can have a direct effect on students' responses and quality of writing. Collecting samples of writing assignments from different academic institutions, Reid and Kroll analyze assignment design issues, such as phrasing within the assignment, purpose, evaluation criteria, content, and context. Moreover, these authors show how students' written production starts from their interpretation, and at times misinterpretation, of an assignment. Although all these aspects might be applicable to

both mainstream students and second language writers, L2 students might have more difficulties understanding an assignment due to their language constraints. Therefore, assignments should contain straightforward and explicit language that allow both the L1 and L2 populations to develop a clear sense of the assignment's expectations. Lastly, instructors could make assignments more clear to students by reading the assignment with the entire class, hence, incorporating reading comprehension strategies that would help students better comprehend the phrasing within an assignment.

2. Students' backgrounds assessment: As native and non-native speakers bring different sets of ideas when they walk into our classrooms, in order to create effective writing activities or syllabi, teachers should take into consideration learners' backgrounds, learning styles, and expectations for the class. Some learners might feel more comfortable with some class activities than with others; for instance, while "ear" learners might prefer to hear a lecture, "eye" learners could feel more comfortable reading the same material. Ferris and Hedgcock discuss the importance of researching students' background before setting class syllabi, class activities, and class objectives. According to these authors, knowing students' backgrounds and expectations for a given class allows educators to better address their students' needs. Although Ferris and Hedgcock focus on second language learners in academic settings, their research could also be adapted for use with other learners, including non-traditional students, both inside and outside academia.

Pedagogical Activities and Class Materials

Depending on the previous exposure students have had to language conventions and activities, they might need specific instruction on how to follow some of the steps in

the writing process. Therefore, professors should incorporate a set of additional activities and strategies, including pre-writing tasks, such as brainstorming, clustering, zero drafting—activities with which L2 writers might not be too familiar. Also, as many books used for writing classes might not automatically fit with all the class objectives and the learners' needs, professors should be willing to create materials not found in the main *reader* or *rhetoric* to better address the specific population of learners in the class (Ferris and Hedgcock 85-95).

1. Peer response: Although this pedagogical approach has been used in writing classrooms for decades, there is still some question related to *how* peer review should be carried out. Ferris and Hedgcock offer a complete overview of peer response as a pedagogical process while exploring the advantages and disadvantages of the implementation of this process with L2 learners in classroom settings. While Ferris and Hedgcock agree that learners' inexperience as critical commentators, the vagueness of their comments, and their overall concern with surface level errors might hinder the effectiveness of peer review, they also argue that this process allows students to interact with one another and to develop audience awareness. Therefore, both Ferris and Hedgcock maintain that peer review could be an effective way to teach writing as long as the process becomes an integral part of a class syllabus and is carefully modeled for students (177-184). First, students need to understand the significance of this process, *why* they are doing peer review. Second, they need to be provided with clear guidance as to *how* to do peer review—implementation of specific tasks that explain what they are expected to look for in their peers' drafts. Similarly, Whei Zhu explores the advantages and disadvantages of using peer review in writing classrooms. Because she focuses her

attention on how this process works in mixed groups made up by both ESL and native English speakers, she is able to find differences on how these learners respond differently to peer review. For instance, Zhu argues that ESL students in her study responded better to written than oral peer review feedback due to the constraints of their oral proficiency (204).

Peer review remains, therefore, an important classroom strategy that when well-modeled and structured, can enhance both native and non-native speakers' written competence. Even if most of the research on peer review has taken place in academic institutions, this teaching methodology could also be used with non-traditional populations, including adult second language learners. Yet because these learners have needs that differ from those of the mainstream population, these learners might need careful guidance on how to perform this activity.

2. Journal writing: Following expressivist ideas, journal writing has been one of the teaching strategies most used in writing classrooms. This kind of activity is believed to encourage students to find their "voices" while allowing them to freely express themselves without any concern for form or grammar. Although L2 learners in regular composition classes have used this strategy to write in English, Bean, et al., discuss the possible benefits of using a learner's L1 to compose texts in an English academic environment when this L1 is socially stigmatized. Bean et al., assert that by providing a "safe" space for bilingual individuals whose L1 is stigmatized to use this language, these individuals are more likely to have a better appreciation for their L1 while also improving their second-language learning process (229-232). Although these authors do not directly suggest the use of journals specifically, the use of journals and the learners' L1 could

provide learners with a safe space for them to develop literacy in both languages and improve their L2 writing proficiency.

Although most of the research has focused on journal writing in academic environments, other authors such as Jungkang Kim have shown how this same strategy can be used with adult ESL students since “journal writing can provide an opportunity to develop second language literacy by engaging in the use of the language and meaningful and authentic contexts” (21). Although second-language journal writing with the adult ESL population provides a space for free expression and the development of self-reflective strategies, this strategy could primarily be used with adult learners who have advanced or intermediate levels of language proficiency—functional circumstantial bilinguals. In cases in which learners have a low level of English proficiency, as in the case of incipient circumstantial bilinguals, journal writing in the learner’s L1 should be implemented instead. Journal writing in a learner’s L1 could serve multiple purposes: to foster literacy in the L1, to allow for the cognitive transfer between the learner's L1 and L2, to enhance adult learners’ motivation and identification with his or her L1, and to decrease L1 stigmatization.

Assessment and Teacher Response to Student Writing

Assessment and teacher feedback play an important role in the teacher-student interaction. Yet this aspect of the teaching process remains one of the most problematic issues in classroom setting. For instance, although generally both L1 and L2 writers receive feedback on grammar issues in their papers, research has shown that the emphasis on sentence-level correction does not help advance students’ writing skills (Ferris and Roberts, 123-139).

While teachers use grammar feedback both with their L1 and L2 students, researchers have found that L2 writers may be stigmatized and their grades could be lowered significantly when their instructors evaluate their written productions using only grammatical standards. Ferris and Hedgcock argue that even though second-language learners expect to receive grammar feedback, only the global errors interfering with comprehension should be directly addressed (Ferris 199). More than undermining the value of grammar feedback, these authors maintain that when carried out at the latter stages of the writing process, grammar feedback can facilitate the development of self-editing strategies. Also, for L2 learners with low language proficiency, direct feedback—telling students exactly what they need to change—is preferable since they do not possess the linguistic abilities to make corrections on their own.

Although long-term residents are able to orally communicate efficiently in English, like L2 learners, these bilinguals also have difficulties using grammar conventions in their papers since they are unfamiliar with many of these structures. Although these learners recognize the kind of rhetorical patterns used in English, their lack of formal grammar training in the language makes grammar feedback less effective. Ferris argues that long-term residents could benefit from grammar feedback as long as teacher feedback does not include explicit grammar terminology (One Size 151).

Even though grammar feedback occupies an important place in the writing assessment process, researchers have also emphasized the importance of offering content-related feedback in the early stages of the writing process. For instance, as a way to emphasize the idea of writing as a process rather than a product, researchers have suggested that academics should ideally offer content-related feedback on the early stages

of the writing process, leaving grammar feedback for the latter (Ferris and Hedgcock 131-135). Therefore, although both content and grammar feedback could help students develop writing skills, instructors should use feedback according to the writing stage students' papers are in.

Assessment and teacher response in community-based programs differ from those of the mainstream populations found in classrooms since non-traditional programs do not depend on grading as a means of assessment. On the contrary, as these learners generally understand feedback as a means to measure their progress in language learning, they have more chances to look at assessment from a positive standpoint. Professors, tutors, or teachers become “coaches” rather than judges of the learner’s work. Therefore, teacher response to adult second language learners’ work might take such non-traditional forms as positive motivation or re-phrasing rather than correcting, and the learners in these programs seem to be more likely to benefit from assessment than mainstream students in classroom settings. Although feedback has predominantly taken a written form in academic settings, adult second language learners might not have the language proficiency to benefit from this type of feedback. Therefore, the implementation of oral feedback in response to writing seems to be a more effective form of feedback to use with adult second-language learners.

Although the teaching methods generally used in academic settings could be adapted to fulfill the needs of non-traditional populations, including adult L2 learners, these learners should be studied to more accurately establish what their needs are. The following chapter, therefore, provides a description of the project I pursue, the

participants, and the research methods I use to test my research questions concerning the way in which adult L2 learners in a community program develop written competence.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODS

Project's Description

Although, as a result of immigration and globalization, researchers and educators have started to acknowledge the increasing presence of bilingual individuals in the United States, these researchers have generally focused on the study of bilingual populations within academia. This lack of acknowledgment of bilingual individuals outside academic settings stems not only from the association of teaching and language learning primarily with academia, but also from the complex learning environments in which learners outside the academy operate.

Because my study explores issues concerning second-language writing and community literacy programs, this project works between the boundaries of two divides: that between the academy and the community and that between Composition and Second-Language Studies. This project explores issues concerning two marginalized areas of study: second-language writing and community literacy programs in an attempt to establish the writing needs adult L2 learners in a Midwestern town have when they acquire English through a community service program. By studying this community service program in particular, I expect to help expand Composition's scope by bringing ESL community-based education and second-language development theory back to Composition. But above all, and moving away from mainstream research, I hope to develop a better understanding of the role writing competence plays in a community of adult second-language learners whose main interest in studying English is to gain oral proficiency.

Although adult L2 learners in this community program privilege the development of bilingualism over biliteracy—writing and reading skills—this project specifically looked at the role writing plays in such a community. I wanted to establish the possibility for the development of a functional writing competence that allows adult L2 learners to better interact with the dominant language, while also identifying the ways writing development could enhance adult L2 learners' overall language proficiency. Because most adult language learners in this program had low levels of English proficiency, it was also important to study the boundaries between writing, spelling, and word-by-word identification. Unlike elective bilinguals who generally receive more explicit writing instruction, adult L2 learners in this program were unable to use writing as a composing process; instead, due to their low levels of proficiency, these learners looked at writing as a tool to spell well, to identify written forms, or as a mnemonic technique to remember words or expressions. Because in the process of studying writing development, the development of other language skills was also observed, this study promotes a more comprehensive understanding of writing. Similarly, since L2 learners in this study displayed a low level of L2 proficiency, this study calls for the re-definition of writing—generally understood as a composing process—into a broader definition that welcomes other forms such as spelling, copying words down, and following models as the kinds of writing adult L2 learners in this program can carry out.

Adult second-language learners generally conceive of language skills as a means to achieve economic stability, and they also have low levels of self-confidence in the L2. Therefore, in addition to establishing the role writing plays in the language acquisition process of a group of adult Spanish native speakers, the learners' motivation, oral

competence, and the interactions between bilingualism and biliteracy were also considered. Including these social and linguistic aspects allows me to show the complex learning environments in which adult L2 learners acquire a second language. Similarly, being a second-language writer and a Spanish native speaker myself allows me to have a closer rapport with the participants and a better understanding of the cultural and linguistic challenges they face while they develop writing competence.

Participants

Participants in this study are members of an ESL community education program located in a rural town in the Midwest. The program offers free personalized language training to adult language learners interested in improving their English language proficiency. These adult learners are Spanish and Chinese native speakers, most of whom hold jobs at the local restaurants. Although the program advertises its tutoring services in the local businesses, most adult learners get to know about the program through friends and relatives who are, in many cases, members themselves. Because most of these language learners hold full-time jobs during the day, students and tutors meet two or three times a week—according to both the tutors and students' availability—from 10:00 to 11:00 pm. Tutors in the program are students at the local university; hence, the program only runs during the Fall and the Spring semesters. Although sponsored by one of the churches on campus as opposed to the university, this program does not include any overtly religious components.

There are two types of participants in this research: three to six adult ESL

learners⁶ and four to six English tutors. The adult learners in this study are Spanish native speakers from Latin America who have lived in the community for at least two years, while the volunteers are students at the local university. Tutors in this program use the book *New Interchange Intro* and its workbook; also, because most adult L2 learners have difficulties remembering to bring materials to class, the program's coordinator creates a folder for each adult L2 learner to keep his or her materials. Tutors have free leeway to decide whether or not to use both the book and the workbook; hence, each tutor individualizes his or her tutoring session, carrying out the activities he or she feels is most helpful for a particular student.

The number of participants in this project varied during the course of this study. Ana withdrew from the program, Gustavo withdrew from the study,⁷ and due to lack of employment opportunities in the area, Jose and Fernando were transferred to a nearby town—making it more difficult for them to come to class on a regular basis. Similarly, in spite of the general interest most tutors displayed at the beginning of classes—when there were around eight to ten tutors—as the semester progressed, only three or four of them consistently continued to come to class and, therefore, were able to participate in this study. Although some language learners and tutors joined the program later in the semester, due to time constraints and lack of continuity, some of them could not

⁶ During the first day of classes, there were five to eight students, yet almost half of them gradually withdrew from the program while others, due to scheduling problems, did not participate in the study. Similarly, some of these learners were Chinese native speakers who lived in another town in the area and who could not, therefore, attend class regularly unless they found means of transportation. These learners did not participate in the study.

⁷ Although Gustavo, one of the language learners who had initially agreed to participate in the study, did not officially withdraw from the study, after a few writing activities and surveys he started avoiding interactions with me; hence, his behavior was taken as a passive withdrawal from the project.

participate in this study, hence, the variation in the number of language learners and tutors participating in both writing activities and surveys.

1. Adult Language Learners: There were five men who were between 25 and 35 years-old and a woman who was in her late 40s participating in this project: Jose, Fernando, Juan,⁸ Daniel, Gustavo, and Ana. Most of these learners displayed a high level of motivation towards the language acquisition process as evidenced by their continuity in the program. Jose had been receiving English instruction with the program for two years, Fernando and Daniel for six months, Ana for three months, whereas Gustavo had just been in the program for a couple of months. Nevertheless, these adult learners displayed low levels of English proficiency, even in cases in which they had studied English through the program for at least a semester and lived in the country for two or more years, including Ana, who had been in the U.S. for 15 years. Because most of the adult L2 learners in this program were between 25 and 40 years old and, therefore, had encountered the second language at a later stage in their lives, they had more difficulty acquiring the second language. Out of the six adult language learners participating in this study, five took a preliminary survey designed to develop a better understanding of their academic backgrounds and motivations to learn the L2. As a result of this first survey, it was possible to establish that most of these learners had had little exposure to formal schooling in their L1. For instance, out of the five adult L2 learners surveyed, none of them had completed their elementary education; instead three had completed the third grade, one the fourth, and another one the fifth grade.

In spite of not having much academic experience in their native language, some of

⁸ All participants in this study were assigned pseudonyms in order to ensure confidentiality.

these adult L2 learners had learned occupations that allowed them to support themselves in the L1 society. For instance, Fernando was a carpenter, Jose a bricklayer. Yet in spite of the occupations they had learned in their home countries, these learners were not able to obtain the same jobs in the U.S. not only because of the language barrier but also because some of these learners may not have a legal status in the country.⁹ The need for English proficiency that enables these language learners to actively participate in the local community was also reflected in the L2 learners' answers to the preliminary survey. When asked about their motivations to learn English, all five learners surveyed responded that they wanted to acquire the L2 so that they could have better sources of employment. Ana also said that she wanted to learn English so that she could "communicate with her children."

With the exception of Ana, the language learners in this study held jobs, but these jobs tended to be unstable and poorly paid. These were the reasons why adult L2 learners in this community program attempted to gain a linguistic competence to either find other jobs or be promoted in the same company. Yet at times, these learners' long work schedules and fatigue prevented them from attending class consistently. Therefore, these learners' needs for employment sometimes hindered their development of language proficiency.

2. Tutors: Tutors in this community service program were students at the local university who did volunteer work while teaching English to non-native speakers. These students were native English speakers who, in some cases, had either studied Spanish or had some

⁹ Information about the participants' legal status was not gathered as part of this study, but because a significant percentage of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the local community arrived in the U.S. illegally, it is reasonable to assume that some of the study's participants fall into this category.

interest in becoming ESL teachers in the future. Although tutors in the program generally displayed an interest in teaching ESL students, few of them had training in tutoring adult-second language learners. Tutors' majors included biological sciences, marketing, and English. At least two of the tutors who participated in the study had minors in Spanish. Similarly, the community service program was coordinated by a student who was in charge of recruiting English learners from the community and tutors from the local university. Alicia¹⁰ was a former tutor in the program, but after becoming the coordinator, she did not tutor students unless there was a shortage of tutors. Alicia decided when meetings and tutoring sessions took place, and she sometimes made transportation arrangements for the adult language learners to come to the tutoring sessions.

Approaches and Methods

In order to become familiar with the program and the adult learners receiving English instruction, I worked as an English tutor during fall 2007. Working two nights per week allowed me to interact with the adult language learners and, therefore, to verify the preliminary assumptions I had concerning these learners. I had initially planned to work with different adult learners to get a better sense of their language learning goals as well as their motivations, but due to the lack of bilingual tutors with a high level of Spanish proficiency, I worked exclusively with one learner with a low English proficiency. Despite this difficulty, working as a tutor in the program during the fall semester allowed me to get a sense of how the program operated while getting to know the adult language learners who, by the end of the semester, were comfortable with my presence as a tutor.

¹⁰ Like language learners, the tutors and program coordinator were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Because my project dealt with human subjects, this study required IRB approval to ensure the participants' confidentiality. This process of approval was intended to follow the regular procedures of research with human subjects as dictated by the university and to ensure that the project did not represent any serious risk to the participants. To obtain approval for this project, I completed several forms and wrote a detailed report describing the project and my reasons for wanting to work with a community service program in particular.

After completing this preliminary work, I began formal data gathering. I started by surveying both language learners and tutors on topics relevant to my research. Surveys for the adult L2 learners included educational background, academic goals, motivation towards language acquisition, and the kinds of writing they usually did. Surveys for tutors gathered information about academic background, motivation for teaching in the program, and the teaching strategies they used to tutor in the program. Some results from those surveys were discussed in the background information; additional results will be discussed in the next chapter.¹¹

As I surveyed and interviewed members of the program, I created a set of writing activities to help learners improve their writing skills according to their specific needs. Although I had initially anticipated that creating writing activities related to adult L2 learners' immediate writing needs, such as helping learners fill out basic forms, would help them develop a better understanding of the functionality of writing, after having interacted with them for over a semester, I became aware that these learners needed a more solid linguistic proficiency in the L2 before being able to complete such activities.

Writing activities were sometimes administered to an entire group of learners

¹¹ Copies of these surveys are attached as appendices 1 and 2.

when there were fewer tutors than students present, while others were administered individually as part of the tutoring sessions. The writing activities in this study had multiple purposes: to establish what kind of writing adult L2 learners participating in this study could do, to measure students' responses to writing activities in general, to establish in which ways writing activities might lead to the improvement of their overall language proficiency, and to look at other factors such as motivation to write. What follows is a description of each of the writing instruments used for this study. For more information see appendix 3:

1. Writing Activity (How to express one's love for a Valentine): Because we had such a large group of adult L2 learners this day—about six students, all of whom participated in this writing activity—and very few tutors, the writing activity was carried out as a group activity. I provided a brief history of the holiday to use reading as a source of input for writing. After reading together as a group, students were asked to read from a list of new expressions and vocabulary—all of them followed by their correspondent translation in Spanish—related to “love.” With this first part of the activity, I attempted to make students feel more comfortable with the reading activity, while also providing them with phrases they might be able to use in the future. Also, because Valentine's Day is an important holiday in U.S. culture, with this activity students were expected to gain a better insight on how this celebration came to exist. During the previous class, students had studied basic vocabulary to describe people both physically and personally, so this writing activity was intended to reinforce that vocabulary. The last portion of this writing activity was a short “journal entry,” for which students were encouraged to use their

native language to respond to the following question: “how do people celebrate Valentine’s Day in your home country?”¹²

2. Writing Activity (Personal and Physical Descriptions): Because most adult L2 learners in this study seemed to have difficulty completing the first writing activity, a second writing activity reinforcing the use of adjectives and descriptive words was created. On this day, we had only three language learners; therefore, each tutor could work with a student individually. For this activity, students were provided with several pictures accompanied by a brief description of the person in each picture. This activity was created to test students’ ability to use models to create their own descriptions according to the pictures provided. Because adult L2 learners in the program have difficulty responding to open-ended questions, I decided to use both pictures and text as a means to facilitate the writing activity and enhance confidence.

3. Writing Activity (Hobbies): This writing activity was created with the purpose of having students practice one of the most difficult grammatical structures in English: questions in present tense. Due to the students’ low level of proficiency, this activity required them only to practice questions in present tense by the use of the auxiliary “do.” Not only were adult L2 learners in the program more likely to have heard this expressions in the past—since most people ask direct questions to others by using “you”—but also keeping the focus on a single pronoun helped them to understand and use the grammatical structure better. This day in particular, we had only two students, both of whom participated in the writing activity.

¹² Because students seemed overwhelmed by the activity’s length and because they had already shared their answers orally, the second writing activity was not implemented.

4. Writing Activity (Job interview practice): Because some of the adult learners taking part in this study had started to withdraw from the program because they were unable to find jobs in the local businesses, with this activity I attempted to address one of adult L2 learners' primary motivations to learn English: finding sources of employment. For this activity, adapted from McKay and Tom's "Teaching Adult Second Language Learners," students were provided with phrases related to job interviews, and they were asked to decide the frequency with which each of these activities should be done. The three students who participated in this activity were not only supposed to become familiar with what was expected in an interview in the L2 culture in comparison with the same expectations in the L1 culture, but they were also expected to practice frequency adverbs such as *always, never, sometimes*.

5. Writing Activity (Using persuasion): This activity was created as an attempt to have adult language learners in this study develop an understanding of writing as a persuasive tool. Students were asked to choose an object they considered to be really useful. This was the only writing activity for which learners were asked to do some work outside of the program since learners were asked to spend 10 minutes thinking about the reasons why they thought that particular object was useful and write some notes in Spanish in regards to the usefulness of the object they chose. With the help of their notes, students described the object physically and thought of three to five advantages of using this object. The purpose of this activity was for each language learner to persuade the tutor—audience—that he or she should buy the object.

6. Writing Activity (Job advertisements): For this writing activity, students were provided with a job advertisement. The purpose of this activity was to target adult L2 learners' need for employment. This activity was expected to fulfill several purposes: to refer to the students' immediate needs, to encourage these learners to incorporate reading as a regular practice (e.g., newspapers), and to enhance reading comprehension while using writing as a tool to communicate their understanding of a given advertisement. This writing activity was divided into the main parts, the first part being an advertisement for students to read, the second part a set of questions to which they should respond in writing, and a third part in which adult L2 learners were asked to create an advertisement for any job position.

7. Writing Activity (Residential lease): The purpose of this writing activity was to familiarize students with one of the possible writing tasks they might encounter in their every day lives. Because language learners move from one town to another, it might be important for them to know how to understand the language used in residential leases and how to fill out these forms. For this task, students were provided with a list of unknown vocabulary—words translated into Spanish. Then tutors were instructed to walk students through the activity by reading and ensuring adult L2 learners understood the phrases necessary for them to fill out the form.

Although there were several delays in both the process of approval of the project and the translation of the writing activities and surveys, writing activities were administered throughout the spring semester. For a period of two and a half months (from mid January through March), the results of the writing activities and the data collected

from the different surveys were analyzed. For this analysis, I examined adult learners' literacy levels and the improvements in writing they exhibited; I also observed their attitudes when completing the writing activities. These writing activities enabled me to observe students' reactions to the implementation of writing instruments, to establish what kinds of writing these learners *needed* as opposed to those they could actually *carry out*, to identify personal factors that hindered the development of these learners' writing competence, and to establish the usefulness of writing activities to enhance overall language proficiency. By the end of March, my analysis was complete.

Limits of the Study

Given the nature of the community service program I studied in which adult language learners had low levels of language proficiency, economic needs that prevailed over their L2 development, and both motivational and educational limitations, there were a number of factors that either limited or changed the direction of the study, hence, limiting the conclusions that can be drawn:

- 1. High Rate of Turnover:** Adult language learners taking part in this study continuously quit and joined the program, therefore limiting the ability to follow the writing development of specific students over time. For instance, Ana, the only female language learner participating of this study, moved away halfway through the study, whereas two male adult L2 learners, who did not participate in the study, joined.
- 2. Inconsistency:** Because of both time availability and weather-related conditions, some adult learners did not come to class consistently. For instance, although two male students joined the program halfway through the study, one of them stopped coming to

class for long periods of time—a week or two—and then returned to the program, an inconsistency tutors also displayed. Sometimes we had a lot of tutors and few students to teach at other times—especially on Thursdays nights—some tutors did not attend.

3. Lack of an Established Curriculum for all Tutors to Use: Although the community service program I studied has been operating for about 2 years, there is not an established teaching curriculum or set of objectives for tutors to follow when teaching the adult L2 learners, an absence that led to both tutors and learners' lack of engagement in the program and a lack of continuity in regards to the topics learners studied.

4. Low L1 Literacy Level: Although adult L2 learners' low L1 literacy level was not a limit of the study, this aspect did impact the direction of my research. Because the level of L1 literacy found in the participants in this study was lower than initially expected, this aspect added some new challenges to the process of studying the role that L2 writing plays in such a community. This added element allowed me to test some of the preliminary assumptions other researchers, such as Valdes, have made on the bidirectional nature of L1 and L2 cognitive processes and how they relate to the development of L2 proficiency, hence showing the possibilities for further research in community-service programs.

In spite of the limits of this project, caused by challenges which are inherent in community service programs, this study shows that work with communities can provide researchers with extensive research opportunities. This project not only shows ways in which adult L2 learners develop language and motivational skills, but also shows how the development of a writing competence could benefit these learners' overall language proficiency. The findings from this project, presented in the next chapter, could serve as

the basis for other researchers to expand theories regarding how adult second-language engage in the development of language skills, including writing.

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

As research has previously shown, L2 learners', including adult L2 learners, social, economic, and personal backgrounds can affect their language development. For instance, the levels of literacy of the adult L2 learners participating in this study, their previous educational experience, their economic stability, and their motivation and attitudes towards the language-acquisition process positively and negatively impacted the development of their second language. Because most adult language learners in this program were primarily motivated to acquire an L2 proficiency to fulfill their economic needs, the development of oral competence remained one of their main focus. For instance, Fernando said that he wanted to learn English "to stop working in the kitchen, and start working as a waiter." Therefore, even though this study was initially set up to explore the role of writing, because the participants displayed interest in developing other language skills, I looked at the development of writing competence as it relates to the development of other language skills.

As previously stated, this study works between the boundaries of two false divides; hence, it becomes a relevant task to establish the implications these divides have on the development of written proficiency in a population of adult L2 learners. On the one hand, although the academy and the community have been separated as institutions, because the activities tutors and/or teachers working outside academia use resemble those activities traditionally used in classroom settings, the separation between these two institutions remains physical as opposed to ideological. For instance, as products of academia, tutors teaching adult second-language learners in this community service program generally employed the same methodologies they had seen professors use in

regular composition classes. On the other hand, teachers and tutors who had previously been exposed to second-language studies tended to employ different teaching strategies with a stronger emphasis on the development of an oral rather than a traditional written proficiency. Therefore, tutors' reliance on certain pedagogical strategies not only stemmed from their previous schooling experiences, but also mirrored the separation between Composition and Second-Language Studies. While in regular composition classes, educators usually employ traditional activities targeting the development of writing competence, such as writing thesis-statement-driven papers and reading essays, second-language educators generally use games, puzzles, informal conversations, and filling-in-the blanks activities. Therefore, the separation between Composition and Second-Language Studies was also reflected in the teaching strategies the tutors employed. For instance, while those tutors who were majoring in a foreign language were able to create lesson plans that incorporated both writing—understood as filling in the blanks—and oral activities, tutors who had never taken any second language classes were less likely to include complementary written activities the adult learners could actually complete. This distinction remains relevant to this project since participants in this study felt more comfortable with activities employed in language learning classrooms as opposed to activities traditionally used in composition classes.¹³

Motivation and its Role in the Development of Language Skills

Adult L2 learners' motivations to acquire a second language play key roles in the development of their subsequent language skills. As shown by the preliminary survey in which five adult learners ranked reading and writing as the two least important language

¹³ For the purpose of my study, I refer to the typical activities carried out in language classrooms as language learning activities as opposed to traditional writing activities such as reading or writing—activities generally used in mainstream classrooms.

skills, most of the adult L2 learners in this study did not see an immediate applicability for reading and writing; they privileged, instead, the development of speaking and listening. Although Jose, the learner with the highest level of literacy in his L1, ranked reading as the second most important skill to develop, he still ranked writing last. The results from Jose's survey might lead to some inquiry to establish his choice. For instance, Jose, indeed, saw the benefits of developing reading competence, as evidenced by his initiative to read out loud during any tutoring session. Although Jose ranked writing as the least important language skill to develop, during regular tutoring sessions, he insisted on having the tutor write words down for him to see them and, as he put it, "remember them better." Also, Jose was the only learner who kept all of his class materials—handouts different tutors gave him and a notebook—in a folder he brought to class every day. Therefore, although Jose did not seem to recognize writing as an important skill, he was motivated to use writing as a tool to improve his L2 proficiency. Most language learners in this study did not show the same level of motivation during writing activities, but they were motivated by other tasks. For instance, during some of the tutoring sessions I carried out during the spring semester, I incorporated several activities to address at least two different language skills per session, sessions during which Daniel, the language learner I worked with during that semester, displayed different levels of motivation according to the activity. Daniel almost always seemed to enjoy when I read a sentence aloud, and he would always try to repeat it, but when it was his turn to read, his engagement with the activity was lower than before. Although Daniel did not have a high level of oral proficiency, he attempted to interact orally when I asked

him questions and did not demonstrate the same kind of resistance as with the reading activity.

Because adult L2 learners in this study most valued the development of oral competence, oral input was used as a source of motivation to complete writing activities. For this reason, some of the writing activities were accompanied by informal conversations in which tutors provided most of the oral input, so that learners would be more encouraged to engage in these activities while also developing both oral and written competence. Namely, during writing activity 3 (hobbies), tutors were asked to start the tutoring session with a "mini-chat" in which they talked about their own hobbies—limiting their oral input to the use of the auxiliary “do” in present tense. Similarly, this activity was followed by a reading out loud activity for which learners had to listen to the tutor first and then read each sentence independently. The presence of this oral input helped students feel more comfortable, hence, responding more positively to the writing activity and becoming more motivated to participate in it.

Although most of the adult L2 learners in this study were primarily interested in developing oral competence to find better sources of employment or to interact with members of the community, there was the exceptional case of Ana, who attempted to acquire a literacy level similar to that of her children and was, therefore, motivated to develop reading and writing competence. Although conclusions in regards to female vs. male development of reading and writing skills are beyond the scope of this study, it would be important to research further the nature of literacy acquisition of parents based on gender and the role first-born generation children play in their parents' literacy and

language acquisition processes.¹⁴ All of the secondary sources of motivation also played a role in the attitude each learner displayed; for example, because the majority of participants wanted to interact with other members of the community, they would be more likely to engage in oral as opposed to writing activities. On the other hand, Ana, who had more time to devote to the study of class materials because she did not have a job during the course of the study, also engaged in reading and reading activities.

External factors also aided the development of L2 proficiency; for example, the learners' exposure to positive feedback, re-affirmation of their language skills, and sympathy from other members of the community enhanced adult L2 learners' motivations. Even in cases when tutors did most of the work by modeling the correct form in the target language, they would usually congratulate adult L2 learners after completing any activity. This positive feedback not only helped learners feel more comfortable with the tutoring sessions, but it also re-affirmed their language skills. Similarly, learners in this study benefited from the sympathy from tutors and native-English speakers in the program. For instance, every time students walked into the building where classes took place, they would be enthusiastically greeted by the tutors and the program coordinator, leading to their feeling welcome and more motivated to come to class. Hence, motivation in the community service program also enhanced adult L2 learners' willingness to engage in different tasks conducive to the development of their L2 proficiency. Not only did all of the external factors mentioned above enhance the adult L2 learners' motivations, but these same factors diminished the students' high levels of anxiety when they encountered traditional writing activities.

¹⁴ Although an important finding deserving of more research, the development of literacy based on gender was not the focus of this study. Also, this issue could not be further studied due to Ana's early withdrawal from the program when she found a job in another town in the area.

Anxiety and its Relationship to Writing

In the initial stages of this study, I believed motivation to be the most important factor impacting the adult L2 learner's writing development. As the study progressed, though, anxiety proved to have an even higher negative impact on these learners' development of writing competence. Due to the recurring association of writing activities with student anxiety, it became important to identify the causes of this anxiety and strategies for coping with it.

To begin with, as with many adult second-language learners, L2 learners in this study had low levels of literacy in their L1 leading to negative perceptions of their L2 proficiency and to high levels of anxiety when they encountered traditional writing activities. Namely, none of these adult L2 learners had completed their elementary educations; hence, activities such as using a book, writing words down, and reading out loud caused high levels of anxiety and discomfort. Most adult L2 learners in this study preferred to engage in conversations and games with tutors, which showed that these learners' association of writing with traditional academic activities conditioned their participation and attitudes towards the implementation of writing activities, activities they usually associated with academia. Also, because the previous language training some of the participants had received through the community service program did not usually emphasize the development of writing competence, L2 learners in this study lacked familiarity with L2 writing activities, which caused their already high levels of anxiety to increase.

Although adult L2 learners' anxiety seemed to increase each time they encountered unfamiliar or more difficult writing activities, more than from the writing activities per

se, adult L2 learners' levels of anxiety seemed to stem from these learners' lack of confidence and familiarity with writing demands. Therefore, because these learners were anxious and had difficulty working independently, tutors had to find strategies to alleviate this anxiety. For example, when tutors introduced a new writing activity, they had to actively engage in the writing activities and use strategies to make students more comfortable. Tutors, therefore, resorted to spelling words out loud when students could not provide written responses to a given writing task. According to some of the tutors, when they guided the student letter-by-letter—an activity with which students generally felt confident—students' anxiety level declined since spelling allowed students to complete the writing task even when they lacked the vocabulary or were unfamiliar with grammatical structures. Similarly, tutors used positive feedback to reduce students' level of anxiety. Phrases such as *good job* and *you're doing well* were regularly used as a means to alleviate the pressure and diminish the students' anxiety levels during the writing activities.

Adult L2 learners in this study displayed different anxiety levels consistent with both their familiarity with the task and its level of difficulty; hence lower levels of anxiety were observed when language learners encountered activities to which they had been previously exposed. Language learners in this study, for example, were more used to writing down single words by filling in the blanks—an activity employed in the book that the L2 learners in the program use—as opposed to following instructions to write complete sentences or even paragraphs. Also, although these L2 learners would read words aloud and listen to the tutors, they preferred tutors to produce most of the writing. Consequently, L2 learners in this study felt more comfortable acting as passive

participants in the writing process because then they did not have to “write” and were released from the anxiety usually associated with writing activities. Therefore, given the low level of competence adult language learners in this program displayed, there was limited room for traditional academic writing since these L2 learners lacked L2 proficiency to use writing creatively and independently. Instead, these language learners generally used writing as most language learners would: they would copy single words down, spell words, and use models or grammar drills while attempting to find strategies to cope with the anxiety levels more complex writing tasks created.

Language Learners’ Anxiety Coping Strategies

During writing activities, adult L2 learners displayed discomfort, including lack of eye contact with the tutors, a lack of initiative to work independently, nervous tics, and overall avoidance of writing activities. At the same time, they developed coping strategies to deal with this anxiety. For instance, during writing activity 1, students were asked to describe their Valentines physically. This was a group activity—because of a shortage of tutors— for which students were asked to sit next to one another and had, therefore, easy access to each other’s responses. Gustavo, who according to my assessment did not know how to read in Spanish, displayed high levels of anxiety, anxiety he coped with by copying the answers from his peer, Fernando.

Because adult L2 learners in this study were circumstantial bilinguals who were already immersed in English language and the U.S. culture, they resorted to alternative ways to fulfill their immediate writing needs and to alleviate the anxiety caused by their inability to carry out basic writing tasks. For instance, because filling out forms is a writing task adult L2 learners in this study might encounter on a regular basis, they

simply memorized basic information. When I asked Fernando to fill out a form containing basic personal information (name, address, phone number, age), he completed the activity correctly stating that “he had memorized those a long time ago” because “they always ask the same stuff.” This observation might lead to some inquiry in future research projects on whether or not the memorization of personal information could be considered part of the development of reading or writing competence.

Similarly, students’ anxiety coping methods included the students’ constant need for positive feedback and reassurance—positive feedback they required from their tutors during regular tutoring sessions. Because adult L2 learners participating in this study had low levels of L2 proficiency, they looked for the tutors’ approval of their responses, especially in cases when writing activities were implemented. Therefore, students’ needs for positive feedback served two main purposes: they allowed students to cope with the anxiety traditional writing activities generated and helped enhance these learners’ motivation towards the L2 acquisition.

Writing activities and surveys in Spanish were primarily implemented to enhance L2 language development, yet they also provided learners with a space to use their L1 while lowering these learners’ anxiety levels. As Bean et al. have previously suggested, L2 learners might better develop their L2 if their L1 is not stigmatized. For the purpose of this study, adult L2 learners were encouraged to use their L1 in order to enhance confidence and promote higher levels of L2 proficiency. During writing activity 1, for instance, learners were familiarized with St. Valentine’s Day by the use of a reading and a couple of writing activities; the first writing task in which they had to physically describe their Valentine in English and the other in which they had to describe in Spanish

how people in their home country celebrated this holiday. Although the reading activity was supposed to work as a means for students to engage the topic, because students seemed anxious to read, I decided to introduce the topic by directly relating it to their past experiences in their home country. After reading about the holiday's origins, students were asked to share in Spanish some of their thoughts on how they usually celebrated this holiday in their home countries. Not only was this oral activity a good strategy to engage students' attention, but it also allowed students to feel more free to participate. Overall, it appeared that language learners in this study resisted writing activities as a means to cope with both their lack of familiarity with writing in their L2 and with the anxiety caused by these same activities, anxiety that seemed to be alleviated by the use of the students' L1.

Writing Development in a Community of Adult L2 Learners

Although previous research has primarily shown the direct relationship between L1 and L2 literacy levels (Ferris and Hedcock 132; Rivera 2; and Valdes 36), a high level of literacy and previous exposure to traditional learning activities might result in a learner's better performance on writing activities. Although the small number of participants in this study prevents definite conclusions regarding the direct relationship between high L1 literacy levels and L2 proficiency, Jose, the participant with the highest level of education in his L1 did display higher levels of confidence when completing writing activities and surveys than the rest of the participants. Jose would always interact with the tutor, and although he also needed constant positive feedback, he was more engaged in writing activities and surveys. While it cannot be proven that Jose's better performance on writing activities exclusively stemmed from his higher L1 literacy, this

finding supports previous research on the bidirectional nature of L1 and L2 cognitive processes.

Although writing activities that challenge the language learners' proficiency created a high level of initial anxiety, the constant exposure to writing activities—some of which included writing of basic structures—helped enhance adult L2 learners' language skills. The constant exposure to writing activities helped enhance adult L2 learners' self-esteem and gave them more self-confidence in their written productions. As Valdes and Sanders have shown in a study of Latino ESL students, exposing students to writing activities can lead to the development of writing competence and enhance the learners' motivation to use language independently (264-272). Therefore, adult L2 learners' lack of engagement and overall discomfort with writing tasks in this study might have primarily stemmed from these learners' low L2 proficiency and lack of exposure to writing activities as opposed to resistance to writing per se. For instance, although during the first writing activity, adult L2 learners did not have enough time to complete the entire activity and were reluctant to share their answers, during the second writing activity, the three learners who participated interacted more and were able to complete it. The results of the first writing activity might have been more negative due to the lack of tutors present that night since this activity was carried out as a group, and, therefore, students had to share their answers with a group of people as opposed to a single person (the tutor), as in the case of the second activity. Yet after having being exposed to a sequence of activities which combined language practice, vocabulary, grammar, and the writing of basic sentences, students became more accustomed and, therefore, more relaxed when encountering writing activities as part of their regular

tutoring sessions. Examples of this are two of the adult L2 learners' interactions with tutors during writing activities 3 and 4. In one of these occasions, in spite of having the option of copying words from the model provided for activity 3, Fernando attempted to write the word down as he thought the word should look, and looked at the model only to corroborate his answer. Similarly, during writing activity 4, Jose—the participant with the highest level of previous schooling—initiated the tutoring session by reading aloud some of the sentences in the writing activity, without the tutor's prompting. This finding suggested that adult L2 learners' resistance to writing in this study stemmed from their lack of familiarity with writing activities, activities they thought themselves incapable of performing. Therefore, introducing writing as an essential part of the tutoring sessions in this community service program not only benefited the adult L2 learners' language skills development, but also helped enhance their levels of self confidence and motivation, underscoring the role motivation, self-confidence, and exposure to writing play in the acquisition of language skills.

Although the implementation of writing activities as part of regular tutoring sessions seemed to enhance students' motivation while lowering their anxiety, because of these learners' lack of L2 proficiency and their social condition as immigrants, the question of whether or not they could use writing, as traditionally defined by the academy, to fulfill their immediate needs remained unanswered. For instance, although the development of writing activities specifically targeted to these learners' writing needs could ideally motivate these learners to find applicability for their writing competence, it was difficult for them to see the value of writing in their everyday lives. Also, because the types of employment most of these adult L2 learners had access to both in their home

countries and in the U.S. did not use such regular employment demands as requiring résumés and letters of recommendation, these learners, in most cases, did not see the *need* for writing competence. For instance, during writing activity 4 (interview dos and don'ts), Jose had difficulties engaging in the topic because, as he put it, "he was a carpenter back in his home country and people would come to him and ask him to fix one thing or the other so he never had a job interview before." Therefore, although this writing activity, in particular, targeted adult L2 learners' needs for employment, these learners' socio-economic environments differed from the one presented in the activity. This finding showed not only that these adult L2 learners did not see much of an applicability of their written competence in English as a result of their not generally using writing in their mother tongue, but also that the job market in the L1 culture did not require regular methods of employment; hence, their lack of interest in the development of a writing competence. Instead of using regular methods of employment for which they would need a basic level of writing competence, adult L2 learners in this program found alternative ways to fulfill their employment needs both in the L1 and L2 environments; they talked to friends, family members, or other acquaintances. In this sense, there seemed to be a cultural emphasis on orality that was reflected in the adult L2 learners' interest to develop oral over writing proficiency. Therefore, because adult L2 learners' lack of interest in developing written competence stems from their belief that writing is not applicable to their every day lives, tutoring sessions should not only incorporate writing activities, but part of these sessions should also be devoted to these learners' acculturation to L2 writing. Although some socio-economic factors might restrict immigrants' use of writing in the L2 culture, tutors should have conversations with the

adult second-language learners about the importance of writing in the L2 culture. For instance, adult L2 learners could learn about the contexts and circumstances in which they are likely to encounter writing tasks and get prepared to perform these activities.

With the purpose of making adult L2 learners aware of the importance of writing in the L2 culture, several writing activities were created to target the language learners' immediate writing needs—activity 4: job interviews, activity 6: job advertisements, and activity 7: residential lease. Although these activities seemed to help learners acquire new vocabulary in the target language, they were not, as I had hoped, more significant to the language learners than any other type of writing activity. For instance, when introducing writing activity 6, I started providing Fernando with oral input to introduce the topic of job advertisements. Initially I asked him some questions in regards to the importance of knowing how to read and interpret ads in the newspaper and what people usually use them for. Although Fernando agreed that it was a means to find sources of employment, he stated that “that was not the way he found jobs.” Fernando told me that when he did not know anybody in the particular place he was looking for a job, he usually used “the phonebook” with the list of local restaurants in the area and called them or went to each one of these places. Similarly, during writing activity 7: residential lease, Daniel, who lived in a house with several roommates, stated that he had seen one of “those leases *only* once in his home country, but he had never had to sign one up [sic].” Here, Daniel highlighted a cultural difference between the L1 and the L2. While people in the United States tend to move out of their parents' houses early in their lives, people in other countries tend to live with their families for longer periods of time; therefore, they are less likely to encounter residential leases. Similarly, the fact that Daniel lived with

several other roommates exemplified one of the alternative ways adult L2 learners find to fulfill their needs for housing: finding other acquaintances or family members to live with.

Although most research on adult L2 learners' language development stresses "the need to [design] class activities around the issues...of interest to the adult learners" (Kim 23), in this study, adult L2 learners' responses to writing activities intended to be related to their immediate needs were not as effective as initially anticipated. Although writing activities that target adult L2 learners' immediate needs enhanced these learners' development of written proficiency, other aspects, such as the cultural differences between learners' L1 and L2 as well as these learners' socio-economic status, had a negative effect on the students' reactions to the writing activities. Nevertheless, in spite of not being as related to the language learners' needs as initially anticipated, each one of the writing activities allowed learners in this study to acquire new vocabulary as well as a better understanding of the L2 culture in relationship to the L1 culture.

Writing Development and Its Effects on Overall Language Proficiency

The kinds of writing that participants in this study were able to carry out might not fit traditional academic writing demands, yet participants developed a certain level of writing competence that they primarily used as a tool for the development of other language skills. For instance, when faced with most of the writing activities, language learners in this study used writing as a means to remember words or grammatical structures, therefore, creating a visual picture of words and expressions they had only previously heard. Participants in this study retained words more easily when provided with both oral and written feedback, and they also seemed surprised to realize that a

given word on a piece of paper was a word they had heard many times in the past. Therefore, L2 learners' realization that writing could also be a tool to expand their vocabulary in the L2 allowed them to see a more immediate applicability for writing. Although this perception shifted the focus of writing development from the exploration of ideas to a more mechanical use of structures in written production, the word-by-word—and even letter-by-letter—identification of words could also be considered writing, a type of writing dependent upon the students' overall language proficiency.

What follows is a set of descriptions of the students' language abilities, adapted from Valdes and Anloff-Sanders. The table created by Valdes and Anloff-Sanders identifies seven levels of writing proficiency displayed by L2 learners. I have expanded the first level of their table to include four additional categories: speaking, listening, reading, and motivation, which I believe work together to create language proficiency. These descriptions show the most noticeable features of the adult L2 learners' language and motivational skills at the beginning of this study and they are intended to serve as a comparison to the subsequent progress they made after both participating in a set of seven writing activities and ten months of regular tutoring sessions. At the beginning of the study, three of the adult learners were in level one of language and motivational skills. Gustavo, the one learner who was suspected to be illiterate, did not reach this level in any of his language skills. Fernando's listening, reading, writing, and motivational skills were in level one, but his speaking skills were in a higher level (possibly two). Because this categorization identifies where the majority of learners were on January 8th, 2008 at the beginning of the study, Juan, who joined the program at the end of February, is not included.

Table 1: Adult Language Learners' Language Skills as of January 8th, 2008

Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronounces certain words and/or expressions he or she is in contact with on a regular basis (food vocabulary, present tense structure especially with the pronoun “you”). • Has a thick accent. • Uses Spanish phonetical rules.
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands the basic message in a sentence after it has been repeated at least twice. • Sometimes misunderstands questions, but can still engage in simple conversations.
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stumbles when attempting to read a word out loud. • Can only read word by word and pauses in between words. • Has a thick accent reflected on the pronunciation of words he/she reads out loud.
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writes single words he or she has previously heard. • Writes words with several misspellings.
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks confidence when using language, but attempts to engage in conversations, games, and traditional writing activities. • Shows low levels of motivation when asked to perform writing activities even when they are accompanied by a model.

As shown in the previous table, the development of writing, reading, speaking, and listening language skills seemed to cognitively complement one another since most learners, despite their desire to acquire one skill over another, displayed similar levels of proficiency in all language skills. Because acquiring proficiency in a foreign language and, therefore, developing language skills requires time and consistency, it is important to acknowledge that these learners' growth and improvement in the L2 were limited by the short duration of this study. Yet in spite of the short time in which these learners' cognitive processes were monitored, by comparison, learners displayed at least some higher level of proficiency in all language skills.

The following table shows the development of adult L2 learners' language skills as a result of both the implementation of writing activities and their exposure to continuous training through the community service program I studied.¹⁵

Table 2: Adult Language Learners' Language Skills After Three Months of Writing Activity Implementation

Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes and remembers words more easily. • Not only pronounces certain words and/or expressions he or she is in contact with on a regular basis (food vocabulary, present tense structure especially with the pronoun "you"), but also has a wider arrange of vocabulary to express himself or herself orally. • Still has a thick accent and uses Spanish phonetical rules, but is able to recognize phonological patterns in the L2.
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands the basic message in a sentence after it has been repeated at least twice. • Sometimes misunderstands questions, but can still engage in simple conversations. • Makes connections between homophones (words with similar sounds) and although this generates some confusion at first, the learner is able to compare and contrast and have a wider range of expressions and words that enable him or her to engage in oral conversation as he or she is able to comprehend oral input.
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still stumbles when attempting to read a word, yet some words have become familiar and he or she can, therefore, read them more easily. • Still primarily reads word by word, but now is more concerned with meaning than with sound since he or she has a better grasp of how words sound. • Pronounces words by employing Spanish phonological patterns, but there is a more conscious effort to produce the L2 sounds. • Recognizes written input and connects words known orally to their written counterparts.
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempts to write single words he or she has previously heard and these words have fewer misspellings—the more contact he or she has with the written input, the fewer mistakes he or she makes when reproducing a word. • Follows grammatical patterns to provide written responses to questions. • Attempts to provide different answers than the ones provided by the model—still resorting to Spanish when there is a lack of vocabulary.
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still seems unsure when using the target language, but attempts to engage in conversations, games and language learning activities • Tries to engage in the writing activities even if writing is not his or her main priority.

¹⁵ While work other tutors carried out with these learners during regular tutoring sessions might have also had an impact on the proficiency participants displayed at the end of this study, the little proficiency displayed among longer-term participants in the program seems to indicate that writing activities had a positive effect.

Since some of the descriptions of language skills development shown in both tables remain the same, for the purpose of clarity, I refer here only to the specific areas of improvement language learners in this study displayed. What follows is a brief analysis of these areas: the development of a broader vocabulary, the use of inferences, the development of reading comprehension awareness, the presence of fewer misspellings in learners' written production, and a better engagement with writing activities.

Because language learners were exposed to context-related vocabulary they were unfamiliar with—the language of advertisements, interviews, and the technical vocabulary of residential leases—, they developed a broader vocabulary that was not restricted to their immediate surroundings, such as the food industry. Similarly, by improving vocabulary, adult L2 learners in this study were able to recognize and remember more words, thanks to the use of both oral and written input. Also, although these learners' pronunciation of words still followed Spanish phonological patterns, most demonstrated a more conscious effort to pronounce words in the target language. For example, adult L2 learners both repeated words without the tutors' prompting and asked tutors to repeat words for them to imitate.

As the tables show, written input did help enhance adult L2 learners' overall language proficiency, even if writing seemed a secondary priority for most of these learners. Adult L2 learners participating in the writing activities could more easily identify and remember words or expressions when they were exposed to both oral and written input simultaneously. For instance, during one of the writing activities carried out during a regular tutoring session, the tutor wrote the words *when, who, how, what, why* when trying to teach Fernando how to ask questions in present tense. When asked to

translate in Spanish for the tutor to verify that the student understood what the words meant, the learner could not identify some of these words. Yet after the tutor pronounced the same words, the learner was able to pick up on the words' meanings immediately. Therefore, this finding supports the idea that written input might be benefited by the use of oral input as well. Similarly, even if as what Reid has called "ear" learners, these adult L2 students generally had more contact with such sources of input as pronunciation and listening, students preferred tutors in the program to write words and expressions down for them to remember; hence, written input enhanced word retention and vocabulary expansion. This development of vocabulary also led to some improvement in the learners' writing competence, since adult L2 learners in this study could remember more easily how to write single words they could identify only orally before.

At least two of the four language learners who consistently participated in writing activities—Daniel and Jose—were able draw connections between similar words when provided with either oral or written input. For instance, although Jose initially wrote *were* instead *where*, after having access to written input I provided him with, he could easily differentiate one word from the other. Both Daniel and Jose used this strategy of comparing homophones to understand sentences they read, hence developing a basic level of reading comprehension. Although this situation generated some confusion at first, learners were able to compare and contrast and engage more actively in writing activities and tutoring sessions.

As learners in this study had more exposure to written input during regular tutoring sessions, they became more aware of the way words looked and were, therefore, more likely to reproduce them on paper. Although learners still relied heavily on spelling when

they were unsure how to write a given word, as the writing activities progressed, learners displayed fewer misspellings of words and relied less on the tutor's spelling of words.

Although adult L2 learners displayed higher levels of motivation to improve their oral proficiency than any other language skill—reflecting the reliance on oral competence development that Second-Language Studies has stressed—the implementation of writing activities not only helped these learners develop a level of writing competence, but also enhanced overall higher levels of English proficiency at the end of this study. Yet the traditional definition of writing has to be re-defined to encompass a broader understanding of writing as the kind of writing adult L2 learners with a low level of English proficiency can carry out. Adult L2 learners can copy words down, spell, or recognize written input, but they might not be able to compose long essays or even paragraphs unless they acquire an intermediate/high level of proficiency in the L2. Although writing might not be one of adult L2 learners' main goals when acquiring a second language, the development of this skill can indeed help advance these learners' language acquisition process while also empowering them with the acquisition of a new skill they might be able to use in the future.

As important as the study of non-traditional populations is, researchers should consider that work with community programs requires them to develop an awareness of the features inherent in such programs. Developing such awareness would allow researchers to know what aspects to consider when carrying out research in community service programs. The study I developed has enabled me to identify some implications, presented in the next chapter, for researchers interested both in practical and theoretical research.

CHAPTER 4: IMPLICATIONS

The study of community-service programs allows for research opportunities to advance a particular field and for the acknowledgement of non-traditional communities. This study in particular, as one of the attempts to explore other research territories, has provided results that should be of interest to other researchers in the future. It provides suggestions on how to carry out two important types of research in community service programs: pedagogical and scholarly research. Although scholarly research has generally been privileged by academics, I believe pedagogical research, as shown in this chapter, should be as important to Second-Language and Composition Studies. Given my personal interests in teaching and the applicability of research, this chapter primarily explores practical, program development research; nevertheless, it also provides relevant insights into how researchers could carry out traditional scholarly research on language development in community-service programs. Similarly, even though this study does not presume to answer all of the possible questions stemming from the study of adult learners in community-service programs, this project provides suggestions on how researchers should approach these communities, as well as how program coordinators could make their programs operate more efficiently.

Implications for Pedagogical Research

Although community service programs provide fruitful research territories, because they welcome non-traditional populations, researchers interested in pedagogical research should approach these communities with an awareness of the features inherent in such programs. Accordingly, researchers interested in community-program development should design research approaches that acknowledge learners' prioritizing of their

economic survival over their language training, their lack of time to study new materials, and their possible inability to commit to class. Because adult L2 learners are interested in having economic stability, tutoring sessions should incorporate topics related to socio-economic empowerment in the L2 culture. Tutors could, for instance, teach adult L2 learners how to use language they are likely to encounter at work and in public places such as hospitals, supermarkets, parks, and libraries; also, tutors could help learners develop a functional literacy to interact with other members of the community. Similarly, because adult L2 learners cannot always commit to class and lack time to study new materials, tutors should use tutoring time exclusively to practice the target language. Also, because adult L2 learners should have as many opportunities as possible to practice the target language, tutors should provide suggestions for extended learning opportunities such as homework assignments and language practice. For instance, tutors could suggest that students watch movies or the news in English, read the local newspaper, or write down words they do not understand down. Although extended language practice would benefit language learners, tutors should be aware that adult L2 learners, for various reasons, might not always engage in such activities; hence, tutors should not base their tutoring sessions on expectations about homework assignments.

Moreover, researchers need to create research instruments that acknowledge social aspects causing a high rate of turnover and inconsistency in class attendance. Like most adult learners in community programs, participants in this study prioritized their means of subsistence over the development of their cognitive skills; hence, other social and economic factors unrelated to the community program had negative impacts on the learners' ability to participate in the study. For instance, because most of these learners

held unstable jobs in the local restaurants, once some of the local businesses shut down, adult L2 learners moved to other places where they could find sources of employment. For these reasons, researchers should create research instruments that promote these learners' acculturation to the L2; namely, research instruments should be conducive to pointing out cultural differences between the adult learners' L1 and L2 and these learners' socio-economic status. For instance, tutors and learners should work together preparing resumes and/or job applications—while comparing how resumes in the L1 differ from the L2—so that adult L2 learners have more options if there are any social aspects impacting the community.

When approaching community service programs, researchers should also be aware that work with these programs may involve a high degree of inconsistency on the part of both learners and tutors. Even if adult learners in this study were, for the most part, interested in their language development, and saw community service education as the only way to get training in the L2, sometimes their long hours at work interfere with their regular attendance to classes. Similarly, sometimes, tutors in the program prioritized other obligations over their responsibilities to the program as a result of the lack of compensation for their work. Although language learners in this study seemed to withdraw from the program due to external factors related to their economic stability, it would be important to acknowledge that there could have been other factors unintentionally suppressing learners' motivation to attend classes as well. For instance, adult L2 learners could have become bored, found some of the activities not useful, or might have begun the program with unrealistic expectations. Nonetheless, due to the adult learners' desire to be accommodating, it is hard to establish to what degree their

inconsistency in class attendance was caused by low levels of motivation. Therefore, due to the nature of community service programs, researchers and program coordinators should design studies and programs that accommodate inconsistency in class attendance. For example, adult L2 learners could be provided with specific topics to be covered on a specific date. This schedule—which should allow at least a couple of sessions per topic—could make language learners feel more obliged to attend class while it would also provide a sense of continuity and organization for tutors.

As shown in the next section, creating a set of teaching or tutoring activities would contribute to resolving learners and tutors' lack of consistency in class attendance. Similarly, researchers interested in program development and program coordinators need to decide what kind of program they want to study, establish what research methods they intend to use, and establish what role they want to play in the program. Although the involvement of researchers in community service programs would indeed contribute to the overall organization of these programs, researchers need to be aware that the decisions they make before becoming part of these communities will determine their subsequent role in the programs. For example, becoming participating members of the community service program could allow researchers to gain students' acceptance and get a better sense of how a given program operated; at the same time, it might become difficult to distinguish their role as tutors or coordinators from their role as researchers. On the other hand, although approaching a community-service program only as a researcher might make it easier for researchers to define their roles, this approach might hinder the students' responses to research questions and generate resistance to the study and even the researcher. As challenging as it is to work in community-service programs,

researchers could contribute their knowledge to create a solid structure—as suggested in the next section—other less experienced tutors or administrators could use in the future.

Program Development Implications

Because learners who receive instruction from community-service programs are involved in complex learning and social environments, several practical issues should be considered to improve these learning environments. For example, community service programs would benefit from experienced educators and researchers' involvement, established academic curricula and objectives, and flexible timelines and schedules to address issues of inconsistency and turnover. Although ideally the needs of each community-service program should be studied individually, the following recommendations would improve programs in both rural and urban areas:

- 1. To Establish a Clear Curriculum, Objectives and Timelines:** Community service programs should have an established teaching curriculum that corresponds to the learning objectives learners are expected to achieve after a specified period of time in the program. In cases when such curriculum does not exist, program coordinators and tutors should have meetings before the initiation of classes to establish the topics, objectives, and activities for the semester. Similarly, community service programs should acknowledge the possibility of fluctuating student and teacher population by creating a set of regular lesson plans and a sequence of flexible timelines directly related to the teaching objectives. If learners are provided with objectives and timelines, they will be more likely to understand what they could be missing if they do not attend classes. For instance, in an ESL community-service program for adults, these timelines could

accommodate learners with different levels of proficiency: beginners, low-intermediate, intermediate, and advanced levels—levels determined by an informal placement “test.”

2. To Incorporate Writing as Part of Teaching Curricula: Because, as this study has shown, the implementation of writing activities enhances the overall development of language skills, tutors and program coordinators should implement writing as a regular component in community service programs’ teaching curricula. Therefore, in order to create effective curricula and teaching activities that would provide learners with diverse instruction, tutors and/or teachers should be instructed on how to develop writing activities that address both adult L2 learners’ lack of language proficiency and the writing needs they might encounter. Although there is still some controversy on whether or not writing activities targeting L2 learners’ lack of language proficiency—grammar drills—should be implemented before adult L2 learners are able to engage in more elaborate writing activities, the results of this project show that ideally L2 learners should be exposed to writing that addresses both language patterns and writing related to the learners’ everyday lives. Although this study provides evidence only of the usefulness of writing in the development of adult L2 learners’ language skills, other community-service programs could also implement writing as part of their teaching curriculums. For instance, writing activities could be implemented in literacy programs and adult education programs.

3. To Create a Sense of Engagement and Continuity: Creating a solid structure would give both learners and tutors a sense of continuity that would ideally encourage them to engage more fully with the teaching and learning process. Implementing a clear curriculum and a set of learning objectives before the initiation of classes would increase

adult learners' engagement and guide tutors through the tutoring process. Only when adult learners feel that their learning process is taken seriously will they be willing to engage more seriously with it.

Also, as evidenced by the community service program I studied, implementing a one-one pedagogical approach in which teaching is personalized in tutoring sessions would make learners feel more comfortable with the learning environment and address their particular needs better. For instance, language learners in the study left and joined the program at different times; hence, these learners displayed different levels of language proficiency that would not have been as well acknowledged in a regular class as it was in individual tutoring sessions.

Similarly, in those programs with tutoring sessions as opposed to classes, to enhance consistency and continuity, each student in the program should work with the same tutor for a long period of time. In that way, the tutor would know exactly what the learner has previously studied, and the tutor could access the students' cognitive progress more accurately. In cases when a student must change tutors, the original tutor should provide the new tutor with a list of topics the learner has previously studied. For this reason, tutors or teachers in community service programs should receive regular training that would allow them to both continue to build on their teaching experience and better address the needs of the adult learners participating in their programs.

4. To Train Tutors Effectively: Because community service programs welcome non-traditional learners who, depending on their needs and the nature of the program, might need more time to develop a specific ability, community service programs should schedule teaching training sessions for their tutors at the beginning of each semester.

Although ideally the programs' coordinators should have the experience needed to train tutors, in cases when the coordinator lacks the experience to conduct these preliminary meetings, the program's sponsors should arrange lectures with guest speakers who would walk tutors through the process of planning for tutoring/teaching sessions. Inexperienced tutors should be provided with teaching as well as cultural training that would prepare them for the job they will perform in the future. For instance, tutors should initially be instructed on how to create mini-lesson plans according to topics and use materials provided by the program. Tutors should be required to show the coordinator a lesson plan prior to the first tutoring session. For community-service programs working with adult L2 learners, lesson plans should be focused on developing language learners' language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) so that learners grow accustomed to looking at language from several angles while benefiting from diverse instruction. Also, in regards to the tutors' cultural training, ideally a person who has navigated both cultures should be in charge of providing tutors with cultural training that would enable tutors to recognize cultural differences related to adult L2 learners' attitudes and motivations.

Moreover, program coordinators should instruct tutors on how to use sources such as books as *one* of the many materials they could incorporate into their tutoring or teaching sessions as opposed to only following the book's content chapter-by-chapter. This instruction along with regular meetings with tutors in which they are trained to create materials and lesson plans independently would allow tutors to grow as tutors and would help maintain students' attention and motivation.

5. To Specify Regulations and Rules: Although tutors might be motivated by receiving teaching and/or tutoring training, they should also become aware that the free training

they receive is given to them under the condition that they engage seriously in the program and, therefore, comply with the program's regulations. For example, tutors should be informed early in the semester of the rules for canceling or missing classes. Also, having a calendar of events or timelines available for tutors would allow them to plan ahead of time and make sure their time availability coincides with the programs' class schedule. Nonetheless, because tutors and coordinators in most programs volunteer their time without receiving any sort of monetary compensation, coordinators should stress rules and regulations as part of the program and not as arbitrary impositions upon the work tutors do. Similarly, when asking tutors to create lesson plans for each tutoring session, coordinators should stress this requirement as a means for tutors to improve their teaching skills.

6. To Grant Some Kind of Compensation for Tutors and Coordinators: Although the demands community service programs make for programs to function better are necessary, program coordinators and sponsors should be aware that lack of compensation for the work volunteers do might be one reason for their lack of commitment; hence, granting some compensation for community service program members' work could be as an effective motivational tool. This contribution could motivate tutors to fully engage with the program and the activities they carry out. Even in cases when programs cannot afford to offer monetary compensations to tutors, other forms of compensations such as coupons from local businesses, college credit hours, and even letters of recommendation for tutors to use when applying to jobs should be made available.

Remaining Research Questions

Although several suggestions for carrying out practical research in community service programs have been provided in the previous section, given the nature of community service programs where lack of consistency, high rates of turnover, and lack of a teaching curriculum co-exist as part of the teaching of adult learners, other questions remain answered, and need therefore, further study:

- In what ways could community programs be better funded so that tutors and coordinators do not see teaching in these communities as charity work but as any other teaching commitment? Should tutors and program coordinators receive compensations for their involvement in community service programs?
- How could learners be more motivated to come to class in spite of their work schedules? Could community service programs obtain agreements with the companies that employ their adult learners to guarantee their availability for classes?
- If like the academy, community service programs *are* sites of learning, can traditional academic research and pedagogy be adapted to community service programs? To what degree should the study and research of alternative sites of learning be incorporated into academic research?
- Should graduate students be trained to carry out research in places other than the academy?

Other Theoretical Questions

Although this study provides suggestions for program development, there are several research questions researchers should address when continuing the dialogue here initiated. To start with, researchers should consider that due to the possibility of

inconsistency in class attendance, research should be conducted during long periods of time to accurately monitor learners' progress. For instance, although this study allowed me to follow the adult L2 learners' cognitive development over the course of three months, the inconsistency in class attendance and the high rate of turnover in this program made conclusions about these learners less clear than initially planned; hence, limiting some of the results of this study.

Moreover, although this study primarily measures adult L2 learners' attitudinal changes while they acquired listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills, another way to measure learners' improvement would be to implement a pre-test and a post-test to be administered at the beginning and at the end of any given study. By implementing these tests, researchers could have a more precise instrument to compare learners' progress during a longer period of time and, therefore, monitor the learners' progress while comparing results from the initial to the later stages of their research.

Similarly, in order to record students' development of cognitive skills more accurately, researchers should consider having a control group to compare and contrast students' progress after the implementation of research methods. For instance, although this study monitored adult L2 learners' development of writing competence in relationship to other language skills, because these learners received regular instruction simultaneously, it was difficult to establish how much of their language skills development stemmed specifically from writing activities as opposed to the tutoring sessions in general.

Equally important, researchers should study other languages besides Spanish because there are important language learning differences between them and because of

the likelihood that the number of second-language learners in the United States will continue to increase. For instance, the community program I studied provided English instruction for Chinese adult language learners who could not participate in this study.¹⁶ Although any researcher interested in community-service programs could carry out successful research with native speakers of other languages, having at least a basic linguistic knowledge of the learners' mother tongue might allow researchers to produce more accurate results. Adult language learners in community-service programs generally lack the linguistic competence to fully interact with others, and in many cases, they might also be more reserved and resistant to "outsiders" than regular learners. Therefore, these aspects might lead these learners to withhold information from the researcher. For example, as a Spanish native speaker, I could obtain valuable information related to my research questions through informal conversations with the learners—conversations usually taking place before or after the tutoring sessions. Learners in this study not only seemed to be more comfortable with my presence as a researcher because I was already part of the program, but they also felt more comfortable sharing information with me because they felt I understood their language and culture.

In spite of the challenges that working with community service programs present to researchers and academics, these communities are not only great places for innovative research, but they also enable researchers and academics to reach out to non-traditional learners who have generally been unacknowledged. Perhaps as researchers, we should start by demystifying the idea that community service programs should be the concern of

¹⁶ Because I believe that research results could be more accurate if the researcher has a basic knowledge of the participants' L1, these Chinese students were not asked to participate in this study. Also, my lack of knowledge of Chinese would have prevented me from providing these learners with consent forms in their native language, as my university's IRB would have required.

only college students, who in the transition to becoming professionals, want to help others by doing volunteer work, and instead start looking at these programs as sites of education that need as much attention as any academic institution. Only when researchers and experienced educators are willing to share their knowledge with less experienced educators will community service programs become stronger and more reputable places where learners gain the knowledge they want and need. Beyond the specific research and teaching suggestions I have made in this chapter, I would like to suggest that both academia and the field of Composition Studies need to expand their scope to include populations not found in academic institutions. Bringing ESL community-based education and second-language development back to Composition is one way to reach this goal; yet other efforts to expand Composition's scope should be made in the future.

Because, as this study shows, it is possible for adult L2 learners with low levels of English proficiency to develop writing competence according to their language proficiency, researchers in both Composition and Second-Language Studies need to reconsider their definition of writing. Although adult L2 learners with low levels of proficiency might benefit from some of the typical methodologies used in Second-Language Studies to enhance writing such as spelling, grammar drills, and controlled language exercises, these methodologies should be the starting point in a continuum of more challenging exercises that push L2 learners' writing proficiency forward. Based on L2 learners' language proficiency, both composition and second-language instructors should provide L2 learners with writing exercises that go beyond the repetition of words or expressions and make these learners use writing as a composing process.

In order to find a more adequate place for writing, researchers in different fields should re-evaluate the position writing occupies in each of their disciplines. For example, although the development of writing competence has not been the priority in language classrooms, because, as shown in this study, writing can enhance other language skills, language instructors should start incorporating writing as a more important part of their teaching curricula. This approach will require ESL instructors not to rely on the development of oral competence only, but to assign each language skill, including writing, an important place in their teaching objectives. Also, although ESL instructors have to consider the learners' proficiency level, learners should also be exposed to challenging tasks—as opposed to drills only—that move L2 learners' writing competence forward.

Because the number of L2 writers enrolled in mainstream composition classes continues to grow, composition teachers are challenged to find more effective strategies to address L2 learners' writing needs. Although most composition teachers are concerned with their L2 students' development of writing competence, writing instructors tend to focus primarily on sentence-level issues with ESL students. Although some bilingual writers might need more basic language training before developing writing competence, most other second-language writers in composition classes would benefit from writing instruction that helps them recognize English writing conventions. Also, while it is important to acknowledge that the support services most academic institutions offer can help L2 writers with their writing, these places should not *replace* the writing classroom and/or writing instruction. Instead, because the number of bilingual writers in U.S.

academic institutions will continue to grow, it is time to take more explicit action to incorporate L2 writers' needs as priorities in our teaching methodologies and objectives.

Similarly, composition instructors should challenge their understanding of writing to distinguish the differences between writing goals in composition classes, as opposed to writing goals in places other than the academy. While students in composition classrooms need to know how to belong to an academic community by writing essays and citing sources among others, learners outside academia might find the same writing tasks inapplicable. Yet other tasks such as filling out forms, creating resumes, responding to job applications could also be considered writing, a type of writing defined differently from writing among academics. Although more remains to be said about the nature and place writing should occupy in Composition and Second-Language Studies as well as in writing outside and inside academia, this study draws attention to the possibility for the development of writing competence in different areas as well as the need for a broader definition of writing.

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Appendix 1—Consent Forms
Sample Consent Form for Tutors as required by the Institutional Review Board

Dear tutor:

I am a Master's candidate in English conducting research for my thesis. I want to invite you to take part in my research study. In this letter, you will find out what the purpose of my study is and what I expect from you if you decide to participate.

Purpose of Research: In this project, I want to explore the role writing plays in helping adult ESL learners learn English.

What I would expect from you:

- Complete a brief survey about your educational background
- Allow me to observe and make notes about your tutoring sessions
- Allow me to incorporate small writing activities into your tutoring sessions

What I will do with this data: The information I gather from my research with you will be used for my Master's thesis. Also, I may use some of the results in future conference presentations and academic papers.

Confidentiality:

- I will assign each one of you a pseudonym that will be used all throughout my research, including in my observation notes and thesis.
- Even if some of the tutoring sessions I observe are audio taped, I will be the only person with access to these tapes, and I will destroy these tapes within one week of observation.
- You will have the option to give oral consent to participate in this project rather than signing this form which will leave no record of your identity.
- You will not be asked to share any personal information, including legal status of the programs participants.

In exchange for your participating in this study, I will share with you ideas on how to improve your tutoring sessions.

Even if you agree to participate in this study, you can withdraw at any time because your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

If you have any questions about the project, feel free to contact me at (217)549-9965 or cpelaezmorales@eiu.edu.

Thank you for your time.
Carolina Pelaez-Morales
Master's candidate in Composition and Rhetoric

I have read the above information and understand the nature of the study and my participation. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

Sample Consent Form for Language Learners as required by the Institutional Review Board

Dear student:

I am a Master's candidate in English conducting research for my thesis. I want to invite you to take part in my research study. In this letter, you will find out what the purpose of my study is and what I expect from you if you decide to participate.

Purpose of Research: In this project, I want to explore the role writing plays in helping adult ESL learners learn English.

What I would expect from you:

- I will ask you to complete brief surveys about your educational background and your goals for learning English, but I will not ask you to share any information about your current places of employment or your immigration status.
- During some tutoring sessions, I will ask you to complete some writing activities to assess your written and oral proficiency in English--activities for which you will not be required to reveal any personally identifying information.
- I will ask for your opinions about some of the writing activities you complete.

What I will do with this data: The information I gather from my research with you will be used for my Master's thesis. Also, I may use some of the results in future conference presentations and academic papers.

Confidentiality: Your confidentiality will be maintained in all aspects of this project since:

- I will assign each one of you a pseudonym that will be used all throughout my research, including in my observation notes and thesis.
- You will have the option to give oral consent to participate in this project rather than signing this form which will leave no record of your identity.
- Even if some of the tutoring sessions I observe are audio taped, I will be the only person with access to these tapes, and I will destroy these tapes within one week of observation.

In exchange for your participation in this study, I will offer assistance in writing activities.

Even if you agree to participate in this study, you can withdraw at any time because your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

If you have any questions about the project, feel free to contact me at (217)549-9965 or cpelaezmorales@eiu.edu.

Thank your for your time.

Carolina Pelaez-Morales

Master's candidate in Composition and Rhetoric

I have read the above information and understand the nature of the study and my participation. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

Spanish Translation of Consent Form for Language Learners as required by the Institutional Review Board

Querido estudiante:

Soy una estudiante de maestría en Inglés y estoy llevando a cabo una investigación para mi tesis de grado. Quiero invitarle a participar de esta investigación. En esta carta usted encontrará el propósito de mi estudio y lo que esperaría de usted en caso de que decida participar.

Propósito de la investigación: En esta investigación quiero investigar como la escritura en inglés fomenta el proceso de aprendizaje de esta lengua en una comunidad de adultos hablantes no nativos.

Que esperare de usted si decide participar:

- Le pediré que complete unas encuestas cortas acerca de su formación académica tanto en español como inglés; también, le preguntaré acerca de sus motivos para aprender Inglés. Sin embargo, no le preguntaré nada acerca de su lugar de trabajo aquí en Estados Unidos o su estado de inmigración en este país.
- Durante algunas sesiones de tutoría, le pediré que complete unas actividades relacionadas a escritura con el fin de evaluar si estas actividades le ayudan a mejorar su competencia oral y escrita en Inglés—en estas actividades no le pediré que revele ningún tipo de información personal.
- Le pediré que comparta conmigo su opinión acerca de algunas de las actividades de escritura que yo le pida completar.

Que haré con esta información?

La información que recoja durante mi investigación será usada para escribir mi tesis de graduación. De igual manera, usaré parte de esta información en caso de ser aceptada en una conferencia en el futuro.

Confidencialidad Su confidencialidad será protegida en todos los pasos de este proyecto de la siguiente manera:

- Le asignaré a cada participante un seudónimo el cual será usado durante toda la investigación, incluyendo mis notas, observaciones y tesis.
- Le daré la opción de aceptar su participación en este proyecto de manera oral en lugar de firmar este formato. Por esta razón no habrá ningún record de su identidad.
- Aunque yo grabaré algunas sesiones de tutoría, seré la única persona con acceso a estas grabaciones, y las destruiré máximo una semana después de la observación.

A cambio de su participación en este proyecto, yo me comprometo a ayudarle con cualquier tipo de actividad de escritura que usted necesite.

Si usted decide participar de esta investigación, usted podrá retirarse en cualquier momento que decida debido a que su participación es completamente voluntaria.

Si tiene alguna pregunta o dudas acerca de este proyecto, por favor no dude en contactarme a mi celular (217)549-9965 o a mi correo electrónico cpelaezmorales@eiu.edu.

Agradezco su atención.

Carolina Pelaez-Morales

Estudiante de Maestría en Inglés con énfasis en Composición y Retórica

Yo he leído la información presentada con anterioridad y entiendo la naturaleza de esta investigación y mi participación. También, acepto participar de manera voluntaria.

Appendix 2—Surveys for Adult Language Learners

Academic Survey:

1. What is your first language?

2. What languages (besides English) do you speak??

NON-U.S. Educational Experience (Check the highest level of education you have completed in your native country)

- None _____
- Primary/Elementary school _____
- Secondary/High School _____
- Vocational/technical school _____
- Community college degree _____
- College/University degree _____
- Graduate degree _____
- Other: _____

U.S. Educational Experience (Check the highest level of education you have completed in the U.S.)

- None _____
- Primary/Elementary school _____
- Secondary/High School _____
- Vocational/technical school _____
- Community college degree _____
- College/University degree _____
- Graduate degree _____
- Other: _____

3. What plans, if any, do you have for additional schooling?

4. Why do you want to learn English?

5. Rank these language skills in order of importance for you (use numbers 1-4; number 1 should be the most important reason for you)

- Read _____ Speak _____
- Write _____ Listen to others _____

6. Describe any formal or informal writing that you do in English or in your native language

2. Motivation for the acquisition of English Survey:¹⁷

1. To come to class...
 - a. Coming to class is really exciting
 - b. I love coming to class
 - c. I like coming to class
 - d. I don't mind whether I come to class or not
 - e. I have to come to class
 - f. I hate coming to class

2. Coming to class helps me...
 - a. A lot
 - b. More or less
 - d. Not too much
 - e. Doesn't help me at all

3. When I don't come to class it is mainly because...
 - a. I don't want to come
 - b. I have other more important things to do
 - c. I don't have time
 - d. I am tired
 - e. Another reason _____

4. When I am not in class, I practice...
 - a. A lot of English
 - b. Very little English
 - c. I hardly ever practice English
 - d. I don't practice English at all

5. What I am taught in this program helps me to...
 - a. Find jobs
 - b. Talk to my friends
 - c. Understand other people when they speak
 - d. Fill out forms or documentation I don't know how to fill out

¹⁷ All surveys were translated and administered in Spanish to ensure the accuracy of the language learners' responses.

3. Types of Writing Adult Language Learners Use Survey:

1. I write in English...

- a. Every day
- b. Frequently
- c. Sometimes
- d. Only when I have to
- e. Never

2. I write in English when I have to...

- a. Fill out forms
- b. Write a resume to apply to a job
- c. Help my children with their homework

3. When a tutor teaches me a new word, I prefer to...

- a. Listen to the word several times
- b. Pronounce the word
- c. Read the word
- d. Write the word down

4. Writing in English is...

- a. Very important
- b. Important
- c. No as important
- d. a waste of time

5. I don't write in English because..

- a. I don't like it
- b. It is not useful for my job
- c. I don't know how to do it
- d. It bores me
- e. I don't care about it

6. I write in Spanish...

- a. All the time
- b. Sometimes
- c. Hardly ever
- d. Never

Appendix 3—Surveys for the Tutors

Academic Survey:

1. What languages (besides English) do you speak? _____
2. How well do you think you speak this language(s)? _____
3. Do you think you write well in this language? _____
4. What kinds of writing activities do you do when you were learning this language?

5. U.S. Educational Experience (Check the highest level of education you have completed)

- None _____
- Primary/Elementary school _____
- Secondary/High School _____
- Vocational/technical school _____
- Community college degree _____
- College/University degree _____
- Graduate degree _____
- Other: _____

6. What plans, if any, do you have for additional schooling?

7. Why did you decide to tutor at this community service program?

8. What kinds of activities do you implement in your tutoring sessions to improve your students' English proficiency?

9. When tutoring, which language skills do you put the most emphasis on? Rank them in order of importance for you (use numbers 1-4; number 1 should be the most important reason for you)

- Read _____ Speak _____
- Write _____ Listen to others _____

10. Describe any formal or informal writing activities you use when you tutor.

2. Teaching Strategies Survey:

1. When you try to explain a word or concept to a non-native speaker you feel:

- a. Challenged
- b. Happy
- c. Anxious
- d. Worried
- e. Concerned
- b. Frustrated
- c. Unhappy
- d. Enraged

Other _____

2. During a regular tutoring session you primarily:

- a. Chat with the student
- b. Use the book and try to follow a chapter
- c. Bring materials of your own (books, tapes, note cards, drawings)
- d. Mimic actions so that the student understand what you say
- e. Use the blackboard to copy things down

Other _____

3. I enjoy teaching English in this program primarily because...

- a. It is important to help others
- b. I want become an ESL teacher
- c. I want to practice Spanish with these learners

4. Every time you introduce a new word or grammatical structure you primarily..

- a. Repeat the word or structure several times (orally)
- b. Translate for the learner to understand the word or grammatical concept in his or her mother tongue
- c. Copy the word or grammatical structure down on a piece of paper the learner can take with him or her
- d. Use the blackboard and write the word down so that the student can see it
- e. Have the student repeat the word after you have said it

Other _____

5. When working with students in the program, which of the following are students more resistant to?

- a. Pronunciation of words
- b. Reading aloud
- c. Writing
- d. Speaking

6. Given your past tutoring experiences, what kinds of activities motivate students in the program the most?

Appendix 4—Writing Activities

1. Writing Activity:

How to express one's love for a Valentine

1. Read the history of Valentine's Day:

Is a (1) **holiday** celebrated on **February 14**. Valentine's Day is a traditional day on which (2) **lovers** show (3) **their** love for each other. Men and women (4) **send** Valentine's (5) **cards**, candy, or flowers. Valentine (6)**was** a (7) **priest** who (8)**helped** Christians.

1. Holiday: Día festivo	2. lovers: novios, parejas	3. Their: "su"
4. Send: mandar, enviar	5. Cards: tarjetas	6. Was: era, fue
7. Priest: sacerdote	8. Help: ayudar.	9. Helped: ayudó

2. Learn new vocabulary

- I love you: *Te Amo*
- For my love: *Para mi amor*
- Congratulations: *Felicidades*
- I fell in love with you: *Me enamoré de ti/usted*
- I have a crush on her: *Tengo una traga/ estoy tragado de ella*
- I am faithful: *soy fiel*

3. Writing activity: Each student writes his or her name on a piece of paper, and then put them in a bag. Students write a Valentine's card for that person.

Describe your Valentine's physically (físicamente)
My Valentine's is: 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____
Describe your Valentine's personality (su personalidad)
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

4) Journal writing:

Students are encouraged to write in the mother tongue to respond to the following question:




Cómo celebran el día de San Valentín en tu país?

How do people celebrate Valentine's Day in your country?

2. Writing activity:

Physical and personal Descriptions

Instructions for the tutor: Read the sample paragraph with your student, and make sure he or she understands all of the words. Then instruct the student on how to fill out the blanks for each one of the pictures. Try to help the student when he or she needs help. By the end of the tutoring session, I will ask you a couple of questions in regards to the activity and the student's response to it.

	<p>Diana is beautiful and smart. She has black hair and black eyes. Her hair is straight and long. She is short and slim because (porque) she exercises every day She likes watching T.V and listening to music. Diana is from Costa Rica so (por esto) she speaks Spanish and English. She studies and works at Eastern Illinois University, and she will graduate (se graduará) in May 2008.</p>
	<p>Marcela is _____ and _____. She _____ red _____ and _____ eyes. Her hair is _____ and _____. She _____ tall and _____. She likes _____. Marcela is _____ France (Francia) so (por esto) she _____ French.</p> <p>Marcela wears _____ (gafas/lentes) She works at Wal-Mart.</p>
	<p>Tom _____ friendly and _____. He has black _____. He is _____ and fat. He likes _____ and _____. Tom is _____ United States and he speaks _____.</p>
	<p>My name is _____. I am _____ and _____ . I am _____ and _____ . I like _____ and _____ . I _____ from _____ and I speak _____ .</p>

3. Writing activity:

Hobbies

Instructions for the tutor: Start by introducing the topic of hobbies orally--informal conversation. Then use the sentences on the left to provide the student with a brief explanation on how to ask question in the present tense. Review all words you think the student might not know or seems unsure about. Then ask him or her to use his or her personal information to complete the sentences on the right. Although you could assist the student, you should let him or her complete as much of the sentences alone, intervening only in cases when the student asks for your help. For instance, you could write the sentence *how do you say _____ in English?* and tell the student he or she can use it when being unsure about a word. At the end of the tutoring session I will ask you some questions about the student's response to the activity and his or her attitudes too.

About me.....	About you...
<p>1. What do you like? I like apples, bananas, and avocados</p> <p>2. Where do you live? I live in Charleston, IL</p> <p>3. When do you go to bed? I go to be at 10:00 pm</p> <p>4. Where do you live? I live in Charleston, IL</p> <p>5. When do you go to bed? I go to bed at 10:00 p.m</p> <p>6. Who do you live with? I live with my friend</p> <p>7. How old are you? I am 25 years-old</p> <p>8. Why do you study English? I study English because I want to learn the language</p>	<p>1. What do you like? I _____</p> <p>2. Where do you live? I _____</p> <p>3. When do you go to bed? I _____</p> <p>4. Where do you live? I _____</p> <p>1. When do you go to bed? I _____</p> <p>2. Who do you live with? I _____</p> <p>3. How old are you? I _____</p> <p>4. Why do you study English? I _____</p>

4. Writing activity:

Job interviews practice (adapted from Teaching Adult Second-Language learners):

Instructions for the Tutor: Read the following sentences aloud for the student; make sure he or she understands what the phrases mean. Then ask him or her to put a check on the box according to what he or she thinks.

In an interview....	Always	Sometimes	Never
1. Ask how much money the company pays			
2. Be late			
3. If you don't understand a question, ask the employer to repeat it.			
4. Wear nice clothes			
5. Bring a friend to the interview			
6. Chew gum if you feel nervous			
7. If you don't know the answer to a question, make up something			
8. Smile and look at the employer			
9. Say as little as possible			
10. Ask questions			
11. Ask about working hours			

2. After the student have filled out the form, discuss with him or her the answers while explaining what is culturally accepted in regards to interviews in the U.S

3. After making sure the student understands what each one of the previous phrases means as well as what is considered appropriate or inappropriate in an interview, ask him or her to respond to the following questions:

In an interview

- Do you ask how much money the company pays?

- Are you late for an interview?

- Do you wear nice clothes?

- Do you bring a friend to the interview?

- Do you chew gum if you feel nervous?

- If you don't know the answer to a question, do you make something up?

- Do you smile?

- Do you look at the employer?

- Do you talk a lot?

- Do you ask questions?

- Do you ask about working hours?

- Encourage the student to come up with a question that he or she thinks should be important to ask during an interview
- _____? (pregunta)

(respuesta)

5. Writing Activity:*Using persuasion*¹⁸

Bring to class an object you consider to be really useful for you. Spend 10 minutes thinking why you think the object is useful--you might write some notes in Spanish. How would you convince somebody that he or she needs to buy that object?

(Trae a clase un objeto que tu creas es muy útil para ti. Cuando estés en casa, piensa y escribe en español las razones por las cuales este objeto es útil. Cuando vengas a clase vas a tener que convencer a un compañero que él o ella tiene que comprar ese objeto)

1. What does the object look like?

- _____
- _____
- _____

2. What are the advantages (ventajas) of using this object?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

¹⁸ This writing activity does not include any instructions for the tutor since I was the only person to administer it.

6. Writing Activity:

Job advertisements

Instructions for the Tutor: Start the session by talking about the way people in the U.S. generally look for jobs. Then introduce the word “advertisement.” Show the student the advertisements section on the local school’s newspaper and ask him or her to tell you what are the similarities or differences between them—provide language support when needed. Start by reading the following advertisement, making sure the student understand what each word means first. Then move into the writing activity.

Read the following advertisements:

Pro-Mow Lawn-care inc. is accepting applications for full-time lawn-care technicians. Benefits available. Experience necessary. Applicants must possess valid driver’s license and be dependable. Apply in person at 1610 Red Bud Road in Charleston M-F 9-4 or call Andy Smith at (217) 456 34-39

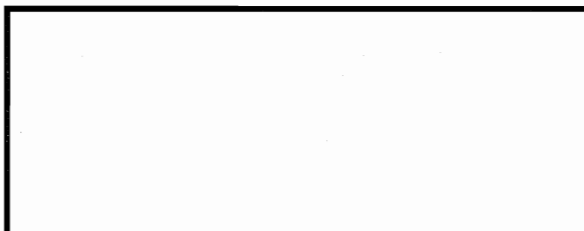
1. What job is it?

2. What is the salary (salario)?

3. What are the requirements (requisitos) to apply (para aplicar) to the job?

4. Where is the employment opportunity (oportunidad de empleo)?

Create one add



7. Writing Activity:

Residential lease

Instructions for the Tutor: Explain to the student really briefly what the topic of today's lesson is-- explain the importance of knowing how to fill out this document. You will be the landlord while the student will be the tenant. Then tell him or her to read the vocabulary in the chart in order to better understand the information they have to fill out.

Residential Lease A

Vocabulary:

Renter: arrendador Deposit: depósito Lease: contrato de arrendamiento Utilities: servicios públicos Tenant: inquilino premises: establecimiento
--

Name of renter: _____

Apartment address: _____

Date of occupancy: _____

Security Deposit: _____

Term of lease: _____ months; beginning _____ and ending _____

Monthly rent: _____ due on or before the first day of each month.

Description of apartment:

Number of bedrooms _____ Number of baths _____ Number of occupants _____

Utilities included: _____

HOUSE RULES

1. No smoking allowed
2. No water beds allowed
3. No animals of any kind are allowed. If any animals are found on the premises, a fee of \$20.00 per day will be charged until said animals are removed
4. Tenants must keep the premises in a clean and habitable condition.