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**Social Networks, Language Learning  
and  
Language School Student Sojourners:  
A Qualitative Study**

by

**WU, Pi-chu**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Education

University of Warwick  
Centre for Applied Linguistics  
September 2008

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made. It has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this university or any other institution for a degree, diploma, or other qualifications

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

WU, Pi-chu 吳碧珠

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1 : Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background information of studying English in the UK .....	1
1.2 My motivation for this study .....	2
1.3 My research questions.....	3
1.4 Significance of this study .....	5
1.5 Outline of this study .....	6
<b>2 : Literature Review .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Learning in the L2 environment.....	7
2.1.1 Different types of learners in the L2 environment.....	7
2.1.2 Research into learning in the L2 environment .....	9
2.1.3 Benefits of learning a L2 in the L2 environment.....	12
2.1.4 Problems international students may face in the host country .....	15
2.2 Frameworks for this study.....	16
2.3 Social networks of students studying abroad .....	17
2.3.1 Bochner et al's social networks of international students .....	18
2.3.2 Bicultural network .....	19
2.3.3 Monocultural network .....	21
2.3.4 Multicultural network.....	22
2.4 Situated learning.....	23
2.4.1 Communities of practice.....	24
2.4.2 Legitimate peripheral participation .....	27
2.4.3 Identity, participation and non-participation.....	29
2.4.4 Communities of practice, legitimate peripheral participation and L2 research .....	30
2.5 Investment, identity and imagined communities .....	31
2.5.1 Power and identity.....	32
2.5.2 Investment, identity and language learning .....	32
2.5.3 Imagined communities, identity and language learning .....	35
2.6 Willingness to communicate – WTC .....	38
2.6.1 Willingness to communicate in the L2.....	38
2.6.2 Research into willingness to communicate in the L2 .....	39
<b>3 : The Natural History of my Research.....</b>	<b>43</b>
3.1 My research paradigm.....	43

3.2 My research participants.....	43
3.2.1 Identifying my participants.....	43
3.2.2 My chosen participants .....	44
3.2.3 Access to my participants .....	45
3.2.4 Reflection on obtaining access .....	48
3.3 Ethical issues .....	49
3.3.1 Informed consent.....	49
3.3.2 Anonymity and confidentiality.....	49
3.4 Data collection schedule and methods .....	49
3.4.1 The schedule of my data collection.....	49
3.4.2 The methods and process of my data collection and reflection .....	50
3.4.3 Reflection on my role in this study .....	56
3.5 Languages .....	57
3.6 Transcribing .....	58
3.7 Data analysis .....	58
3.7.1 Trial stage.....	58
3.7.2 How I analysed my data .....	59
3.8. Formulating my final research questions .....	64
<b>4 : Findings.....</b>	<b>69</b>
4.1 Jenny .....	71
4.1.1 Background .....	71
4.1.2 In what situations did Jenny have her interpersonal contact .....	73
4.1.3 Why was Jenny in these situations .....	76
4.1.4 Whether Jenny used her interpersonal contacts in these situations for language learning and use purposes? If so, how? If not, why?.....	77
4.1.5 What did Jenny gain from these interpersonal contacts .....	80
4.1.6 What problems related to interpersonal contact did Jenny face in the host country and how did she deal with these problems .....	81
4.1.7 What kinds of effect did these interpersonal contacts have on Jenny as a language learner and user .....	86
4.2 Linda .....	88
4.2.1 Background .....	89
4.2.2 In what situations did Linda have her interpersonal contact .....	90
4.2.3 Why was Linda in these situations .....	93
4.2.4 Whether Linda used her interpersonal contacts in these situations for language learning and use purposes? If so, how? If not, why?.....	94
4.2.5 What did Linda gain from these interpersonal contacts .....	96
4.2.6 What problems related to interpersonal contact did Linda face in the host country and how did she deal with these problems .....	97

4.2.7	What kinds of effect did these interpersonal contacts have on Linda as a language learner and user .....	102
4.3	Rita .....	104
4.3.1	Background .....	105
4.3.2	In what situations did Rita have her interpersonal contact.....	106
4.3.3	Why was Rita in these situations .....	109
4.3.4	Whether Rita used her interpersonal contacts in these situations for language learning and use purposes? If so, how? If not, why?.....	111
4.3.5	What did Rita gain from these interpersonal contacts .....	114
4.3.6	What problems related to interpersonal contact did Rita face in the host country and how did she deal with these problems .....	115
4.3.7	What kinds of effect did these interpersonal contacts have on Rita as a language learner and user .....	120
4.4	Sharon .....	122
4.4.1	Background .....	122
4.4.2	In what situations did Sharon have her interpersonal contact .....	123
4.4.3	Why was Sharon in these situations .....	127
4.4.4	Whether Sharon used her interpersonal contacts in these situations for language learning and use purposes? If so, how? If not, why? .....	128
4.4.5	What did Sharon gain from these interpersonal contacts .....	131
4.4.6	What problems related to interpersonal contact did Sharon face in the host country and how did she deal with these problems.....	132
4.4.7	What kinds of effect did these interpersonal contacts have on Sharon as a language learner and user .....	136
<b>5</b>	<b>: Discussion .....</b>	<b>139</b>
5.1	Overview of my participants' language learning experiences in the UK .....	139
5.2	My study and other studies .....	141
5.2.1	Functions of learners' social networks .....	141
5.2.2	Power relations, identity and opportunities .....	143
5.2.3	Willingness to communicate – WTC.....	145
5.2.4	Host family – the primary source of native interaction .....	146
5.2.5	Native-speaking partner – a desirable interpersonal contact.....	146
5.2.6	Non-native speakers – workplace .....	147
5.3	Revisiting the theoretical frameworks .....	147
5.3.1	My participants' communities of practice .....	147
5.3.2	Legitimate peripheral participation of Jenny, Rita and Sharon .....	149
5.3.3	My participants' imagined communities and their non-participation .....	152
5.3.4	My participants' investment in English .....	153
5.3.5	My participants' willingness to communicate in the L2 .....	156

5.3.6 Conclusion.....	159
<b>6 : Conclusion .....</b>	<b>161</b>
6.1 Implications of the study .....	161
6.1.1 Implications for language schools .....	161
6.1.2 Implications for me as a researcher .....	163
6.2 Advantages and limitations of the study in terms of research methodology .....	164
6.3 Suggestions for further study.....	165
6.4 Revisiting my experiences .....	166
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>170</b>
Appendix A: Letter to Prospective Participants.....	170
Appendix B: Form of Personal Information .....	171
Appendix C: Questions for the first interview .....	172
Appendix D: Sample Translation of Transcription.....	173
Appendix E: Sample Transcription in English .....	175
Appendix F: Sample Transcription in Chinese .....	177
Appendix G: Sample of Data Analysis Process – Step 4 .....	178
Appendix H: Sample of Data Analysis Process – Step 5.....	179
Appendix I: Code of Practice for Homestay Accommodation Providers.....	180
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>181</b>

# Tables and Figures

## Tables

Table 2.1 Different types of learners in the L2 environment.....	8
Table 2.2 Examples of different studies in the L2 environment.....	10
Table 2.3 Studies of WTC.....	40
Table 3.1 Access to the participants in the language school.....	45
Table 3.2 Access to the participants in the college.....	46
Table 3.3 Schedule of data collection through face-to-face contact.....	50
Table 3.4 Colours used for answers to research questions.....	60
Table 3.5 Headings for each research question.....	63
Table 3.6 My provisional research questions.....	64
Table 3.7 My research questions after the tutorial.....	67
Table 3.8 Final research questions for this study.....	67
Table 4.1 Data relating to Jenny.....	71
Table 4.2 Data relating to Linda.....	88
Table 4.3 Data relating to Rita.....	104
Table 4.4 Data relating to Sharon.....	122

## Figures

Figure 3.1 Sample of snake drawing – Jenny.....	52
Figure 3.2 Sample of Data Analysis Process – Step 3.....	62
Figure 3.3 Arrangement of my provisional research questions.....	65
Figure 3.4 Arrangement of my research questions after the tutorial.....	66



# Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the tremendous help and support of my supervisors and the people close to me.

Firstly I would like to thank Dr. Richard Smith and Dr. Ema Ushioda for their truly professional help and guidance throughout, and for their contribution and support over these last 3 years. I would like to thank them for the way they always made my tutorials constructive, in that one would always ask me questions and the other would always 'rescue' me by guiding me to the solution. I would also like to thank them for their understanding and patience when the sentences of 'I am sorry; I am late again.' or 'I will send more later.' were so often a part of the e-mails I sent to them.

I want to thank all my participants for their time and contribution to my study, and would also like to thank the private language school for their assistance. I also wish to thank my friend, Meg, for carrying out critical reading on part of my thesis.

My heartfelt thanks and gratitude go to my dear family in Taiwan, especially my mother, for the understanding and support they have given me, which has enabled me to come to England to carry out this study. My thanks also to my new family in Holland for the love and care they have shown me over the last 3 years and to my 'new' children, Jenny and Geoff, for their love and support.

Finally, I would like to thank my loving husband, Tony, for having so much confidence in me and for all the help he gave me throughout my study. His commitment and support was an invaluable contribution in completing this thesis.

## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates individual language school student sojourners' learning experiences in the UK. It takes into account the importance of learners learning through interaction with others in the target language community and recognises how learners' social networks affect their language learning and use.

There are many studies about students who study abroad for academic purposes and immigrant learners, but not many relating to individual language learners in private language schools. In order to fill this gap, this study focused on individual language school learners. With the intention of understanding how the social networks and language learning interact over time as part of their sojourner experience, I utilised different theoretical frameworks that have been applied to other groups of language learners and concluded that these frameworks are also applicable to private language school students.

I recognised that in order to understand my participants' learning experiences I needed to interact with them and also observe how they interacted with their social world. Therefore, formal interviews (semi-structured) and informal interviews (informal group meeting or chat) were the main methods for my study together with observation of interaction in various situations.

This study identified the expectations that learners had with regard to the target language community, host families and native speakers' attitudes towards foreign students, and the realisation that these expectations were higher than what was actually encountered. It also identified the steps the individual language learners took to overcome these disappointments and how they reconstructed their relationships with the target language and community respectively.

In contrast with many previous studies which only focused on learning from native speakers, my study recognised that learners sometimes can have more interpersonal contact with their fellow students than native speakers. And consequently they benefit more from these contacts, in terms of language learning, than from native speakers. This thesis also helps language learners and language educators recognise basic theoretical frameworks which could help them evaluate the benefits and problems related to learning through interpersonal contact. And with this understanding learners will be able to facilitate their autonomous learning in the target language community.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background information of studying English in the UK

The UK is one of the countries English language learners like to come to for their language and culture learning. According to the British Council (no date a), '(T)he UK is a world leader in English language teaching. Over 600,000 people every year come to the UK to learn the language in its natural home.' 'The UK is the world's leading destination for English language study, taking 40% of all learners' (English UK, no date). Britain has developed a wide range of institutions and programmes to meet the demand. Learners can choose the type of language institute which suits them, e.g. a specialised language school, a college or a university. Many local colleges or language schools offer different language classes from elementary through to very advanced levels, leading to Cambridge or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examinations and students can join throughout the year from as little as a week to a full year, depending on their individual plans. These establishments also arrange accommodation for students, for example, staying in a host family or a student flat.

The British Council (no date b) states that:

Many schools and colleges will give you access to all sorts of leisure and social activities. There will be the opportunity to join sports teams, volunteer organisations and groups with specialist interests, such as drama, music, arts or the environment. Trips to local theatres, museums, tourist and sporting attractions as well as other places of interest are often also arranged.

With regard to homestay accommodation, it also states that:

Complete immersion in UK life is often the best way to develop your language skills and understanding of the culture and customs of a British family. ... The real advantage is that you will have to speak English daily (British Council, no date c).

It seems from the above statements that learners will have fairly easy access to multiple opportunities in order to interact with people and use their English. However, this is not always as easy as it sounds and the real situations can be more complex to deal with. In this present study, I would like to present the experiences of four English language learners who were studying English in a private language school in the UK and to discuss and consider what factors in their social world enabled or disabled their learning and use of English.

## **1.2 My motivation for this study**

My initial interest in this research area comes from my personal experience as a language learner in target language communities. I attended a language school in Spain for eight months and rented a room from two different Spanish families during that time. Following this I stayed in England for two months, attending a language school and staying with a host family at that time. During these periods of study, I saw people, including myself, going through various experiences. These experiences sometimes stimulated their learning and brought them pleasant memories; however sometimes these events caused them suffering and became barriers to their learning. Some people became highly motivated to learn the target language and culture; others dropped out and disengaged from learning. Therefore I started to think how I could link the factors which influence people's learning experience when they are in the target language community. I believe that learners bring motivation to the new community to learn the language; however, having motivation does not mean learners would be able to retain high levels of commitment. Learning a L2 in the target language community is complex. From my own experience, informal contact with others and initial reading of the literature, I found it fascinating to observe just how dynamic, sensitive and rapidly changing are sojourners' attitudes to the social world and cultures, personal adjustment, motivation and language learning. I was interested to find out how these processes vary over time and how interventions could be made to support learners in making the most of their stays in the target language community and maintaining their initial high levels of motivation.

When I was carrying out one of my assignments for my EdD study, I had an opportunity to interview language school learners. During these interviews I realised that because of my past interest in language learners' experiences of studying in the target language community, I would like to further my understanding in this area.

I was also inspired by Norton's (2000) study of five immigrant women learning English in Canada. Norton's study involves some aspects which have a similarity to the research I proposed to carry out, for example: working over an extended period to examine the changes of participants' learning experience over time, participants' variable language ability, participants who have only recently arrived in the country.

The main purpose for this study is to understand individual learners' experiences rather than looking for generalization. Therefore, I conducted my study in a qualitative way.

### **1.3 My research questions**

Taking different viewpoints from the mainstream SLA research, which sees learning taking place only in the individual's mind, some researchers (e.g. Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000; Toohey and Norton, 2003; Day, 2002) have concentrated on the relationship between learners and social context. In Norton's book about identity and language learning, she addresses questions like 'since interaction with target language speakers is a desirable condition for adult SLA, what opportunities for interaction exist outside the classroom? How is this interaction socially structured? How do learners act upon these structures to create, use or resist opportunities to speak?' (Norton, 2000:22). And in the article about good language learners written by Norton and Toohey, they asked 'how did the practices in the environments of these good language learners constrain or facilitate their access to English', and 'how did these good language learners gain access to the social networks of their communities' (Norton and Toohey, 2001:314). I found these questions which Norton and Toohey had raised were related to the area I was interested in for my study, and they were helpful when I compiled my research questions.

In this study, my main purpose is to understand ‘how language school students’ interpersonal contacts in the host country affect their language learning and use’. In other words, I wish to investigate the relationship between learners’ social networks, learners themselves, and the language they are learning. In order to understand this relationship, two main questions need to be answered.

- I. What kinds of interpersonal contact do learners have?
- II. What kinds of effect do these interpersonal contacts have on them as language learners and users?

In order to answer these questions, some sub-questions were raised. These questions will be used to help guide data analysis and interpretation. The questions are as follows:

- a. In what situations do learners have their interpersonal contact?
- b. Why are learners in these situations?
- c. Whether learners use their interpersonal contacts in these situations for language learning and use purposes? If so, how? If not, why?
- d. What do they gain from these interpersonal contacts?
- e. What problems related to interpersonal contact do learners face in the host country?
- f. How do they deal with these problems?

By looking at situations where learners had their interpersonal contact, I was hoping to get a clearer picture of learners’ social networks. Understanding the reasons why learners were in these situations would hopefully enable me to discover the motivation behind those reasons. By examining how learners used their interpersonal contacts for learning and use purposes, I could investigate how learners committed themselves to their learning, for example, in what way they used these opportunities and to what extent they used these opportunities. Sometimes they might not even take up these opportunities. By reviewing this question, I expected to discover what situations prevented them from learning and using the target language and how their relationship with others developed and changed, and

if these interpersonal contacts affected their learning. In order to find out what maintained their motivation of learning, to examine what they gained from these interpersonal contacts could be useful. But as I mentioned above, sometimes learners can face situations in which their language learning and use can be affected. In this case, identifying the problems, especially those related to interpersonal contact, that my participants faced in the host country, and how they dealt with those problems could allow me to understand better how their interpersonal contacts could sometimes facilitate or constrain their learning.

#### **1.4 Significance of this study**

It seems that more research has been carried out on immigrants, international students with academic purposes, and university or school language exchange programme students than on the individual language course learner. This study focuses on individual language school learners. Kobayashi (2006) stated that relatively few studies have been conducted with learners in private English as a second language (ESL) institutes. In her article she discussed relationships between Japanese students and Korean students; however, she did not state how these kinds of interethnic relations between ESL students affected their English language learning. Moreover, many studies have only focused on how contact with native speakers helps learners improve or learn the target language. For me there appeared to be a gap in this area of research. Therefore, I think it is necessary to link private language school learners and their interpersonal contacts as a whole, not only with native speakers. Moreover, most of the studies about student sojourners in English-speaking countries have focused more on students' sociological and psychological adjustments than on their experience of English language learning. This study emphasises the way social networks and language learning interact, over time, as part of the student sojourner experience.

In this study I wish to highlight that in the target language community language learners learn through interaction with others. In contrast with many previous studies which only focused on learning from native speakers, my study hopes to identify that learners sometimes have more interpersonal contact with their fellow

students than native speakers. And consequently they may benefit more from these contacts, in terms of language learning, than from native speakers.

This study may also help language learners and language educators recognise basic theoretical frameworks which could help them evaluate the benefits and problems related to learning through interpersonal contact. And with this understanding learners may be able to facilitate their autonomous learning in the target language community.

## **1.5 Outline of this study**

This thesis is organised into six chapters. Chapter One starts with background information about studying English in the UK, followed by my motivation for conducting this study, and then discussion of my research questions which will guide the collection and analyse of my data. Following this, I discuss the significance of my study and then describe the organisation of this thesis. In Chapter Two, I discuss in detail various frameworks I apply to examine how my participants learn through interaction within their social networks, focusing on Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory and Norton's work with identities and language learning, and also the concept of willingness to communicate. In Chapter Three, I describe my research methodology along with reflections on my journey of data collection. Interviewing is the main method for my data collection; therefore, it is discussed in detail. How I analyse my data is also reviewed. In Chapter Four, I present the findings of my participants respectively. Each participant's findings are presented corresponding to each research question in order. In Chapter Five, I discuss my findings with reference to other studies and the frameworks I discussed in Chapter Two. In Chapter Six, I conclude my study with implications of my findings, advantages and limitations of my study and suggestions for future research. I finish the chapter by revisiting my personal experience as an individual language school learner, an international student for academic purposes and an immigrant through marriage.



## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

In this chapter, I would like firstly to discuss relevant issues related to learning in the L2 (second language) environment. These issues include different types of learners and research in this type of environment, benefits of learning a L2 in the L2 environment and problems which international students might face during their sojourner experiences. I will show that the individual language learners of private English language schools in English-speaking countries seem to be neglected by researchers, and I conclude that this particular group of language learners needs more attention. By discussing the benefits of learning a L2 in the target language community and problems international students may face, issues related to learners' interpersonal contact and the relationship between learners and the social world will be revealed. Therefore, I will describe in the following section learners' social networks in the L2 environment. As I look at learning from the sociocultural perspective – learners learn through interaction with others, and also many language learners believe that they can learn or improve their language ability by talking to native speakers in the target language community – I will subsequently discuss (a) Lave and Wenger's work on situated learning, (b) Norton's work about language learning, investment, identity and imagined community, and (c) willingness to communicate – WTC.

### **2.1 Learning in the L2 environment**

Firstly I would like to clarify that I use 'learning in the L2 environment' to cover learning a L2 in the L2 community, and studying for academic purposes or training courses in the L2 community. Therefore, learners in the L2 environment can include immigrants and non-immigrant L2 language learners, and international students who want to obtain a degree/ qualification or credits.

#### **2.1.1 Different types of learners in the L2 environment**

My research focus is on individual language school learners and I distinguish these learners from other language learners in the L2 environment such as immigrants, international students who come to the host country to study for an academic qualification and those who come on group language programmes. The majority of language learners in the L2 environment are sojourners with the exception of immigrants. Immigrants decide to live in a new country permanently, and they face more pressure from changes in their identities and the power relations between them and the residence country, which the individual language school learners appear to face less. In contrast, international students whose purpose for studying abroad is obtaining a degree, can isolate themselves, if they choose to do so, within an academic and campus ‘bubble’, where cultural and language contact is restricted. Huebner (1995) showed the heavy workload in the course can be the obstacle in respect of their making contact with the target language community. Students on group language programmes often have cultural and language contact organized for them and generally do not face many of the personal adjustment processes of the individual sojourner.

**Table 2.1 Different types of learners in the L2 environment**

<b>Learners in the L2 environment</b>	<b>Distinguishing factors</b>
immigrants	remain in the host country
individual L2 language learners	arrange their own learning programmes and courses
group L2 language learners	join in an institutionally organised programme, e.g. year-abroad or summer courses
international students seeking a degree / qualification	academic progression
international students seeking credits for their university degree back home	join in an institutionally organised programme, e.g. year-abroad

We can see that the participants in my study – individual language school learners – are placed between immigrants and students who study abroad for academic purposes (Table 2.1). They arrange their own learning programmes. Making a living is not their main concern, and getting good grades is also not their main purpose. In these senses they are in a kind of limbo. As we shall see from the discussion below,

there are many studies about students who study abroad for academic purposes and immigrant learners, but not many relating to individual language school learners. In this present study, therefore, I would like to look at some different theoretical frameworks that have been applied to both groups and to see if these frameworks are also applicable to private language school students.

### **2.1.2 Research into learning in the L2 environment**

Every year a great number of people are engaged in studying abroad, e.g. Taiwanese or Korean students studying in the UK or Canada, Japanese or Chinese students studying in Australia, American students studying in France or Mexico, or British students studying in Japan. While the size of this population has been increasing yearly, a great deal of research in relation to student sojourners has also been conducted continuously. Some researchers are interested in students' sociocultural and psychological adjustments, e.g. Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) study about Chinese students in Britain and various articles in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. Some focus on students' social networks abroad, for example, Bochner et al's (1977) and Furnham and Alibhai's (1985) work on friendship networks of international students, or Kobayashi's (2006) work on interethnic relations between ESL students. And many others are interested in learners' language learning, including language gains, learning process or learners' relationship with the host society, e.g. Freed's (1995a) and DuFon and Churchill's (2006) collections. Among these, issues about learners' social networks, their language learning experiences and the relationship between these two are specially related to this present study.

It often goes without question that living abroad and studying the living language in the native speaking context is a completely desirable and optimum circumstance for language acquisition. Study abroad has often been described as one of the surest ways to acquire fluency in the target language (e.g. Segalowitz and Freed, 2004). As the number of learners studying language abroad has continued to increase, so has the interest in research in this field. Coleman conducted a review from a European perspective on language learning and study abroad (Coleman, 1998), and Freed also made an overview of issues and research in language learning in a study abroad setting and pointed out that little research had focused on examining the actual

experiences that learners had in their sojourn abroad (Freed, 1998). Since then the research agenda in language learning in the L2 environment has expanded from a focus on global linguistic gains to investigations into learning processes, dimensions of sociolinguistic competence, the role that the context abroad plays in shaping opportunities for learners to learn (DuFon and Churchill, 2006), and the relationship between learners and the social context (e.g. Day, 2002, Isabelli-García, 2006; Kinginger, 2004; Norton, 2000). Different methods (for instance, large scale quantitative methods like questionnaires or qualitative methods like interviews and learner journals) and different theoretical approaches (for example, language socialization or ethnographic microanalysis) have been used for research in this field (DuFon and Churchill, 2006; Freed, 1995a). Different types of language learners, which I have distinguished above, and target languages in different countries have been included in various studies (see Table 2.2). The studies listed in the table below include studies of immigrant adults and children in English-speaking countries, and studies of study abroad programmes for university and high school students. But many of the latter studies are based on learners of other languages rather than English. The table also lists studies of individual language learners. It is interesting to note that in the studies of Schumann (1980), Campbell (1996) and Hassall (2006), the researchers are the participants of their own studies and their own diaries are the source of their data.

**Table 2.2 Examples of different studies in the L2 environment**

Type of learner	Learner from	in	Language	
Immigrants	Different countries	Canada	English	Day(2002); Toohey(1998)
	Different countries	Canada	English	Norton (2000)
	Mandarin and Slavic language background	Canada	English	Derwing et al (2008)
study abroad	America	France	French	Freed (1995b)
	America	France	French	Wilkinson (2002)
	America	Spain/ Mexico	Spanish	Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004)
	America	Indonesia	Indonesian	DuFon (2006)
	America	Japan	Japanese	Iino (2006)
	UK	Europe		Ife (2000)
	Ireland	Germany	Germany	Barron (2006)
(continued overleaf)				

	Japan	America	English	Tanaka and Ellis (2003)
	Japan	America	English	Yashima et al (2004)
individual learner	Researcher self	Tunisia Iran	Arabic Persian	Schumann(1980)
	Researcher self	Indonesia	Indonesian	Campbell (1996)
	Researcher self	Mexico	Spanish	Hassall (2006)
	Different countries	New Zealand	English	Cao and Philp (2006)

As we can see from the above discussion and Table 2.2, although there are studies focusing on immigrants learning language in English-speaking countries, many of the studies about student sojourners' language learning and acquisition in overseas contexts focus on contexts in non-English-speaking countries. Moreover, it seems that more research has been carried out on immigrants, international students with academic purposes, and university or school language exchange programme students than on individual language learners. The individual language learners are obviously neglected. Kobayashi (2006:181 and 182) comments as follows:

The multibillion-dollar English as a second language (ESL) industry dwarfs all other foreign-language teaching worldwide, including foreign-language study abroad in non-English-speaking countries, but the lack of research into the industry is in startling contrast to the increasing body of literature on the study-abroad experience of native English-speaking, predominantly American students mainly in Spain, France or Mexico.

The irony is that the most popular study-abroad context in the world is the least explored. This context is provided by non-credit, private ESL institutes in English-speaking countries catering to nonimmigrant, international students.

At the beginning of this section I mentioned that a great deal of research in relation to student sojourners has been conducted. However, it appears that most of the studies about foreign students in English-speaking countries focus more on students' sociological and psychological adjustments than on their experience of English language learning, for example, Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) and many articles in *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. Relatively few studies have been carried out on the way social networks and language learning interact, over time, as part of the student sojourner experience.

From the above discussion, I feel that more research with individual language learners in private ESL schools in English-speaking countries needs to be done, and learners' social contact and language learning in English-speaking context also needs to be explored more. Accordingly, to address these gaps, in this present study, I shall investigate individual private language school learners' learning experience in the UK, especially the relationship between their interpersonal contact and their language learning.

Like many other things in life, there are advantages and disadvantages of learning in the L2 environment. Learners benefit from it, but they also have to face various problems which they may not face in their own country. Exploring these benefits and problems will help us to recognise how they may affect learners' learning trajectories. Therefore, I will discuss them in the following two sections.

### **2.1.3 Benefits of learning a L2 in the L2 environment**

#### Language improvement and opportunities to use the language

For most learners, the main reason to learn the language in the country where the language is spoken is the authentic environment and the opportunities to use the language to communicate with people. 'The development of speaking proficiency is most cited by study abroad students as their primary motivation for studying language overseas' (Davidson, 2007: 278). After a period of time residing abroad, provided there are extensive and intensive interactions with native speakers, learners may find they can use the language to communicate with people efficiently and effectively, to express their ideas, feelings and needs independently. Studying abroad improves their language ability, especially in speaking and listening, and research supports this obvious point, e.g. the research of the Nuffield Modern Language Inquiry (Meara, 1994) and studies by Ife (2000) and Coleman (1997), and many others which can be found, for example, in Freed's (1995a) and DuFon et al's (2006) collections, or study abroad journal like *Frontiers: the Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*.

As a resident learner myself, I know that you can acquire the language more easily in the target language community. There are so many words that learners can learn from daily life; the language is everywhere, and they gradually 'stick in your head'.

However, sometimes the process can seem very slow and you may become disheartened; when we are beginners we can identify our progress almost day-by-day, but at more advanced levels progress can be almost undetectable. Brecht et al (1995) suggest that the language gain in the study abroad context varies depending on the level of proficiency which learners possess when they enter the study abroad programmes. Moreover, because the language is not graded and learners are exposed to a flood of authentic language, they may feel overwhelmed by the vast amount of incomprehensible input. But as Lantolf (1999) suggests, the ‘real’ environment provides a rich and effective context for making sense of complex language ideas.

However, this does not mean that learners just jump into the environment, immerse themselves in the language bath, and then their language ability is improved. That is a false assumption for many learners. Some learners mistakenly believe ‘ “just being there” is sufficient to “pick up” the language’ (Davidson, 2007:277). They might think they can magically become fluent by being surrounded by the target language. Ife (2000) points out that many learners do not exploit the possibilities available to them when they are residing abroad because they do not know how to; contact with native speakers and interacting with the host society are among such possibilities. It might be the case that learners do not know where to and how to interact with native speakers as Ife suggests; nevertheless, interaction is not solely responsible. Learners should not be the only ones to be blamed when the opportunities for learning or using language are not exploited, especially when the opportunities are controlled by others. Some studies show that in some situations learners might not be given access to such contact and interaction (Norton, 2000; Kinginger, 2004). Moreover, in some situations, it might be the learners who do not want to have the contact or the interaction with native speakers (Schumann, 1978a). The relationship between the language learners and the social context in the target language community is complicated. This is one of the areas on which this present study focuses, and related theories will be discussed in later sections.

### Culture learning

Again it is received wisdom that residing abroad enables learners to become interculturally competent; it enhances their cultural awareness and enables them to

function appropriately in the society. (Because intercultural competence is not the main focus in the study, I will not discuss it in detail. For details, see Byram 1997.)

There is much anecdotal evidence of the value of residence overseas in developing cultural awareness. Jones (2000:163) is typical: 'Visits undeniably provide opportunities for learners to experience and reflect upon what it means to live in another country and to make their own observations, collect evidence and come to their own conclusions'. Through direct interaction with the target language community, learners are able to see the similarities and differences between themselves and others. They, then, take up others' perspectives and understand the world through others' perspectives. While understanding others' perspectives, learners also reflect on their own cultural perspectives, enhancing their awareness of their own culture. When people realise the differences in the new community, they reflect on the norms in their own community and compare the differences. Therefore, being interculturally competent does not just mean understanding why foreign people do what they do, and imitating them, but also understanding the learners' own cultural constructions and not constantly making evaluative judgments comparing one set of norms with another. Through the experience abroad, learners gain, change or confirm their understanding of both the culture of the host community and their own culture, and perhaps, ideally, begin to both value and question them.

#### Other gains during learning in the L2 environment

Apart from the above two areas of gains, during the period of learning in the L2 environment learners may also establish a network of friends and gain knowledge or experience personal development, for example, becoming more independent or mature, changing their career aspirations, or experiencing an effect on their social identities (Roberts et al, 2001). 'Long-term impact on personal lives and professional careers will undoubtedly remain the primary validation of study abroad learning' (Davidson and Lehmann, 2005, cited in Davidson, 2007:279). Shannon (1995) also suggested this through her own experience of study abroad.

The establishment of a network of friends and experience of an effect on their social identities result from the relationship between the learner and the social world. They are not only learners' gains but also considered factors affecting



learners' investment in their target language learning, which I will discuss in more detail later.

We can see that language learners can have different gains from learning a L2 in the L2 environment, but they also face various problems which may affect their learning. In the following section I will briefly discuss problems learners may face in the L2 environment.

#### **2.1.4 Problems international students may face in the host country**

Although the problems experienced by those students who reside abroad vary depending on, for example, the type of placement (e.g. work placement or study placement), and their cultural origins and destinations, there are some common problems shared by them. Furnham and Tresize (1983) suggest the problems foreign students face are threefold: problems of living in a foreign culture, which are related to my participants, problems of late adolescents/young adults asserting their emotional and intellectual independence, and problems associated with academic study in higher education (cited in Furnham and Alibhai, 1985:710). The problems of living in a foreign culture can include language problems, insufficient background knowledge about the new environment, interpersonal relations (including establishing contact with native speakers), sociocultural adaptation, accommodation difficulties, separation reactions, dietary restrictions, financial stress, prejudice, homesickness and loneliness. Perceived discrimination is also part of the problems that people sometimes face. This increases stress and hampers psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Ward et al, 2001). A student from a language school who I interviewed for my EdD assignment mentioned that he felt discriminated against by the children in his host family. It affected his relationship with the family, which consequently influenced his interaction with the family and his use of English with them, and it also made his life miserable.

As we can see, many of the problems mentioned above occur when learners are constructing their relationship with the target language community. Recognising these problems would help us to understand L2 learners' learning trajectories in the target language community – their access to learning opportunities, their investment in learning and their intention to use the language.

After reviewing the benefits and problems that L2 learners can have and may face in the L2 environment, I will now discuss a number of well documented theories and research that can be used to explain the diverse relationship between L2 learners and the L2 environment. As I mentioned in 2.1.1 and 2.1.2, my study is based on individual language school learners, and relatively few studies have been carried out in relation to this group. Therefore, in this present study I would like to look at some different theoretical frameworks that have been applied to both study abroad for academic purposes and immigrant learners, and to see if these frameworks are applicable to language school student sojourners.

## **2.2. Frameworks for this study**

From the perspective of sociocultural theory, people learn through interaction in a social context. Therefore, in order to understand learners' language learning in the L2 environment context, we need to understand their contact and relationship with the host social context, and to what extent and in what way the contact and relationship affect their language learning and use.

English language learners go to English-speaking countries expecting to have a lot of opportunities to talk to native speakers in order to use and learn English; however, those English-speaking countries consist of not only host nationals but also people from other nations. That means learners interact with and may learn from other nationalities as well. Therefore, when I examine how learners' interpersonal contact affects their language learning and use, I will look at their whole social networks. Firstly, I would like to discuss learners' social networks in general while they are studying in the target language community and how some studies find learners' social networks function. However, the description of different social networks and their functions do not offer us enough information regarding in what way and to what extent those social networks affect learners' language learning and use, and how those social networks make the learning happen or not happen. Even the study of Magnan and Back (2007) in which they examined the types of social interaction which relate to language improvement did not investigate how

those interactions affect learners' learning. In order to understand learners' learning trajectories, I will look further at theories which apply to language learning and use in the L2 environment. From Lave and Wenger's (1991) point of view, learning takes place through participation in communities of practice. According to Wenger's website (Wenger, no date) 'communities of practice are everywhere'. I make the assumption that among learners' social networks, different communities of practice exist. I also assume that learners have opportunities to join in or even form some communities of practice, where they learn by interacting with others in those communities. For this reason, Lave and Wenger's situated learning – learning in the community of practice, will be discussed. Apart from formal learning in the classrooms, learners expect to have other opportunities to use and learn the language. Nevertheless, as I mentioned in 2.1.3, those outside classroom opportunities may not easily be found or accessed by learners. Even when opportunities are there, learners may be unable or not allowed to use them, or learners may refuse to take advantage of them. This prevention and resistance might be caused by unequal relations between learners and the social world or learners' own self-analysis. The problems of access can also happen within communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). It seems that how learners commit themselves to target language learning, their relationship with the target language community, and how they evaluate the situations they are in would affect their learning in the social context. With this understanding, I have also found helpful Norton's (2000, 2001) discussions about investment, identity and imagined community, which explain how learners' socially and historically constructed relationships to the social world affect their language learning. Also, the concept of willingness to communicate, WTC, in L2 (MacIntyre et al, 1998), which analyses individual's variables affecting learners' intention to communicate in L2 when they are free to do so, can be helpful to my study, too.

In the following sections, I will discuss these frameworks respectively.

### **2.3 Social networks of students studying abroad**

Some of the studies I will discuss in the following section are with regard to the relationship between international students and host national students. However, these discussions can also refer to the relationship between international students and host nationals in general.

### **2.3.1 Bochner et al's social networks of international students**

Drawing on research with exchange students at an American university and a British university, Bochner et al (1977; 1985) suggest that students belong to three types of social networks in the study abroad context: monocultural network (bonds between compatriots), bicultural network (bonds with host nationals) and multicultural network (multicultural circle of friends and acquaintances). With these three types of social networks, study abroad students develop three types of friendship patterns respectively, namely co-national friendship, host national and 'other' national friendships. Bochner et al (1977: 291-292) list different functions of these three social networks.

- monocultural network: 'to provide a setting in which ethnic and cultural values can be rehearsed and *expressed*'
- bicultural network: 'to *instrumentally* facilitate the academic and professional aspirations of the sojourners '
- multicultural network: 'to provide companionship for *recreational*, non-culture and non-task oriented activities.'

Furnham and Alibhai (1985) extended the study of Bochner et al (1977) with a larger number of participants and also they extended the concept of co-national to people from the same continent or geographic, religious or linguistic area. They found the results of their study demonstrated a successful replication of Bochner et al's.

On the one hand, from the friendship patterns listed above, I can easily relate them to the participants of my study as both the participants of the above studies and mine have 'foreign identity'. On the other hand, I feel the functions of these three social networks may be more complicated than they appear. The functions here are applied to those students who are in higher education situations; for other

people, like language school learners or immigrants, the functions of these social networks may be different. If this is the case, how would these functions differ for language school learners?

Language learners decide to learn the target language in the target language community as they imagine and expect having a great deal of opportunities to make contact with and interact with native speakers. Therefore, I will mainly discuss the bicultural network as I feel it may play a more important role for learners, and then briefly discuss the monocultural and multicultural aspects.

### **2.3.2 Bicultural network**

International students' bicultural network involves their relationship with host nationals. It is desirable for international students to make friends with host nationals as it is believed to be one of the best ways to improve their language ability. Some studies suggest that 'the amount of contact with native speakers is an important factor in the acquisition of sociolinguistic and sociocultural knowledge' (Isabelli-Gara, 2006:231). However, in Duff's study of Korean exchange students in Canada, the researcher found that some Korean students considered their English native-speaking peers less effective 'linguistic mentors' (Duff, 2007:316). Ward et al (2001) discuss the interpersonal relations between international students and host nation students and conclude that those who have spent more time with host nationals demonstrate better social and psychological adjustment. And those who are in frequent contact with host nationals also have lower levels of stress and greater sojourn satisfaction, the latter also being described in Yashima et al's (2004) study. We can see that having contact with host nationals, learners not only have benefits in linguistic competence and culture learning, but also gain emotional benefits.

Wilkinson (1998:123) cites Laubscher's (1994) notion that contact with one host national would often lead to further opportunities to build up ties with other host nationals, and that a L2 learner's success at making one acquaintance can impact on his or her out-of-class experiences tremendously. The question is: is it easy for L2 learner to build up friendships with local people? In Ife's (2000) findings related to research about British university students residing abroad (in Europe), she states

that 'just' a quarter of the respondents classify native speakers as their close friends while they are abroad. For me this percentage is not low; as an overseas student from Asia, I have found it is not easy and takes time and effort to have a close friendship with British or European students. I was not satisfied with this low level of close friendship. Perhaps she thought the similarities between British culture and European culture would give learners more opportunities for interaction and the building of relationships.

As far as my participants, language school students, are concerned, I assume that host families, language schools and workplaces (if they have a part-time job) are the main situations where learners have constant contact with native speakers. In this present study, I mainly look at the situations outside the classroom; therefore, I will not discuss the opportunities offered in the classroom. Furthermore, with the emphasis that language schools place on the host family, being a language school student previously myself and having had informal discussions with friends who had similar experiences, I would like to discuss certain issues regarding the host family below.

#### Host family

As Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2002), and Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004) point out, staying with a host family, in a homestay, is often considered one of the most important aspects of study abroad programmes and the accommodation option most recommended by language learning programmes, because theoretically it provides learners with an immediate environment for first-hand target cultural experience and using the target language with native speakers while 'protecting them in a smaller "caring" unit'. Yet, homestay is 'one of the least examined components' although it 'has long been considered a key factor in the study abroad experience' (ibid:254). According to the Ministry of Education in Taiwan, homestay is one of the most frequently mentioned problems by students learning a L2 in the target language country (<http://www.bcc.com.tw/news/newsprint.asp?cde=667126>, news accessed on on-line 16-April-2008). For many students, the homestay often "makes or breaks" the entire experience (Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight, 2004:254). A student from Hong Kong told me disappointedly that when she tried to help to clean the table after dinner, the landlady told her not to, because she was not a

family member (informal communication, 25-June-2008). Perhaps the landlady tried to treat the student as a 'guest' but the student was hoping to be more than just a guest. Their expectation of each other was different.

Some scholars believe in 'homestay advantage' (Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight, 2004:261); on the other hand, other scholars like Rivers (1998), Segalowitz and Freed (2004) and Wilkinson (1998) find that living with host families does not necessarily lead to improved speaking ability. In Martin's (1980) study, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores and classroom grades of homestay students were higher than those of non-homestay students, but Magnan and Back (2007) in their study of American university students in France did not find differences in language gain based on living arrangement, i.e. living with host families, living in international dorms or in individual apartments.

One thing I feel important is host family demographics, because it will affect how learners get along with the family and their experience in the host country. Host families can be single households, younger or older families with or without children, and reasons for becoming a host family differ. For example, they may seek companionship or financial gain. They may or may not have intercultural or linguistic reasons – wanting to find out about another culture or language by having a foreign student to stay with them.

### **2.3.3 Monocultural network**

L2 learners' monocultural social network is their relationship with their compatriots. When learners from the same country get together, they tend to speak their own language. As a result, the time they use the target language is decreased. In her study of approximately 500 elementary and high school students enrolling in English as second language classes in the Washington, D.C. area, Fathman found that 'students who were isolated from speakers of their native language' improved most (Fathman, 1976:441). In Magnan and Beck's (2007) study, although some learners believed that in the study abroad programme they would improve their language proficiency by speaking the target language with other learners from their own country, it showed that those who spent more time conversing with their co-national friends/peers in the target language made less improvement than those who spent less time conversing with their co-national friends/peers. They had regrets about spending

time with the co-national people. On the other hand, contact with people from the same country could help learners' adjustment to the target language community. As an overseas student myself, I felt I did not experience many difficulties in my adjustment to the target language community. Perhaps I was not alone as I had several Taiwanese friends around me at the same time, and I also made friends with host nationals. My experience reflects the research claiming that interaction with both host people and co-nationals benefits sojourners' sociocultural and psychological adjustments (Ward et al, 2001).

In a study with Korean undergraduate students in their local Canadian communities of practice, Duff points out that sometimes Korean students' involvement in English-speaking activities and communities was limited because of Korean culture. She explains that 'since the Korean affiliation and social networks were important for ensuring future careers and social connections in Korea', 'pressures of ingroup Korean-conformity and affiliation sometimes force Korean students to be less active in Anglo-community life' (Duff, 2007:316). She also mentions that when younger Korean students are with older Korean students, in order to show respect to the older, the younger needs to use Korean. L2 learners' cultural background seems to influence their interpersonal contact and language use in the L2 environment.

### **2.3.4 Multicultural network**

A multicultural network is L2 learners' relationship with people from different countries from their own, except host nationals. In Isabelli-García's (2006) study, when she talked about social networks, she did not take L2 learners from different countries into account. She only talked about learners' relationships with other learners from the same country and with native speakers of the host nationals. Another important group, that was people from other countries, was neglected.

In Redmond and Bunyi's (1993) research undertaken in a mid-western American university, it was found that British, European and South American students integrated with host students better than Korean, Taiwanese and Southeast Asian students did. This may be because the languages and cultures of those former countries are close to English language and American culture, but not the latter ones. It is evident, even on the campus at Warwick, to see that usually students



from Asia and students from Western countries tend to congregate in their respective groups. This cultural distance is probably related to language and culture backgrounds. As Schumann says, '(I)f the two cultures are similar, then social contact is more likely' (Schumann, 1978b:166).

Through understanding learners' social networks, we can see learners are involved in different communities outside classrooms, for example, accommodation communities, communities of co-national peers and non-co-national peers, working communities, and among these social networks learners have opportunities to practise their English. Now I will turn to some theories which have been applied to L2 learning and use in the L2 environment.

## **2.4 Situated learning**

Working within an anthropological framework, Lave and Wenger (1991) put forward their theory of situated learning, emphasizing the relationship between learning and the social context where it happens. 'In contrast with learning as internalization, learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world' (ibid:49). In the foreword of Lave and Wenger's book, Hanks states that '(R)ather than asking what kinds of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are involved, they ask what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place' (ibid:14). From Lave and Wenger's point of view learning is participation in the social world, and learning is situated within activity, context and culture. People learn through the process of *legitimate peripheral participation*. In their theory of situated learning, *community of practice*, where learning takes place, *legitimate peripheral participation*, the process of learning, and *identity*, newcomers and old-timers, are the key concepts. The concepts of 'community of practice' and 'legitimate peripheral participation' have been applied in different areas, e.g. business, organizational design, government, education, professional associations, development projects and civic life (Wenger, no date), and also have been used as frameworks for L2 learning

research (Van Benthuisen, 2007). I will discuss these concepts in the following sections.

### 2.4.1 Communities of practice

In their situated learning theory, Lave and Wenger (1991) use the concept of ‘community of practice’ to explore how learning takes place through working practice, and apprenticeship is a typical example. Although in their book, they use apprenticeship to explain this concept, communities of practice are not restricted to apprenticeship. The notion of community of practice is described as ‘a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice’ (ibid: 98). As Lave and Wenger state ‘the concept of “community of practice” is left largely as an intuitive notion, which serves a purpose here but which requires a more rigorous treatment’ (ibid: 42), in his later work, Wenger (1998a) defined ‘community of practice’ in more detail. He defines community of practice as ‘groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly’ (Wenger, no date), and communities of practice contain three characteristics, namely mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998a, 1998b).

- Mutual engagement: A community of practice is not just an aggregate or network of people, e.g. a group of friends. A community of practice has a shared domain which ‘is not an abstract area of interest, but consists of key issues or problems that members commonly experience’ (Wenger et al, 2002:32), for example, a group of artists discussing new styles or new techniques, or a group of surveyors working on similar projects. A community of practice concerns sustaining ‘dense relations of mutual engagement organized around what they are there to do’ (Wenger, 1998a: 74). This is the ‘*share a concern or a passion for something they do*’ in Wenger’s definition.
- Joint enterprise: The ‘joint enterprise’ of a community of practice must be ‘understood and continually renegotiated by its members’ (Wenger, 1998b). In other words, members of a community of practice interact on a regular basis to develop and discuss their joint enterprise and consequently learn and share information and experiences. Without this kind of continual interaction, a

community cannot be called a community of practice. For example, university research students who meet as a research discussion group on a weekly basis form a community of practice, but if they only come together for a one-day workshop, they do not form a community of practice. This is the '*interact regularly*' in Wenger's definition.

- Shared repertoire: This is what capability a community of practice has produced. Members of a community of practice develop a shared repertoire, which refers to its 'routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence' (Wenger, 1998a: 83). This shared repertoire becomes the resources of a community of practice, which enables its members to '*learn how to do it better*' (Wenger, no date).

In 2.2 I have stated that it is my assumption that communities of practice exist within learners' social networks and learners belong to some of these communities. The concept of community of practice is useful, because by recognising communities of practice in learners' social networks, we can recognise learners' learning opportunities and hence understand their learning process.

A community of practice can be found in different situations, for example, in the workplace such as Wenger's (1998a) example of claim processors. Research students in the Centre of Applied Linguistics in Warwick University get together every Wednesday afternoon, discussing and sharing issues about research in language learning and education. Students join in a community of practice of research when they start their research degree. A community of practice can also be formed by people who do the same or similar jobs and come together to discuss or try to resolve mutual problems as a group. If we take language school students who come to Britain to study English as an example, we can expect that they may establish different communities of practice consciously or unconsciously. They may get together at lunchtime discussing their learning and living experiences in the UK and consequently solve their problems of living in a foreign country or their problems about language. They may get together with shared interest, which is learning and improving their English ability. They may meet each other regularly in class or outside class. Through the interaction with each other, these students may learn English and also gain knowledge of how to learn or improve their English. They

develop a community of practice. I should like to investigate if my participants also form communities of practice or belong to any communities of practice.

In Wenger's (1998a:6) book, he mentioned family was also a community of practice.

Families struggle to establish an habitable way of life. They develop their own practices, routines, rituals, artifacts, symbols, conventions, stories and histories....they agree and disagree....Even when families fall apart, members create ways of dealing with each other. Surviving together is an important enterprise, whether surviving consists in the search for food and shelter or in the quest for a viable identity.

It would be interesting to see if language learners can become part of this community of practice and have an ultimate return from their investment in the host family.

Although Wenger sees *family* as a community of practice, according to his definition of 'community of practice', it might be not easy to categorize a *host family* as a community of practice if the initial intention of the host family to have students staying with them is for financial gain, which appears to be the situation in most cases. Nevertheless, a community of practice is still possibly formed between learners and their host families, for example, when both sides are interested in knowing or learning one another's culture. Through the interaction they build up knowledge of one another's culture or customs, and obviously learners also have the opportunity to learn the language. Wenger points out that 'learning can be the reason the community comes together or an incidental outcome of member's interactions' (Wenger, no date). Community of practice represents an opportunity of learning.

In Norton and Toohey's (2001:315) article about good language learners, when they described Norton's participant, Eva, they mentioned:

However, the workplace community of practice overlapped with another community of practice, the social contacts in which workers participated outside work. It was company policy at Munchies that the management would help sponsor a monthly outing for employees.

I found the term ‘community of practice’ used here is problematic. I agree that in a workplace, communities of practice can be formed, but I am not sure whether we can see the monthly work’s outing as a community of practice or not. Perhaps we need to make a distinction here between ‘communities of practice’ and ‘community practices’. There are different and many communities around people, but not all of them are ‘communities of practice’. For example, a neighbourhood is a community but not necessarily a community of practice. If we take the position of people learning through interaction with others in the social world, we may say people learn in those different communities, but not necessarily in ‘communities of practice’.

#### **2.4.2 Legitimate peripheral participation**

‘Legitimate peripheral participation’ is used to describe the varying degrees of engagement that participants have in a community of practice. A person who enters into a community of practice is perceived to be a newcomer not knowing much about the related knowledge of that community, and by taking part in activities and accessing resources in that community, gradually he or she will gain the knowledge and start fully participating in the community as an old-timer. An old-timer is someone who has been a long-standing member of a community of practice with more knowledge and experience of that particular practice. By participating gradually, learners’ social relations within the community change and their knowledge develops. Lave and Wenger (1991:100-101) remind us:

The key to legitimate peripherality is access by newcomers to the community of practice and all that membership entails. ...To become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources, and opportunities for participation.

However, there can be problems. People can join a community of practice, but it does not guarantee that they can access the activities or resources within that community, which would enable them to learn or gain the required knowledge. There are power relations involved and the more powerful members, usually the experts or old-timers, control the access and resources and ultimately will control the level of newcomers’ participation. “The social structure of this practice, its power

relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning (i.e., for legitimate peripheral participation)' (Lave and Wenger, 1991:98). Legitimate peripheral participation is a 'conflictual process of negotiation and transformation' (Morita, 2004:577) because it involves unequal relations or power.

According to Lave and Wenger, '(D)epending on the organization of access, legitimate peripherality can either promote or prevent legitimate participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991:103). In other words, power relations in the community of practice organise the access to resources for learning, in a way that allows learners to learn or alternatively will stop them from learning. Therefore, knowing how the community of practice is structured is helpful to understand how the language learners' access to the linguistic resources is facilitated or constrained.

However, according to my understanding of Wenger's (1998a; 1998b; no date) definition of community of practice, I suggest that legitimate peripheral participation can only be evident once a community of practice has already been formed. In other words, if a community of practice is newly formed, legitimate peripheral participation can not be evident until this community of practice has been established. Moreover, I also believe that legitimate peripheral participation can not be evident until there are more than two members within that community of practice.

In the case of language school learners, if they find a job, they can become part of a community of practice formed by their colleagues at work. They are legitimate participants as they are inside the community of practice. As any newcomer into a community of practice, they start their participation in that community of practice with a peripheral position. However, will the process of participation they experience be similar to their host nation colleagues? Also as they are language learners and they are hoping to learn the target language, will that community facilitate or constrain their language learning?

Lave and Wenger (1991) point out the problem of access to activities and resources for learning in a community of practice. I believe this kind of problem exists in communities in general. In the case of study abroad, learners put themselves in the target language community, but they might find that sometimes it is not easy for them to access opportunities to learn or use the language in that community. Even

in the smaller community, for example the host family, interaction does not always happen (Isabelli-García, 2006). This situation is also found in Norton's study of five immigrant women (Norton, 2000).

### **2.4.3 Identity, participation and non-participation**

Learning takes place by legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice. This means a learner is entitled to membership of that community, and it also implies an evolving form of membership – a learner's identity moves from being a novice newcomer towards a more knowledgeable and skilled old-timer. From Lave and Wenger's (1991:53) point of view, identities are 'long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice'. That is to say, in a community of practice, identity is socially constructed and defined (Riley, 2003; Wenger, 1998a). This is similar to Norton's perception of identity, which we shall see in 2.5.2.

Moreover, by viewing learning through legitimate peripheral participation, we can also see that learners' identities are constructed during the process of learning. Therefore, 'learning involves the construction of identities' (Lave and Wenger, 1991:53); learning and identity are inseparable. This inseparability of learning and identity has been well investigated by Morita (2004). If learning involves the construction of identities, learning a L2 should also involve the construction of identities. It can link to Norton's (2000:11) statement that 'investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity', which I will discuss in 2.5.2.

In his later work, Wenger (1998a) claims the equal importance of the concept of participation and non-participation in a community of practice. According to him, our relations to communities of practice involve participation and non-participation, and our identities are shaped by both. Participation and non-participation can refer to insiders (full participation) and outsiders (full non-participation) of a community of practice. They simply reflect our membership in particular communities of practice and not in others. In this case, participation and non-participation have 'distinct effects on our identities' (Wenger, 1998a:165). Within a community of practice, non-participation can be defined as an enabling factor of participation in

the case of 'peripherality', and as a restricted form of participation in the case of 'marginality'. In the situation of peripherality, 'certain degree of non-participation is necessary to enable a kind of participation that is less than full' (ibid:165). For example, when a newcomer can not understand or join in a conversation of old-timers, this experience of non-participation is part of the process towards participation. In the situation of marginality, non-participation prevents full participation and may even lead to full non-participation; Katarina and Felicia in Norton's (2001) study are examples of this (see 2.5.3). In the cases of peripherality and marginality, the experience of non-participation is 'aligned with a trajectory of participation'; participation and non-participation 'interact to define each other' (Wenger, 1998a:165).

Understanding these differences is useful, because it can help us to understand better why in some situations learners do not participate actively in their communities of practice.

#### **2.4.4 Communities of practice, legitimate peripheral participation and L2 research**

Haneda (2006:815) points out that 'Lave and Wenger's social practice theory has much to offer because of its emphasis on the integral relationship among agent, activity, and the world, in which each is conceptualised as constitutive of the others'. As I mentioned in 2.4, the concepts of community of practice and legitimate peripheral participation have been applied in various areas. Here are some examples of research in L2 learning situations. Belcher (1994) examined the relationship between non-native-speaking graduate students and their mentors from the perspective of legitimate peripheral participation. And Flowerdew (2000) applied the idea of legitimate peripheral participation to interpret a non-English-speaking scholar's experience of publishing a scholarly article. Toohey (1998) used the community of practice perspective to examine Grade 1 classroom practices with immigrant children. Joining in Toohey's project, Day (2002) also applied Lave and Wenger's theory to discuss her data. Leki (2001) used legitimate peripheral participation as a framework to discuss the experiences of two nonnative-English-speaking university students in group work with native-English-speaking domestic students. Norton (2001) also used Lave and Wenger's work to understand two of



her participants' withdrawal from their ESL classroom. Different from the above studies of L2 learning focused on classroom/school or academic situations, which are communities of practice already, my study concentrates on learners' outside classroom or after school situations, in which I could possibly find other kinds of communities of practice my participants join in and learn English from.

With regard to L2 learning in the L2 environment, L2 researchers who have applied Lave and Wenger's (1991) legitimate peripheral participation in their work discuss the unequal power relations in the community of practice, indicating that native speakers are the powerful members. Yet, in some situations language learners can be identified as the ones who have the power. Language learners who can choose under what situations to interact with native speakers are conceived as good language learners. They are the ones who decide to speak or not. This implies that they have the power. According to Norton (2000), to understand language learners' opportunities to learn and use the target language outside the classroom, inequitable relations of power between learners and target language speakers need to be explored. However, she also states that second language theories have not sufficiently investigated these inequitable relations of power. In her study with immigrant women learning English in Canada, Norton discussed comprehensively how inequitable relations of power in home, at work and school enable or constrain their language learning in their learning trajectories. Now, I would like to turn to important concepts which Norton has proposed in her work, which I believe can enable me to have more understanding of language learners' opportunities to learn and use the target language outside the classroom.

## **2.5 Investment, identity and imagined communities**

Norton reconceptualises the relation between individuals and the social context in learning from the perspective of feminist poststructuralist theory. In her research with five immigrant women learning English in Canada, she focused more on how

their social interactions in the target language community affected their language learning and use than their individual characteristics did.

### **2.5.1 Power and identity**

In her work, Norton (2000:7) refers to ‘power’ as ‘the socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions and communities through which symbolic and material resources in a society are produced, distributed and validated’. She relates symbolic resources to language, education and friends, and material resources to capital goods, real estate and money (Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995). Power and these resources are inseparable. In a socially constructed relationship, the one that controls or possesses the resources is the one that has power. She also emphasizes that the power relation is constantly being renegotiated because symbolic and material resources in a society constantly change their values.

Although in the 1970s and 1980s, scholars interested in second language identity tried to distinguish between social identity and cultural identity, in more recent years, the intersections between them are considered more significant than their differences (Norton, 2006). Norton uses ‘identity’ to refer to ‘how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future’ (Norton, 1997:410). Therefore, identity is multiple, a site of struggle and subject to change (Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995). If we bring power and identity together, we can see that changes of power and changes of a person’s identity affect one another.

In order to investigate how relations of power impact on language learning, following West (1992), Bourdieu (1977), Weedon (1997) and Cummins (1996) (cited in Norton, 2000:7-9), Norton (2000:9) conceptualizes the relationship between power, identity and language and she states that ‘relations of power can serve to enable or constrain the range of identities that language learners can negotiate in their classroom and communities.’

### **2.5.2 Investment, identity and language learning**

In her research with five immigrant women in Canada, Norton found that existing theories of motivation in SLA were not consistent with the findings from her research, and especially did not do justice to the identities and experiences of these five language learners. Therefore, she challenged the notions of motivation in second language learning and proposed the notion of investment, which she thought 'might help to extend notions of motivation in the field of SLA' (Norton, 2006:504). According to Norton (2000:10), the concept of investment 'signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their ambivalent desire to learn and practice it.' Based on his understanding of Norton's work, Ellis (1997:140) defines L2 learners' investment as the 'learners' commitment to learning an L2, which is viewed as related to the social identities they construct for themselves as learners.'

Norton points out that in SLA literature motivation is 'considered an immutable personality trait of the language learner' (Churchill, 2002:3). In other words, people talk about a learner being motivated or unmotivated as an unchanged identity; how committed a learner is when he/she is motivated is not investigated. However, in the process of learning English, learners sometimes make more efforts than at other times, or make more efforts in one context than in others. They are motivated, but their commitment to learning English is changing from time to time and from space to space. In other words, their investment in learning is dynamic. For example, when learners realize that in certain situations, they can learn more English, they make more efforts to do so, and subsequently make less efforts when this is not the case. It is similar to people who invest for financial reasons; they invest more money in something which will bring them a more profitable return than something which does not.

Norton further explains 'if learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital. Learners expect or hope to have a good return on their investment' (Norton, 2000:10). Learners are like 'investors who expect a good return on their efforts' (Ellis, 1997:42). With these gains of symbolic and material resources, identities of learners will change. English language learners commit themselves in terms of energy, time and money to learning English in English speaking countries; this is an investment for them. They want to have some return on these investments – symbolic and

material resources – for example, to improve their English ability, to build up friendships with people from different countries, to gain knowledge or to get a better job which allows them to make more money, or to even find future opportunities to make money. With these resources, they may become more advanced English speakers or see themselves as internationalists with a global identity.

As we have just discussed, by investing in an L2 learners can acquire symbolic and material resources. And with these gains, learners' identities will change. Therefore, Norton suggests, 'an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity' (Norton, 2000:11). This relates to what I discussed in 2.4.3, learning involves the construction of identities. Wenger explains the relationship between learning and identity, '(B)ecause learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming – to become a certain person or, conversely, to avoid becoming a certain person' (Wenger, 1998a:215). During the process of learning the target language, learners change constantly not only their language ability, which in most cases increases, but also the way they see themselves or others look at them. Learners' identities change over time and space. They may negotiate or behave differently in the same or similar contexts over time. Learners' relationships to the social world are socially and historically constructed, in other words, their identities are socially and historically constructed. The identities in which learners see themselves also affect how they commit themselves or participate in the activities. In other words, while their investments change their identities, their identities also affect their investments in their learning.

However, things are not as simple as they appear. In the relationship between L2 learners and native speakers, there are often power relations involved. Given that native speakers are usually those who control or possess the symbolic and material resources and control opportunities for L2 learners to speak, L2 learners can also be the ones who bring the resources to the relationships and therefore claim opportunities to speak. For example, in Norton's (2000) study when Eva, from Poland, knew that Europe was a desirable holiday destination for her Canadian colleagues, she decided to talk about vacations in Europe. Her European experience became her symbolic resource, which enabled her to speak and to be invited to join in the conversation again.

Learners will make efforts to find opportunities to be seen or heard; they do not want to be marginalized. However, sometimes learners will decide not to take these opportunities. Nevertheless, these efforts or investments should not be regarded as a single action taken by learners. As learning develops due to interaction, the investment or effort interlocutors reciprocate will govern the level of return received by the learners.

Another way to understand the relationship between second language learning and identity is through ‘imagined communities’ – how learners’ actual and desired memberships in imagined communities affect their learning trajectories of the second language, how the notion of imagined communities enhance our understanding of language learning and identity.

### **2.5.3 Imagined communities, identity and language learning**

While inspired by Lave and Wenger’s (1991) idea of learning – people learn by participating in a community of practice – Kanno and Norton (2003) also notice that most of the learning that Lave and Wenger describe takes place in tangible communities of practice, such as communities of midwives or tailors. This kind of community of practice is immediately accessible; that is to say learners’ involvement with and belonging to the community are direct and concrete. This is what Wenger (1998a) calls *engagement*. However, Wenger also points out that engagement – directly involving in the community of practice – is not the only way in which people belong to a community. *Imagination* – ‘a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves’ (ibid:176) – is another mode of belonging to a community. ‘We not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through practices we do not engage in’ (ibid:164). This perception is similar to Anderson’s (1991) imagined community.

The concept of imagined community was proposed by Benedict Anderson (1991, cited in Kanno and Norton, 2003). He argues that the nations we think of are imagined communities, because ‘the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’ (Anderson, 1991:6, cited in

Kanno and Norton 2003:241). With the power of imagination, we ‘can feel a sense of community with people we have not yet met, but perhaps hope to meet one day’ (Kanno and Norton, 2003:241). ‘*Imagined communities* refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination’ (ibid). For example, a Taiwanese female student, who is studying finance in a university in Taiwan, may envision herself working in the City in London. Those who are working in the City are members of her imagined community. Another student learning English in Taiwan may want to speak English as fluently as native-English speakers. His or her imagined community is a group of native-English speakers.

Norton (2001) examined two of her participants’, Katarina and Felicia, stories of non-participation in their ESL classroom, and found that the disagreement between their imagined communities and their teachers’ educational visions resulted in their withdrawal from their ESL courses. In Katarina’s case, because of her history of being a teacher in Poland, she imagined herself as a member of a professional community in Canada. However, her teacher saw her as an immigrant and thought that her English was not good enough to take a computer course. Katarina was angry and decided not to go to the English class again. Felicia’s decision of not returning to her English class again was because her teacher did not recognise Peru as a major country when she summarised students’ presentations about their own country. Felicia had led a wealthy life in Peru and thought herself a wealthy Peruvian rather than an immigrant in Canada. When she realised the teacher had ignored the importance of Peru to her, she decided to walk out of the English class and never returned. In these two cases, learners’ language learning in the classroom was hindered by their imagined communities and their teachers’ response to them. With reference to Wenger’s (1998a) participation and non-participation, their non-participation was not an opportunity for participating peripherally, but an act of refusal of being marginalised. In Kanno and Norton’s (2003) discussion of imagined communities, Kanno mentioned an example of a Japanese teenager’s imagined Japan giving him impetus to make an effort to maintain his Japanese language proficiency. His imagined Japanese identity facilitated his language learning. These three examples tell us that learners’ investments in the language learning also need to be understood within the context of learners’ imagined communities in which

they have their imagined identities. Murphey et al (2005) also suggest that identities, imagined communities and investment in learning English co-construct each other.

Let's look again at the example of the Taiwanese student I mentioned above. In that student's imagination, she is a member of the City in London, and she knows that English is an important means to gain this future affiliation and in fact, she also knows she needs to learn the English for daily life communication and also the English for her professional use. This imagined community encourages her to learn English and also helps her to plan her learning, e.g. learning English for Specific Purpose, focusing on more speaking or writing, etc. People working in the City in London are her imagined community and she would like to become one of them in the future. In other words, that imagined community – her image of a desired future, is her ideal self (Dörnyei, 2009, accessed on-line). Moreover, she knows that the person she would like to become is proficient in English, a L2 for her; therefore she is motivated to learn the L2 to reduce the discrepancy between her actual and ideal self. She would like to master the L2. The *Ideal L2 Self*, which is 'the L2-specific facet of one's 'ideal self' (ibid:29), is a motivator for her. In other words, if a person's imagined community is a group of people who can or need to speak the L2 fluently, the learner will be motivated to learn the L2. We can see that the learner's imagined community can be meaningfully linked to the Ideal L2 Self.

I have found Norton's work interesting. However, the social networks of her participants – immigrant women – are different from those of my participants – private language school learners. Some of the social issues raised or experienced can be very different and could affect how the power relations operate within their respective social networks, and subsequently will affect their investments in identity and language learning. The question is how different those experiences are.

From the point of view of researchers who are interested in relations of power within classroom and communities, 'it is argued that the extent to which a learner speaks or is silent or writes, reads, or resists has much to do with the extent to which the learner is valued in any given institution or community' (Norton, 2006:502). Although it seems 'others' are those who decide whether learners can practise and use the target language, learners can also be the ones who value

themselves and are those who decide whether they want to speak or not. They are the ones who control their willingness to communicate in the L2.

## **2.6 Willingness to communicate – WTC**

### **2.6.1 Willingness to communicate in the L2**

WTC, willingness to communicate, was introduced to the communication literature by McCroskey and Bare (MacIntyre et al, 1998). It originally referred to first language communication. WTC represents the ‘intention to initiate communication when free to choose to do so’ (MacIntyre, 1994:137). However, the situation of communicating in a L2 is more complex, because the level of one’s L2 proficiency is an ‘additional powerful modifying variable’ (Dörnyei, 2005:208). MacIntyre et al extended McCroskey and Bare’s WTC in L1 to L2 communication and defined it as ‘a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2’ (MacIntyre et al, 1998:547). It is a situated construct. They proposed a multilayered ‘pyramid’ model of L2 WTC, listing potential influences: desire to communicate with a specific person, state communicative self-confidence, interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, L2 self-confidence, intergroup attitudes, social situation, communicative competence, intergroup climate and personality (ibid:547). Kang (2005:291) further proposes a new definition:

*Willingness to communicate (WTC) is an individual’s volitional inclination towards actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation, which can vary according to interlocutor(s), topics, and conversational context, among other potential situation variables.*

Several studies conducted by MacIntyre and his colleagues showed that WTC was most influenced directly by communication apprehension and perceived communication competence (MacIntyre, 1994; Baker and MacIntyre, 2000). Communication apprehension is defined as ‘an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons’ (McCroskey, 1984 cited in Baker and MacIntyre, 2000: 314). Perceived



communication competence is ‘the belief that one can communicate effectively in a given situation’ (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990, cited in Clément et al, 2003: 192). It is different from a person’s actual competence. It appears that people who have a lower level of communication apprehension and a higher level of perceived communication competence are more willing to communicate. In Yashima et al’s (2004) study of Japanese high school students participating in a year-long study programme in the United States, it also showed that perceived communication competence strongly relates to WTC in the L2. Yashima et al’s study also showed that WTC predicts frequency and amount of communication with host nationals. Other factors which influence WTC have also been identified, for example, motivation (Hashimoto, 2002), social support (MacIntyre et al, 2001), attitude towards the international community (Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al, 2004), sex and age (MacIntyre et al, 2002) etc.

WTC can be seen as an individual difference which facilitates L2 learning; it can also be seen as nonlinguistic outcome of L2 learning (MacIntyre, 2007). MacIntyre et al (1998) suggest that to create WTC is an objective for L2 education. They argued that ‘the ultimate goal of the learning process should be to engender in language students the willingness to seek out communication opportunities and the willingness actually to communicate in them’ (ibid:547).

WTC represents the decision to communicate when a person is given the choice to do so. However, in some situations L2 learners, for example the immigrant women in Norton’s (2000) study, are not always the ones to have the choice. Moreover, in the later study, Clément et al point out that the ‘pyramid’ model proposed by MacIntyre et al (1998) does not ‘explicitly deal with situations in which status-based linguistic accommodation and other social pressures might create L2 use against the personal preference of the speaker’ (Clément et al, 2003: 191). From the above point of view, it shows that this model does not take relations of power into account.

## **2.6.2 Research into willingness to communicate in the L2**

Some researchers have applied the concept of WTC in the L1 to the L2, and here are some of the examples.

**Table 2.3 Studies of WTC**

Researcher(s)	Participants
Cao and Philp (2006)	8 international students from a university-based private language school in New Zealand
Hashimoto (2002)	56 undergraduate and graduate students of the University of Hawaii
Kim (2004)	191 Korean university students in the Korean context
Kang (2005)	4 Korean students in an American university
MacIntyre et al (2001)	79 ninth graders from a junior high school in Canada
MacIntyre et al (2002)	268 students from a junior high French immersion programme in Canada
Yashima (2002)	389 university students in Japanese EFL context
Yashima et al (2004)	166 Japanese students studying at a high school in Kyoto 60 Japanese students in a study-abroad programme in America

I have found Cao and Philp's (2006) study and Kang's (2005) study interesting. One of the reasons is that most of the studies of WTC tend to be quantitative (Dörnyei, 2005), but they both employed a qualitative approach, and my study is also qualitative. In Kang's study, conversations of 4 Korean male students' and native-English speakers were video recorded and observed. Interviews and stimulated recalls were also conducted. Kang discussed during a conversation how the interlocutor, topic and conversational context influenced learners' psychological conditions of security, excitement, and responsibility. From the findings, Kang suggests WTC as a 'dynamic situational concept that can change moment-to-moment, rather than a trait-like predisposition' (Kang, 2005:277). Cao and Philp (2006) conducted their study with 8 international private language school students in New Zealand. The data was collected through questionnaires, observations and interviews. A number of factors were found to influence learners' WTC behaviour in class: the group size, familiarity with interlocutor(s), interlocutor(s)' participation, familiarity with topics under discussion, self-confidence, medium of communication and cultural background.

From the above discussions we can see that individual language learners in private English language schools in English-speaking countries have been neglected by researchers, and that this particular group of language learners needs to be given

more attention. Given that language learning occurs through interaction, understanding learners' social networks as a whole can allow us to get a general picture of where they can use their L2. We can also see from these discussions how learners' social networks and language learning interact over time through different perspectives. For example, with the concepts of community of practice and legitimate peripheral participation, we can recognize alternative learning situations where participation is essential. And with the concepts of identity, imagined community and willingness to communicate, we can better understand how learners' investment in the L2 learning is affected through their relationship to the social world and their own self-analysis. I believe these concepts will be useful in understanding how the social networks of my participants in the host country affect their language learning and use.

In the following chapter, I am going to describe how I conducted my study in order to see how these concepts apply to my participants as individual language learners. For example, I would like to see how the functions of their social networks differ from other groups of language learners, and whether or not my participants belong to any communities of practice where they learn English through participation. Also, I would like to find out how power relations operating within my participants' respective social networks affect their investments in identity and language learning, and what factors can affect their willingness to communicate. In order to facilitate the collection and analysis of my data, the following research questions were compiled:

- I. What kinds of interpersonal contact do learners have?
  - a. In what situations do learners have their interpersonal contact?
  - b. Why are learners in these situations?
  - c. Whether learners use their interpersonal contacts in these situations for language learning and use purposes? If so, how? If not, why?
  - d. What do they gain from these interpersonal contacts?
  - e. What problems related to interpersonal contact do learners face in the host country?
  - f. How do they deal with these problems?

II. What kinds of effect do these interpersonal contacts have on them as language learners and users?

# **Chapter 3 The Natural History of my Research**

In this chapter, I will firstly give a brief explanation of my research paradigm followed by a description of how I identified and selected my participants. Thirdly, I will cover ethical issues and data collection schedule and methods, which mainly comprised of a series of interviews, informal gatherings and observations. Following this, I will briefly discuss issues relating to the languages that my interviews were conducted in and transcribing of these interviews. Finally, I will present how I analysed my data and how my research questions were formulated.

## **3.1 My research paradigm**

Supporters of constructivism ‘share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it...., particular actors, in particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex process of social interaction involving history, language, and action’ (Schwandt, 1994:118). I am one of them. Richards (2003) describes constructivism from the ontological perspective based on the belief that reality is essentially constructed through the interaction of the individual with the environment.

Following this belief, I decided to look at how learner’s learning was affected by learners’ socially and historically constructed relationship to the social world. Also, with this belief, I recognised that in order to understand my participants’ learning experiences I needed to interact with them and also observe how they interacted with their social world.

## **3.2 My research participants**

### **3.2.1 Identifying my participants**

According to my research proposal, my original plan was to research international students who attended English language courses in a local college where not only English language courses were offered but also academic courses and apprenticeships were available. In the meantime, I was also planning to undertake a similar but simpler study with several students from a private language school. This school was different from the former college because it only offered language courses, but not any combination programmes, such as 3 days' work placement + 2 days' language class. One reason to do this was for purposes of comparison with the main study, but in addition, the second enquiry would provide backup in the event that difficulties might have been encountered with the main project. However, after discussing my research proposal with my supervisors in the first tutorial, I decided to change my main participants from students in the college to those from the language school, and the study with students from the college became the backup project. The reason was the uncertainty about access to the students in the college. As I had had several contacts with the language school before, I was more confident of getting the access I needed from the school. I feel that the decision in making this change was a positive one. The staff and students in the language school were very helpful.

After deciding on my target groups, I started to contact the language school and the college to request permission to approach their students. I will discuss these two stages respectively. But, before that, in order to make it easier for readers, the participants in my study will be presented first.

### **3.2.2 My chosen participants**

My research participants were individual international adult students who were attending English language courses in a language school or a local college in Britain for at least 6 months. Other variables were not particularly considered when I chose my research participants, such as specific nationality, age, gender, language ability, and previous experience.

The language school was located in a town called Ingramford (pseudonym) situated in an area of the Midlands in the UK. The participants from this school

included Linda, Eric and Rita from Taiwan, Tony from China, and Sharon, Jenny, Geoff and Kelly from Korea. A Polish student, Judith and two German students, George and Ben, were the participants from a local college near Ingramford. All the participants' names and that of the town have been changed to protect the identities of informants in line with the confidentiality agreements established with them from the outset (see Appendix A).

I had 11 participants in total. When I finished my last formal interview with Geoff, my Korean male participant, I had collected a great amount of data. After considering the possibility of managing all the data I had obtained and also consulting with my supervisors, I decided to focus on four participants for this thesis. They were Jenny and Sharon from Korea, and Linda and Rita from Taiwan. The reasons for this decision included that among all of my participants, I had met with them the most. They were all involved in the various methods I had used for my data collection. Also, they had various social contacts, not only within the school and host family.

### 3.2.3 Access to my participants

**Table 3.1 Access to the participants in the language school**

Participant	Date of initial contact	Method of initial contact	Informed consent
Linda	28-10-'05	Face-to-face meeting in the school	Verbal consent - at the initial meeting in the school
Eric	28-10-'05	Face-to-face meeting in the school	Verbal consent - at the initial meeting in the school
Rita	28-10-'05	Face-to-face meeting in the school	Verbal consent - at the initial meeting in the school
Sharon	28-10-'05	Face-to-face meeting in the school	Verbal consent - at the initial meeting in the school
Jenny	28-10-'05	Face-to-face meeting in the school	Verbal consent - at the initial meeting in the school
Tony	03-02-'06	Face-to-face meeting in the school	Verbal consent - at the initial meeting in the school
Geoff	17-02-'06	Face-to-face meeting in the school	Verbal consent - at the initial meeting in the school
Kelly	17-02-'06	Face-to-face meeting in the school	Verbal consent on the day of interview

**Table 3.2 Access to the participants in the college**

Participant	Date of initial contact	Method of initial contact	Informed consent
Judith	01-12-'05	Face-to-face meeting in the school	Written consent – via e-mail Obtained on 12-12-'05
George	31-05-'06	E-mail	Verbal consent on the day of interview
Ben	31-05-'06	E-mail	Verbal consent on the day of interview

## (A) A local language school in Ingramford

This school was not a strange place for me, because both my sister and brother attended some of the courses there a few years ago. Also, in the first year of my EdD course when I was doing my assignment for the ‘Research Methods’ module, I wrote to the director to ask for permission to do interviews with two Taiwanese students there. Therefore this was not the first time I made contact with the school.

Firstly, in October 2005 I wrote an e-mail with my research proposal to the school director to ask for permission as I had done for my assignment in March 2005. He wrote back, telling me it should be no problem and asking me to contact the director of studies in school. I had met the director of studies several times and it seemed not too difficult for me to obtain permission to meet students in school. The ‘gatekeepers’ were very helpful and I could access the students easily.

I went to the school one Friday afternoon in October 2005, giving the summary of my research proposal to the director of studies and looking through the list of students for likely candidates for my research. I listed five students who would stay at least six months, three from Taiwan (Linda, Eric and Rita) and two from Korea (Sharon and Jenny), and asked the director of studies to ask them if they would be interested in taking part in my research. With their initial agreement, I went to meet them the following Friday afternoon. I gave each of them written information about my research (Appendix A) and also explained verbally. I also asked for some personal information (Appendix B). I emphasised that they would have the opportunity to understand their own learning and personal development by participating in my study. I also mentioned to them that if they were unwilling to continue to participate in my study, they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. As the participants had to give their time to take part in the study, I considered that some compensation and reward could be helpful. Therefore, in the first meeting, I told them I would give each of them a £10 book voucher in return,



and for the informal group meeting, a free meal would be offered. Moreover, I also offered to help them with their English when I read through their diaries. After that initial face-to-face meeting, my journey of data collection with the language school students began.

During the period of my study with this language school, two more male students, Tony and Geoff, agreed to participate in my study. They were introduced to me by my Taiwanese participants, Eric and Rita. Tony and Geoff started their courses in the school at the beginning of January and February 2006. I felt very grateful for Eric's and Rita's help. It could be one of the advantages of doing research with people who come from the same place as the researcher – the researcher can get invaluable support and help.

#### (B) A local college near Ingramford

When I mentioned my research proposal to one of my friends, she told me she had contact with this college and she could help me if I wanted to do my research with students there. She took me to see the course manager in June 2005. In this initial meeting, I explained to the manager about my research interest and the methods for my data collection. Luckily the course manager gave me permission to approach their students; however, she told me it was the end of term, so she suggested I return to the college again in October. I told her I would send her my research proposal for her reference, but she did not think it was necessary. All I needed to do was to give her a call before I wanted to meet students in the college after the new academic year started again. Her attitude was so relaxed that I was worried that she might change her mind when I contacted her again. I wrote to the manager again in October and asked her to arrange different groups of students for me. Unluckily, she told me she was busy at that moment and preferred that I went in November. After contacting her several times, I was finally able to meet students at the beginning of December, which was close to the date I was due to go back to Taiwan for three weeks. I went to three different classes with their teachers present. As I had done with the students in the language school in Ingramford, I gave each of them written information about my research, explained verbally, and also gave the students the form for their personal information. I told them if they felt like participating in my study, they could give the form to the teachers and I would go to

collect them the following week. I also mentioned what I would offer in return for their participation, e.g. a £10 book voucher, for the informal group meeting a free meal would be offered, and my help with their English when I read through their diaries. I also emphasised that they would have the opportunity to understand their own learning and personal development by participating in my study. Finally I had fifteen forms back, but when I contacted them again, nine of them said they were too busy to participate. Among the six students who were willing to participate, only one Polish girl agreed to participate in all activities, including writing a diary. Therefore, I decided to keep only one student from this college, this Polish girl Judith.

During the period of my data collection, I had opportunities to conduct a single one-off interview with three students respectively at the end of their stay in the UK. They were a Korean student, Kelly, from the above language school, and two German students, Ben and George, from the above college. With these three students, I was planning to use their interview data mainly for the purpose of comparison. However, during the period of data analysis, because of the limitation of time and volume of the thesis, after discussion with my supervisors, I decided to put these three participants' data aside.

### **3.2.4 Reflection on obtaining access**

To gain access to a place to do research is not easy, especially if the place is previously unknown to the researcher. I was lucky this time because I knew the 'gatekeepers' and also with my friend's help, I was given permission from the 'gatekeepers' without too many difficulties.

In terms of involving participants in my study, I found that the unexpected help from the participants and positive peer influence were invaluable and unforeseen advantages. I was able to involve additional participants easily because of the information and encouragement my existing participants gave them, namely snowball sampling. Sometimes when I met with participant A, he or she would ask me if I had also met or would meet with participant B or C and sometimes would offer to arrange contact for me.

### **3.3 Ethical issues**

#### **3.3.1 Informed consent**

As I mentioned in 3.2.3, I gave each of my participants written information about my research and asked for some personal information. I also mentioned to them that if they were unwilling to continue to participate in my research, they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. They subsequently all agreed verbally or through e-mail to participate in my research.

#### **3.3.2 Anonymity and confidentiality**

I mentioned in the letter I gave to the prospective participants that ‘You will remain anonymous when I report on the research.’ In the first interview, I emphasised it again and told them that I would use fictional names when I reported the results. I also used fictional names for the town where the language school and the local college are located and for any others my participants mentioned in the interviews. One participant was worried I would mention a particular name. After she showed her concern, I assured her that no real names would be mentioned in my thesis. When the participants asked me to keep what they told me as secret, I promised them I would do as they asked, and I have done so.

### **3.4 Data collection schedule and methods**

#### **3.4.1 The schedule of my data collection**

My data collection through face-to-face contact started with my first interview on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2005 and finished with my last observation of Jenny on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2007. For the detailed schedule, see table 3.3.

**Table 3.3 Schedule of data collection through face-to-face contact**

Method Participant	1 <sup>st</sup> interview	2 <sup>nd</sup> interview	3 <sup>rd</sup> interview	Final interview	Group meeting (dinner)	Informal chat	School party (observation)	Pub / night club (observation)	Making trifle (observation)	Workplace (observation)
Linda	18-11-'05	18-02-'06	27-02-'06	04-03-'06	10-02-'06	13-01-'06	17-02-'06	03-03-'06	18-02-'06	
Eric	20-11-'05	01-04-'06		04-04-'06	10-02-'06	16-01-'06	17-02-'06	03-03-'06		
Rita	18-11-'05	18-02-'06	03-06-'06	19-06-'06		16-01-'06 (a) 28-05-'06 (b)	17-02-'06		18-02-'06	22-04-'06 (pub)
Sharon	20-11-'05	04-06-'06		20-06-'06	10-02-'06	13-01-'06 (a) 28-05-'06 (b)	17-02-'06	22-04-'06		
Tony	17-02-'06	16-06-'06		18-07-'06			17-02-'06			
Jenny	18-11-'05	19-05-'06		29-09-'06	14-08-'06	13-01-'06 (a) 14-06-'07 (b)	17-02-'06	03-03-'06		16-06-'07 (tea room)
Geoff	04-04-'06			04-11-'06	14-08-'06		17-02-'06			
Judith	22-04-'06			08-09-'06	14-08-'06					

Single one-off interview : Kelly 02-03-'06; George 01-06-'06; Ben 01-06-'06.

### 3.4.2 The methods and process of my data collection and reflection

For my data collection, I needed my research participants to talk about their experiences and give me detailed information; therefore, formal interviews (semi-structured) and informal gatherings (informal group meeting or chat) were the main methods for my study. Other instruments included observation of social activities, diary entry, on-line communication synchronously or asynchronously, i.e. E-mail or MSN communication, and participants' blogs.

#### Interviews

It is said that interviews are perhaps the most widely used method in qualitative research. Cohen et al (2000) state that the interview is used by researchers as an instrument in their attempt to reach a rich understanding of people's lives, experiences and opinions. Since experience is a personal thing, it needs to be described in depth by those who have the experience themselves rather than through observation or simple yes/no questions or structured questions. For example, as I too was a language learner in a foreign country, I might use my own experience to design the questionnaire, which would become too subjective. Moreover, experience can not be squeezed into just in a few lines on paper.

Therefore, I decided that the interview would be the main method for my data collection.

All interviews were tape recorded on a 'Tandberg Educational TCR822 Audio Tutor' recorder. The participants of my main study were invited to have at least three interviews, either formal or informal ones. The first interview lasted about 45 minutes to one hour, and it was held in a school classroom or my accommodation in the university. This is the only interview where all participants were asked the same questions (see Appendix C). In the first interview, as suggested by Linda and Rita, I held the interview with both of them together, which was not in my original plan. It turned out well because they just kept talking and the atmosphere was relaxed. I did the second interview again with both of them together as this was their preference. However, I did not realise there were problems with this type of interview until I did the transcription and read through it. I found Rita dominated the conversations of these two interviews. Rita sometimes said things for Linda before Linda finished talking or sometimes Linda would just repeat Rita's answers. Therefore I was not sure if what Linda said was really her own opinion.

From the second interview, I started to arrange the remaining interviews in different places due to convenience, such as the school classroom, student's host family, a friend's house or my accommodation in the university. The second and the third interview normally lasted between one hour and two hours. Whenever I had the interviews in my accommodation or my friend's house, I tried to offer my participants snacks and tea or coffee, and I tried to make the atmosphere less formal.

All the participants, including those whom I only met once, had the final interview. It usually lasted longer, about two and half hours or more. In the final interview I asked the participants to use a drawing of a winding snake or river (Pope and Denicolo, 2001) (Figure 3.1) to recall their living and learning experiences from the time when they first arrived in Britain till the moment we had the last interview.



Britain, which they did not think they would do themselves. Jenny told me that she would like to do it again herself in the future. It is very encouraging to know that the interview was appreciated. And personally I was glad that it worked out as I had mentioned in the letter which I gave them at our first meeting – ‘During the process, you will have the opportunity to understand your own learning and personal development.’

From the above examples, I would suggest that researchers should not just talk about or ask for data from their participants. It is worth discussing their research methods with their participants, since after all the participants are also working with these methods.

#### The limits of interviews

The interview was my main method to collect data; nevertheless, it has its limitations. I will discuss them as follows.

What people say is one thing, and what they actually do might be quite another. Sometimes people would say what they believe, but not what they do. These kinds of situation happen in the cases of interview. The worst situation is deliberate deceit. And this can often be found quite some time after the accounts are published. After Sikes (2000) found out that she had been deliberately misled by one of her interviewees in a life history research project, she wrote an article talking about truths and lies in research. She discusses the reasons why people lie in the interview. They lie because they want people to think they are intelligent or they want to show their ability to overcome difficulties; they lie for social and psychological purposes.

Sometimes people forget things; it might be because too many things happen to them and they have inaccurate recall. Or people do not want to mention unhappy memories; they ‘only give what they are prepared to reveal’(Walford, 2001:90). This situation happened in my study. In the first two interviews, Rita did not mention about her Japanese friend, but from the third interview she started to mention about this friend who turned out to have a significant effect on her learning experience. This shows the advantage of conducting multiple interviews with a participant.

It happens quite often that the interviewee will say something which they think the interviewer wants to hear. The researcher should remember that ‘(W)hat people say in an interview is not the whole picture; adequate research and, in particular,

adequate theorizing, needs to take account of that' (Gillham, 2000:94). However I suggest that if one interview cannot give the researcher the whole picture, then multiple interviews can have the function of collating the missing pieces of 'jigsaw' to enable the researcher to complete the picture. This is why by having different interviews or gatherings with my participants I was able to compile a more complete picture of their learning experiences.

The other problem that occurred during my study was 'inconsistency', especially in Sharon's interviews. It made me connect it to how Sharon described her personality – changing all the time. On the other hand, it also made me recognise that sometimes this 'inconsistency' had helped me to understand how my participants' relationships to the social world changed over time and space.

Like other qualitative research methods, the interview is time consuming and a rather wearing business, including all the setting up and travelling, the interviewing, the transcribing and analysing. Its subjectivity is also inevitable. The interviewer may also face some reluctant respondents.

#### Informal group meetings

On some informal occasions, for example group dinners and informal chats, my friend, Terry, who is a native speaker with many years of experience hosting foreign students at home, was invited to join us. Given his experience and the fact that he was a native speaker, I felt that my research participants might feel encouraged to talk and practise their English in his presence.

I arranged two dinners with two different groups. The first dinner was held in Eric's house and it lasted for three hours. Eric, Linda, Sharon and my friend, Terry, were invited. During the dinner they were chatting in a relaxed manner, talking about various topics. I had the tape recorder on from the beginning to the end of the dinner, and I also video recorded from time to time. The second dinner was held in the dining area of my accommodation in the university and it lasted about two and a quarter hours. Geoff, Jenny, Judith and my friend, Terry, were invited. Geoff and Jenny were from the language school, and Judith was from the college. This was the first time Judith met Geoff and Jenny. During the dinner only the tape recorder was used.



The atmosphere of these two dinners was relaxed and friendly with flowing conversation, particularly at the second occasion, where the participants appeared enthusiastic to find out about each other's background and personal experiences.

I found the mobile phone with video recording function was very useful. It is small and handy and people see it as a phone not a video recorder, which did not appear to be intrusive when I was using it. Perhaps they felt less intimidated by the mobile phone than the video recorder. I used it when I did observations at the school party, in the pub and in Linda's house when she and Rita were making trifle with her landlady. The mobile phone which I used is 'Nokia N70'.

### Observation

I carried out observation when I attended some of the students' social events, for example attending their school party or going to a night club with them. I also carried out observation when Linda and Rita learned how to make trifle with Linda's landlady. I thought those occasions could offer good opportunities for me to investigate my participants' interaction with other people. I video recorded part of those events and I had some interesting findings. For example, smoking makes people get together more easily, and when they are smoking together, they usually chat to each other too. When I mentioned this to some of the participants, they (including Eric, Jenny, Judith and Geoff) agreed with it.

### Diary entry

Diary writing was one of the methods used for my data collection. It was not merely to collect the information from the diary, but also to help my non-Chinese speaking participants with their English as I promised to correct their diaries for them.

Although I explained in our first meeting that diary keeping could help both them and me to gain greater and useful insights into their living and learning abroad and that it could also provide them opportunities to get more experience in writing English, this data collection method was not efficient. Only one participant, Judith, took it seriously, but she stopped sending me her diary after she moved to a house where she did not have access to the Internet. During my interviews, when I asked my participants why they did not want to write or continue keeping the diary, they gave me their reasons, for example, Linda said 'in my head' and 'always in my mind'.

All my Chinese speaking participants, including three Taiwanese and one Chinese, told me at an early stage that they did not want to write or continue to write a diary. They preferred talking to writing. On the other hand, the two female Korean students told me that I should have kept insisting that they continue to write a diary. In fact, I was worried that if I kept checking if they were doing this for my study, they would feel under pressure and decide to drop out. I had this concern because when I first met Sharon, she asked me if she could drop out if she did not feel like continuing. It was difficult for me to judge whether I did the right thing or not by not checking frequently with them about their diary entry. I knew I did not want to lose any participant by giving them pressure which may lead to their unwillingness to continue my study. One interesting thing was that although Jenny said I should have forced her to write a diary for me, she admitted that she only wrote up her diary the day before I collected it. So, one thing that needs to be questioned here is to what extent the diary is factually accurate.

#### E-mail, MSN communication and blog

I also used online communication as a supplementary source. I had some MSN communications with Eric, Linda and Rita after they had finished their study in Ingramford. I saved the on-line chats into computer files or took notes after talking with them.

E-mail is a very common means of communication these days. However, Judith was the one who used e-mail to contact me most and to send me her diary. I was disappointed because when I wrote a mail to my participants, no one replied to me. I thought it might be because it was not easy for my participants to access the Internet. However, when I met them again, some of them told me that they had in fact received my e-mail. It seemed that they just ignored the e-mail.

I also discovered that blogs were a useful source for data collection. Linda wrote her unhappy feelings after returning to Taiwan, which she did not tell me when we were chatting on-line. The problem with blogs is the language which they are written in. I knew Jenny also had her own homepage, but it was in Korean, which unfortunately I could not understand.

### **3.4.3 Reflection on my role in this study**

I had different identities during this study. I was a research student in a British university, and same as my participants, I was also a foreigner learning English in the UK. In my study, I tried to keep myself a certain distance from my participants. During the data collection period, I did not really socialise with my participants. The social activities in which I joined them were for the purposes of data collection only. I did not engage in private social activities with my participants until I finished my data collection with them.

Although during the data collection, I arranged for my participants to meet a native speaker for the purposes of data collection, it did not influence my participants' social network in any way. The possible explanation can be that they saw my native-speaking friend as part of my research tool. Therefore, they did not see this native speaker as a possible opportunity to expand their social networks. Another explanation could be that they did not know how to build up a relationship with native speakers generally, which is one of the problems highlighted in this study.

### **3.5 Languages**

In order to let the Chinese speaking interviewees express themselves more freely, all formal interviews with them were conducted in Chinese. On the occasions where non-Chinese people were present, English was used. The only problem was that it took much longer to transcribe the interviews in Chinese than those in English.

With non-Chinese speaking participants, English was used during the interviews. As English was not the first language for the interviewer and the interviewees, sometimes the pace of interview was much slower. I found that one of the Korean students grew tired of expressing himself in English towards the end of the interview process. One explanation might be that he had just finished his class, so he got tired easily. However, I also did my interviews with Chinese speaking students after they finished their class, and they did not show this tiredness. Therefore, I supposed the tiredness was also caused by the constant use of English. In the future, if I conduct interviews in a foreign language again, the duration of the

interview needs to be considered, especially if the interviewees cannot express themselves fluently in that language.

In Chapter 4 Findings, when I quote what my Korean participants have said, I will present what they have said originally. I did not try to amend any of their English when I did the transcription. This also applied to my Taiwanese participants' words originally said in English. I translated my Taiwanese participants' words originally said in Chinese into English when I decided to quote them in this thesis (see Appendix D). In order to ensure the accuracy of the translations, I asked a friend in Taiwan, who is a university teacher and an experienced translator, to translate my translation in English back to Chinese. His translation corresponded to what my participants' originally said in Chinese.

### **3.6 Transcribing**

I started my transcribing journey with those eight main participants' first interviews and then continued with the rest of the interviews. After I decided to focus more on only four of my participants, I concentrated on finishing the transcribing of all their formal interviews and informal chats and dinner gatherings (see Appendices E and F).

Doing transcription is a long process. It is said that one one-hour tape takes about 5 to 6 hours, e.g. Bryman (2004), or 8 to 9 hours to transcribe, e.g. May (2001). However, according to my experience, it is longer than it is suggested, for example it took me about 25 hours to transcribe an 80-minute interview in Chinese. It is obviously time-consuming and tiring. Nevertheless, it helped me to recall the interviews. I also realised a proper transcribing machine really helped in this process, and I benefited by having one. The machine I used for this study is 'Sanyo Compact Cassette Transcribing System TRC-8080'.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

#### **3.7.1 Trial stage**

Firstly, I transcribed the first interviews of those eight participants who had more than one interview in order to get a general picture about them. While I continued conducting my research I kept doing the transcribing, but not analysing the data systematically at this stage. Although I had my research questions already, I was trying to do initial free coding (Richards, 2003) to analyse my data to see if there were any themes emerging. I started with Sharon's first interview. I was trying to underline all the statements which stood out for me, and at the same time, I also asked my friend to do the same. I realised I had underlined a lot and my opinions were rather different from my friend's. It worried me and I started to feel confused. It seemed to me that this was not an appropriate method by which to analyse my data. After discussing this with my supervisors, they suggested that I start it in a different way; otherwise I would not have sufficient time to finish the data analysis. One of them suggested that I look at only one participant's data first and see if the information I collected from that particular participant could answer all my research questions. (How I refined my research questions will be discussed in section 3.8.) Therefore, I started again with Sharon's data. The reason was that her data was all in English, and if I needed to discuss with my supervisors again to make sure that I was on the right track, it would be easier for us. As I was also planning to ask a friend to do the parallel underlining, the English version would be less complicated. After I finished my analysis of Sharon's data, I was happy that Sharon's data could answer all my research questions.

### **3.7.2 How I analysed my data**

The method I used for data analysis is content analysis. Gillham describes it as '*Qualitative* content analysis', which 'mainly involves transcribed speech and is textual in that sense but quite different from conventional written text' (Gillham, 2005:136).

Conducting interviews was the main method I used for my data collection and most of the data was taken from it; therefore, the process of my data analysis described here is focused on how I analysed my interview data. This process was also applied to my data collected through other methods.

Step 1:

I read through the transcription and highlighted the statements corresponding to my research questions with a different coloured marker for each question.

**Table 3.4 Colours used for answers to research questions**

colour	Question
orange	1. In what situations do learners have their interpersonal contact?
dark blue	2. Why are learners in these situations?
brown	3. Whether learners use their interpersonal contacts in these situations for language learning and use purposes? If so, how? If not, why?
green	4. What do they gain from these interpersonal contacts?
sky blue	5. What problems related to interpersonal contact do learners face in the host country?
grey	6. How do they deal with these problems?
purple	7. What kinds of effect do these interpersonal contacts have on them as language learners and users?
pink	8. Changes that learners experienced
pencil	9. Others

To answer the first question, I also noted (1) *who* (2) *where* (3) *what* activity (4) *why* did the activity happen and (5) *when / how often*. For the third question, I marked 'yes' or 'no' to indicate if the participants used or did not make use of the opportunities. And with question seven, I noted 'experience' for the examples the participants gave me and 'effects' for the effects they had from those experiences.

During the process of doing underlining, I found that the same statement could be used to answer different questions. Therefore, some statements were underlined with different colours. Moreover, for some statements which I could not decide to which questions they answered, I put a '?' for the time being.

Step 2:

I read through the transcription again and checked if there were any changes that needed to be made with regard to the underlining process or any significant statements that had been missed. During this time, I would also underline with pencil some interesting statements which did not directly answer the questions and I marked them as 'Others'. I kept them to see if I could discover some unforeseen questions or new thinking. However when I was reading more transcriptions, a

'theme' about the changes which my participants experienced emerged. Therefore, I decided to underline those changes with the colour pink. When Gillham discusses coding interview data, he states that 'everything is there for a purpose' (Gillham, 2005: 136). In an interview sometimes the interviewee may say something which is not or seems not to be relevant to the researcher's research questions; however, it can bring up new questions or thinking for the researcher.

At this stage I asked a friend to carry out a parallel underlining exercise. I compared my results with his, and discussed the differences between us. We either reached some agreements or I reconsidered the parts of our disagreement. I asked him to carry out this exercise with two copies of the transcription.

### Step 3:

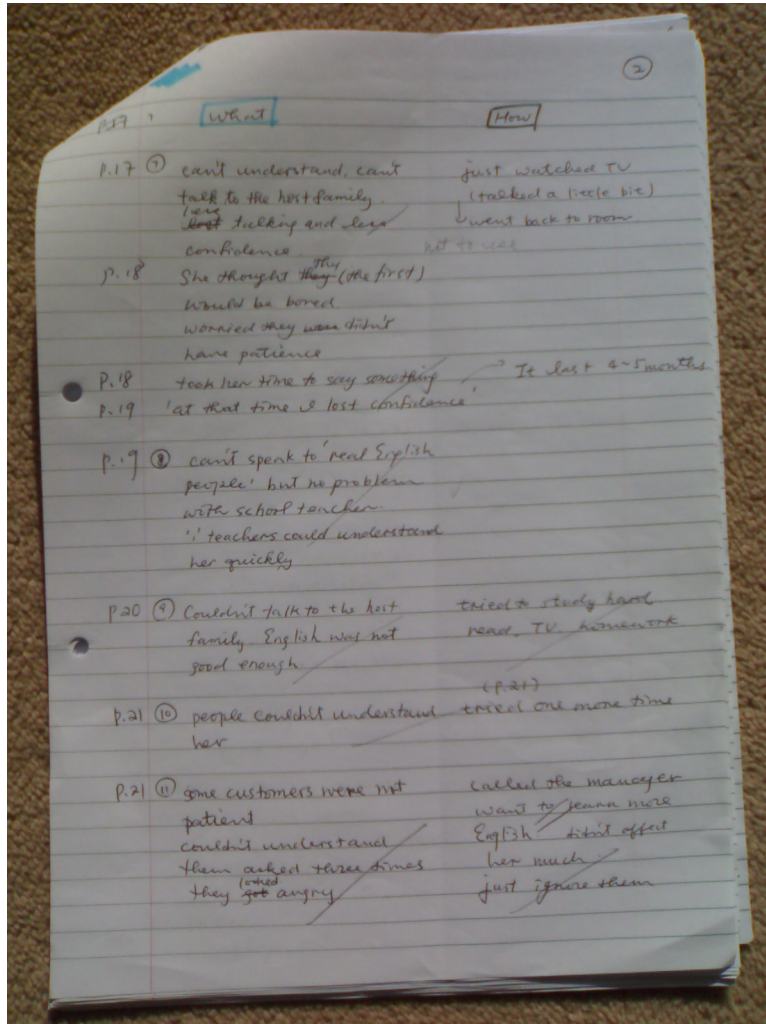
After reading through the transcription twice, I started to compile a list of all statements which corresponded to a particular question.

- Firstly, I set out a sheet of paper with the question at the top. One sheet of paper was prepared for each question and others added as necessary.
- Then I transferred the statements related to that particular question, either with my participants' words or my paraphrases, from the transcription onto the sheet of paper.
  - a. I put a number next to the statement on the transcription before transferring it onto the sheet.
  - b. Then I wrote down the number and the statement on the sheet, and also noted the number of the page where the statement was to be found on the transcription. This helped whenever I needed to check the source of a particular statement. (see Figure 3.2)

At this stage, some changes which had come to light in step 2 were reoccurring in step 3. After this step, I produced different lists of statements to answer my research questions from an individual transcription. Therefore each transcription had its own set of lists, which let me access the data easily. When I needed to compare data from a single participant or among different participants, I was able to use these sets of lists instead of going back to the original transcriptions.

I repeated step 1 to 3 for every transcription. Every participant had different amounts of list sets according to the number of times I recorded them, for example, Sharon had 5 sets, Rita had 6 sets, Linda had 6 sets, and Jenny had 5 sets.

**Figure 3.2 Sample of Data Analysis Process – Step 3**



Step 4:

The next stage was to compile those separate lists that were related to a particular question, and establish a set of headings for the statements. Because the topics which were discussed in different interviews were sometimes repeated, similar statements appeared in different transcriptions.

- I started with the first question. I looked through the list of statements for Question one from each transcription in turn and organised them into different headings.
- At the next stage, I compared and combined these headings and linked them



together to compile the final group of main heading and sub headings for each question (see Appendix G).

- Then I continued with the rest of the questions.

When I repeated the above process with other participants, I changed the wording of the headings if necessary in order to fit all of the relative data in. Here are the main group headings for each question:

**Table 3.5 Headings for each research question**

Question	Headings
1	Accommodation, School, Work, Others
2	Language reasons, Financial reasons, Social reasons, Emotional reasons, Others' influences, Practical reasons, New experiences
3	Making use of the opportunities – language learning, Making use of the opportunities – language use, Not making use of the opportunities – language learning, Not making use of the opportunities – language use
4	Language gain, Social gain, Knowledge gain, Financial gain, Others
5	Language, Interpersonal relationship, Topical issues
6	Language, Interpersonal relationship, Topical issues
7	As a learner, As a user
8	Psychological changes, Interpersonal development, Conceptual changes, Changes about language learning and use, Other changes

Step 5:

The last stage for my data analysis was to write a report of the data in a way that answered each of my research questions individually (see Appendix H). As I mentioned in step one, sometimes the same statement could be used to answer different questions; therefore, in some parts of the report the information was repeated.

As previously mentioned in 3.7.1 Trial stage, I began with Sharon's data, which was all in English. After Sharon's I started on Rita's, which was mainly in Chinese, and then I continued with Linda's and Jenny's. With Rita's and Linda's data, at step 3, I also needed to translate their statements from Chinese into English.

After I wrote up the report for each participant's data analysis, I asked a friend to read my data analysis and give me her opinions. This friend had a background of research in social sciences and had agreed to be a critical reader. It emerged that she had foreign students staying with her family and also had experience staying with a host family herself. She gave me some interesting and useful suggestions to think about and pointed out some areas that she felt needed more explanation. For example, I changed the term 'landlord' into 'the landlady's husband' and looked for a proper definition of 'host family'.

Based on my report of the data analysis, I wrote up my findings for this study. I e-mailed the copy of findings to each participant and asked for their feedback. They also replied to me and agreed mostly with what I wrote. There were only two things I was asked to change or omit. Rita corrected me about the title of her pre-master course and Linda asked me not to mention a certain piece of information in my thesis. I wrote back to Linda and explained how I could re-word it, but she still did not want me to include it. Therefore, I deleted that information.

### **3.8 Formulating my final research questions (with my supervisors and a fellow student)**

The provisional research questions I had at the beginning of this study were different from those I presented in this thesis. They were in the form of two main questions followed by a series of sub-questions.

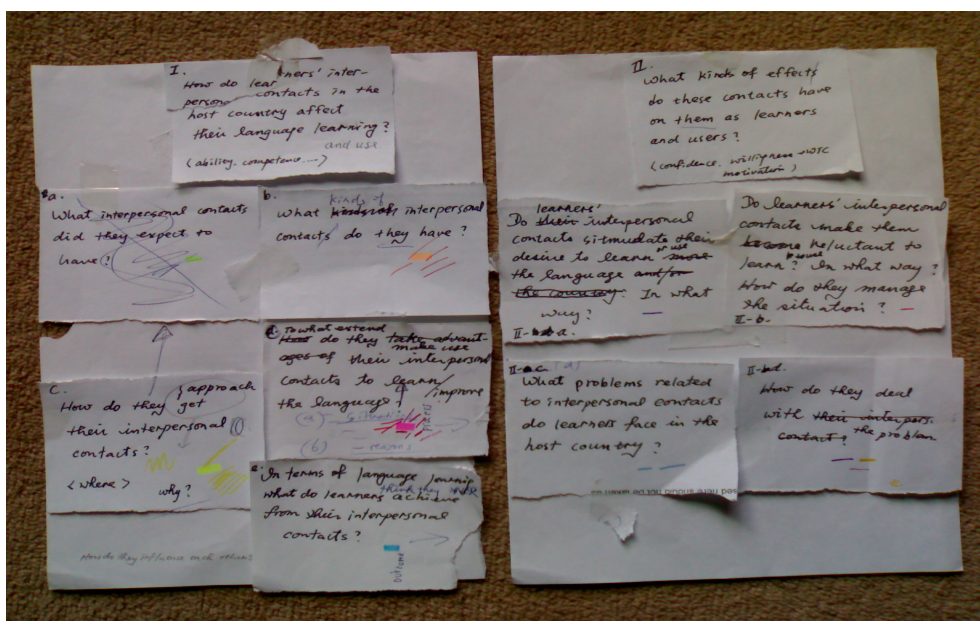
**Table 3.6 My provisional research questions**

I	How do learners' interpersonal contacts in the host country affect their language learning?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What interpersonal contacts did they expect to have?</li> <li>b. What kinds of interpersonal contact do they have?</li> <li>c. How do they approach/get their interpersonal contacts? Where? Why?</li> <li>d. To what extent do they make use of their interpersonal contacts to learn/improve the language?</li> <li>e. In terms of language learning and use what do learners think they achieve from their interpersonal contact?</li> </ul>

II	What kinds of effect do these contacts have on them as learners and users?
	<p>a. Do learners' interpersonal contacts stimulate their desire to learn or use the language?</p> <p>b. Do learners' interpersonal contacts make them reluctant to learn/use? In what way? (continued overleaf)</p> <p>c. What problems related to interpersonal contacts do learners face in the host country?</p> <p>d. How do they deal with the problems?</p>

In one of my tutorials I was asked to bring along these provisional research questions in order to discuss them with my supervisors. In order to explain the connection between them, I wrote each question onto small pieces of note paper and arranged them into two groups on two A4-size sheets of paper.

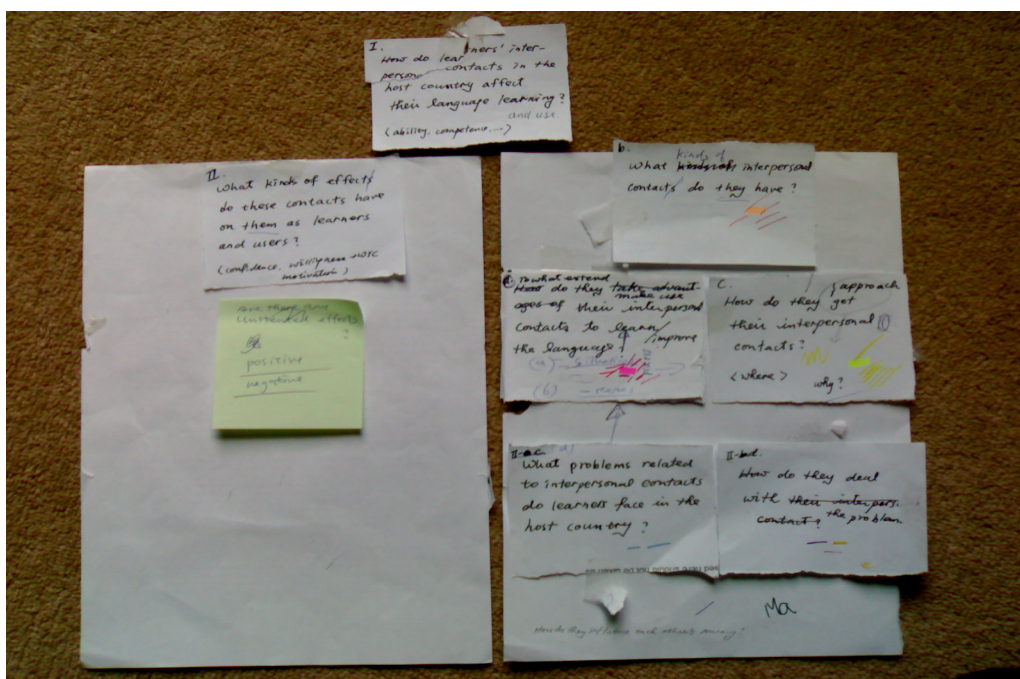
**Figure 3.3 Arrangement of my provisional research questions**



After my supervisors studied them, they commented on the links between the questions and suggested certain changes that might help. We then decided to place everything on the floor, we knelt down and everyone started to rearrange the small note papers containing the questions into various alternative formats. Through this exercise, we were able to identify several unnecessary questions and selected the one we all thought should be the lead question – How do learners' interpersonal contacts in the host country affect their language learning and use? We decided that

in order to assess 'how', I should look at 'process' and 'outcome'. Therefore, questions related to 'in what way', 'to what extent' and 'what is achieved' would then be appropriate types of questions to consider. For 'process' I would look at 'What kinds of interpersonal contact do they have?' as the first main question, and for 'outcome' I would use 'What kinds of effect do these contacts have on them as learners and users?' Then we discussed 'How do they approach/get their interpersonal contacts? Where? Why?' could be changed to 'In what situations' and 'What are the reasons', which then could be asked together with (I-d), (II-c) and (II-d) in order to answer the first main question. With regard to the second question, we decided it was not necessary to have any sub-questions. I just needed to identify whether the effect was negative or positive. We then came to the conclusion that the rest of the questions could be disregarded.

**Figure 3.4 Arrangement of my research questions after the tutorial**



Through this experience I learned that it was important to discuss ideas with not only your supervisors but also your fellow students. I now recognise that this exercise was an activity within our 'community of practice'.

**Table 3.7 My research questions after the tutorial**

	<b>How do learners' interpersonal contacts in the host country affect their language learning and use?</b>
I	What kinds of interpersonal contact do they have?
	a. In what situations? b. What are the reasons? c. To what extent do they make use of their interpersonal contacts to learn/improve the language? d. What problems related to interpersonal contacts do learners face in the host country? e. How do they deal with the problems?
II	What kinds of effect do these contacts have on them as learners and users?
	a. positive b. negative

After that tutorial I finalised my research questions for the thesis as follows. I added an extra question 'what do they gain from those interpersonal contacts' to set I, because I felt it was important to find out if these gains would help them maintain their motivation of learning English.

**Table 3.8 Final research questions for this study**

	<b>How do learners' interpersonal contacts in the host country affect their language learning and use?</b>
I	What kinds of interpersonal contact do learners have?
	a. In what situations do learners have their interpersonal contacts? b. Why are learners in these situations? c. Whether learners use their interpersonal contacts in these situations for language learning and use purposes? If so, how? If not, why? d. What do they gain from these interpersonal contacts? e. What problems related to interpersonal contact do learners face in the host country? f. How do they deal with these problems?
II	What kinds of effect do these contacts have on them as language learners and users?

In the following chapter I will present my findings based on the last two sets of questions and will present the findings of my participants respectively. Each

participant's findings are presented corresponding to each research question in order.

## Chapter 4 Findings

As I stated in Chapter 3, I had 11 participants in total for this study. After considering the possibility of managing all the data I had obtained and also consulting with my supervisors, I decided to focus on four participants for this thesis. They were Jenny and Sharon from Korea, and Linda and Rita from Taiwan. The reasons for this decision included that among all of my participants, I had met with them the most. They were all involved in the various methods I had used for my data collection. Also, they had various social contacts, not only within the school and host family. In this chapter I will present the findings for these four participants respectively. For each participant, I will firstly show the dates I collected the data and how I collected the data. I will also list the keys used for reference of the sources of data. Secondly, I will describe each participant's background. Following their background, I will present the findings according to my questions which are as follows:

- I. What kinds of interpersonal contact do learners have?
  - a. In what situations do learners have their interpersonal contact?
  - b. Why are learners in these situations?
  - c. Whether learners use their interpersonal contacts in these situations for language learning and use purposes? If so, how? If not, why?
  - d. What do they gain from these interpersonal contacts?
  - e. What problems related to interpersonal contact do learners face in the host country?
  - f. How do they deal with these problems?
  
- II. What kinds of effect do these interpersonal contacts have on them as language learners and users?

Before I present my findings, there are some points I would like to clarify.

- (1) From time to time four names apart from these four participants will be mentioned, namely Eric (a Taiwanese student), Kelly (a Korean student staying in the same host family with Linda), Mari (a Japanese student Rita mentioned

frequently) and Terry (a native speaker who appeared in informal gatherings). Eric had his family with him, so he rented a house in the town, and he enjoyed inviting students, including Taiwanese and non-Taiwanese, to his house.

- (2) The term ‘host family’ is used in a broad sense. That means it can be a family consisting of parent(s) with children, a couple or a single person, basically providing meal(s) and rooms. In Jenny’s case, she was a lodger in the second family she stayed with because the family did not offer her dinner. She still called it ‘host family’.
- (3) ‘School’ refers to ‘language school’
- (4) Key to data references: Details of data sources are presented as follows: (participant/how or where data was collected/date/page of transcription or note/my translation). For example, ‘L/int.1/18nov05/p5/t’ indicates the quote was drawn from Linda’s first interview on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2005, which was recorded on the transcription page 5, and it was translated by me. That is, L: (Linda), int.1: (first interview), 18nov05: (18<sup>th</sup> November, 2005), p5: (page 5), t: (my translation). However, ‘p’ (page) does not appear if no exact words are quoted, and ‘t’ (translation) does not appear if the quote was originally in English.

- Contexts in which data was collected are represented as follows:

c	café	d	dinner
e-m	e-mails	E’s	Eric’s
int	interview	m	MSN messenger
nc	night club	n’s	native speaker’s house
pb	pub	sp	school party
S’s	Sharon’s	sv	short visit
tm	trifle making session	w	work

- Four participants:

J	Jenny	L	Linda
R	Rita	S	Sharon



## 4.1 Jenny

Table 4.1 Data relating to Jenny

	Date	Methods of data collection	Key
1	18-11-2005	<i>First interview</i> (in school)	J/int.1/18nov05
2	13-01-2006	Informal chat (in a <i>café</i> with other students)	J/c/13jan06
3	17-02-2006	<i>School party</i> (observation)	J/sp/17feb06
4	03-03-2006	Informal chat and observation (in a <i>night club</i> with other students)	J/nc/03mar06
5	19-05-2006	<i>Second interview</i> (in my accommodation)	J/int.2/19may06
6	14-08-2006	Group meeting ( <i>dinner</i> in my accommodation, including Geoff, Judith, and a native speaker, Terry)	J/d/14aug06
7	29-09-2006	<i>Final interview</i> (in my accommodation)	J/int.fin/29sep06
8	15-06-2007	Informal chat (in a <i>pub</i> )	J/pb/15jun07
9	23-06-2007	Observation (at her <i>work</i> )	J/w/23jun07

### 4.1.1 Background

Jenny is from Korea and she decided to study English abroad because she wanted to improve her English for her career. Making friends from different countries, learning about cultures of different countries and having a variety of experiences were also her reasons to study abroad. She chose the UK in preference to other English speaking countries because she could easily travel to other European countries from the UK, she could work in the UK with her student visa and she had heard 'English was born in England' (J/int.1/18nov05/p2). She stayed in the UK for approximately 22 months; about 19 to 20 months of these were spent in Ingramford in the Midlands, and 2 to 3 months in London. She only attended morning classes in the language schools. During her time staying in Ingramford, she stopped going to school for two months. When she finally returned to school, she felt that this absence had refreshed her.

In Ingramford, Jenny stayed with three different host families and ended up staying in a flat with a young English woman of a similar age until she went to London. The landlady of the third host family was Jenny's colleague from her part-time job in the tea room, and the flatmate was a niece of another colleague from the tea room.

Jenny's original plan was to only stay for one year in the UK, but she did not think her English had improved enough and she wanted to 'more speak naturally' (J/int.2/19may06/p52), so she decided to stay longer and move to London and take language courses in a language school there. She was apprehensive about moving to London. In contrast she stated that she was not worried when she first arrived in the UK, because she knew that she would be looked after by a host family. She was also nervous because for her London seemed to be more dangerous. She was trying to find a part-time job in London. She told me that she did not want to work in a Chinese or Korean restaurant, where she did not think she would have opportunities to practise English. Unfortunately, she had a difficult time in London so she decided to go back to Ingramford. She only stayed in London for two months. She was in such a bad situation that her flatmate in Ingramford actually went to London to take her back to Ingramford, where she stayed with her flatmate again for another 6 months until she went back to Korea.

Jenny had different part-time jobs; she worked for a fast-food restaurant (only for about a month), a hotel (occasionally), a tea room in Ingramford, and a restaurant in London. She got along well with her colleagues in the tea room and when she moved back from London, she worked in the same tea room again.

Jenny was very determined to improve her English and study hard. In her first interview, she told me 'every day my desire is improving my English' (J/int.1/18nov05/p26). And in her final interview, when I asked her if customers' impatient attitudes would encourage or discourage her to study hard, she said no. She said 'I always want to study hard' and it was nothing to do with their attitudes (J/int.fin/29sep06/p22). In our later meetings, she always asked me if I could tell whether her English had improved or not. According to her, her first year in the UK was a great experience. 'Finally very happy, all one year living, great experience.' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p43). In fact, in her first interview she already told me she was happy with her life in the UK and she was happy to accept the differences between Korea and Britain. She said 'living in the UK is my desire' (J/int.1/18nov05/p26).

After she went back to Korea, she wanted to take a TOEIC test, Test of English for International Communication, which is essential for looking for a job in Korea. She was a bit worried about her future when she returned to Korea, for example, she would have to start all over again, she would be one year older, and her friends were already married (J/int.fin/29sep06). When I met her before she went back to Korea, she said to me that she was not ready to go home and she felt under pressure (J/p6/15jun07).

Although Jenny stayed in the UK for 22 months, in this study I only focus on her first year, in Ingramford in the Midlands.

#### **4.1.2 In what situations did Jenny have her interpersonal contact?**

##### Accommodation

Jenny's accommodation situation was more complicated than many of the other students in school. She stayed in three different families and finally stayed in a flat with an English woman.

Like many of the students in the language school she was attending, when Jenny applied for the course, she asked the language school to arrange for her to stay with a host family. The first family consisted of just the landlady and the landlady's husband. Sometimes the landlady's daughters would come to see their parents, and therefore, Jenny had opportunities to meet them. She stayed with this family for two months. During these two months, Jenny also met the host family's friends, which she thought was a 'lovely time'. She said that sometimes she sang Korean songs for them (J/int.fin/29sep06/p14). According to Jenny, the oldest daughter, who was of a similar age to her, was kind to her. If Jenny could not understand what they were talking about, the eldest daughter would explain to her slowly and also tried to understand Jenny (J/int.fin/29sep06). She said that the host family was nice and kind to her. According to Jenny, she mainly talked with the landlady, and sometimes only she and her landlady had dinner together. They talked about daily life, and sometimes her landlady would explain the dishes she cooked. The landlady could cook very well (J/int.1/18nov06). Sometimes the host family helped Jenny with her English.

However, after Jenny had a part-time job, she moved to another family, where she did not have to have dinner with the family. The landlady was divorced with a son. Unfortunately, she did not get along well with the second host family. Jenny spent her Christmas with the landlady, the son and the landlady's mother, but she found during the Christmas dinner, the mood was 'sad' and 'depressing'. She said she did not learn anything special about Christmas from them, and the Christmas she had was not good (J/c/13jan06/p2). In fact, in the final interview, she used some negative words to describe the landlady – horrible, not kind, not good personality, and annoying. According to Jenny, the landlady always tried to say things in an indirect way and liked to set rules for Jenny. Her problems with this host family will be described more in the 'problems' section. Jenny told me she spent a lot of time in her own room when she got back from work and school. As we shall see, it was similar to Sharon when she stayed with her first host family. Also Jenny ended up just buying herself ready cooked microwave meals, because she did not want to spend too much time in the kitchen. It seems that Jenny did not have much interaction with this host family.

Two months later Jenny decided to move to another place. She moved to stay with her colleague's family – her colleague, her colleague's husband and their son. The colleague was from the tea room. The son was quiet and spent a lot of time in his own room. Jenny had a good time with this family. She sometimes helped the landlady – her colleague – to cook dinner; she would also watch TV with them after dinner, or chatted with them. They did kick boxing together and also went to restaurants together (J/int.2/19may06). Jenny got along well with them but one problem was that the house was too far from the town and the school. Therefore, she usually needed the host family to take her or pick her up when she went out. Jenny felt she was stuck in the house. When the landlady decided to leave the job in the tea room and go to work in the neighbouring big city, it was time for Jenny to think of changing places again.

Jenny had a good relationship with the manager in the tea room, so the manager helped her to find a place to stay. Eventually, Jenny moved to live with the manager's niece in a flat. She had a good time staying there. She felt 'very happy, very comfortable, because she is not really neat, like me...very comfortable, like my house' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p38). They were of a similar age and also they had 'many things common, common topics' (J/int.2/19may06/p3). They sometimes cooked

for each other. Jenny told me her flatmate did not like to go out in the evening, so they spent time at home chatting, moaning about work, or watching TV. Jenny also discussed her problems with her flatmate (J/int.2/19may06; J/int.fin/29sep06). Before she had a job interview, the flatmate practised with her. The flatmate seldom had visitors; her aunt, Jenny's manager, sometimes came to the flat and had dinner with them and sometimes invited them to her house (J/int.2/19may06).

### School

In school, Jenny socialised with students from Korea and other countries. They usually went out for farewell drinks whenever some students were leaving. Sometimes the school also arranged a party for the students, which created good opportunities for them to talk to their fellow students and teachers.

Jenny's best friend at the language school was from Korea. Her name was Kelly, and she was Linda's (my Taiwanese participant) housemate. Kelly's going back to Korea affected Jenny a lot, which I will describe in the 'effects' section. She told me that she also liked a Thai student, and she thought Thai students suited her. She also got along well with a Japanese female student. Jenny went out with her and also invited her to dinner in her flat. In the school situation, Jenny seemed to be close to Asian students.

### Work

In the tea room, Jenny had interpersonal contact with native speakers. Jenny had a good relationship with the manager in the tea room. 'Like my mother, she really looks after me' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p58). Apart from the manager, Jenny had opportunities to socialise with other colleagues, especially with those who were of her own age. As she said, they usually had a girls' talk. 'Age is same and same topics, same... yeah... it's good' (J/int.2/19may06/p49). Once she did an interview with her colleagues about good skin and good health as part of her homework from school (J/int.fin/29sep06). She went out with her colleagues, for example, to a night club for a colleague's hen party.

In the tea room Jenny also had opportunities to talk to customers, but these were only small chats, like asking where she was from, and sometimes some customers told her jokes, which she could not understand (J/int.2/19may06). She told me that

‘usually old couple visit there so they are really patient, comparing young, young people’ (J/int.fin/29sep06/p30).

In the beginning Jenny worked in a fast-food restaurant. She said it was very busy there, so she did not have many chances to talk to her colleagues. Most people working there were Polish, which also restricted her interaction (J/int.1/18nov06).

#### Other

When Jenny went out to places, for example, pubs or night clubs, she also talked to people she met in those places, for example, a drunk woman in a night club (J/nc/03mar06). Although Jenny could not really understand her, she just listened and smiled (J/int.2/19may06). Other situations for her to meet and talk to people included job interviews, in shops, in church, in the gym, and participating in my study. Jenny was the only one among my participants who mentioned having been to church and the gym to meet people. Participating in my study was another contact for Jenny. And she also met my English friend, Terry, several times.

### **4.1.3 Why was Jenny in these situations?**

#### To improve her English

Staying in a host family or staying with non-Korean people, socialising with school friends and colleagues, Jenny had many opportunities to use and learn English. She told me that she wanted to have a part-time job, because she wanted to have the opportunity to speak English (J/int.1/18nov06) and ‘have a chance to talk real English’ (J/int.fin/29sep06/p23).

#### To save money

Jenny had a good relationship with her first host family, but after she had a part-time job, she was not able to have dinner with the family. Therefore, she decided to change to a family where she did not have to have dinner, which could save her money. However, this might have reduced her chance to interact with the family at the dinner table and therefore limited her learning or use of the English language. Another reason she wanted to have a part-time job was that she could have money to pay for her accommodation and have some pocket money (J/int.1/18nov06).

She also mentioned that with more hours' work, she could save for her later trips (J/int.2/19may06).

#### For social reasons

She went to pubs or night clubs with friends because she wanted to meet people, for example, she would like to meet a 'gorgeous Englishman' 'naturally' in the night clubs although she realised 'I think no way...' (J/int.2/19may06/p61; J/int.1/18nov06). Going to pubs is also a good way to socialise with other students from the school. 'If some, if new students want to have many friends, they would go some pubs to really get along with other friends' (J/int.2/19may06/p39), and sometimes students would go for farewell drinks when students were leaving. In my experience of going to a night club with her and other students, I noticed that it was difficult to talk to and hear people there because the music was loud. I also noticed that they just sat together with their own group (J/nc/03mar06).

#### Feeling lonely and homesick

In her first interview Jenny told me that when she felt lonely, she preferred to meet Korean students (J/int.1/18nov05). However in her second interview, she said after her close Korean friend, Kelly, went back to Korea, whenever she felt homesick or lonely, she would call her work colleagues (J/int.2/19may06). In her last few weeks before she moved to London, she met some new Korean students in the language school. She went out with them almost every day, and this made her very happy because she could talk about serious problems which she could not discuss before.

#### Others

As I described in 4.1.2 Accommodation, Jenny did not get along well with her second host family, so she decided to move out. And because of the inconvenience, she moved to a flat from her third host family.

### **4.1.4 Whether Jenny used her interpersonal contacts in these situations for language learning and use purposes? If so, how? If not, why?**

#### **(A) Making use of the opportunities**

### Learning from accommodation situations

As most homestay programmes emphasise – e.g. ‘staying with a host family is definitely a great way to learn the language’ (iGapeyear, no date) – Jenny had opportunities to learn English in her homestay situations. ‘They (her first host family) are really helpful, for example, if I cou...if I didn’t say properly, they fixed which I wrong, which I said the wrong grammar.’ From her homestay she also picked up words she did not know before. For example, she learned ‘quid’ and ‘tata’ from her third host family (J/int.2/19may06/p22).

### Learning from work

At work, Jenny’s manager knew that Jenny was learning English, so she would correct her mistakes. ‘Her, she knows I am learning English and I want to learn their say, so she... if I say a little bit strange one, she corrects my English’ (J/int.2/19may04/p12). ‘My manager...she always patient to me and she tried to fix up, which I speak wrong grammar or wrong...’ (J/int.fin/29sep06/p21). According to her, she did not mind her manager correcting her English and appreciated her doing so.

She could not understand what her teenage colleagues said, so she wanted to learn the words which teenagers used. She said it was the same in Korea; it was not easy to understand teenagers’ language. She would try to pick up what they said and if she could not understand, she would ask them. ‘I really want to learn their saying because I really want to join with them. ... if you learn English, especially only in school, we only learn about formal words, not slang, no different, only we learn like formal ones, polite expression, very different’ (J/int.2/19may06/p11).

In her final interview, she said ‘because they talk, like their way, their way, so I could catch you never learn in school, so... some... some information which I never learn there, so it’s quite interesting, because if... it’s more helpful to naturally speaking here, because we usually learn formal way’ (J/int.fin/29sep06/p25). As we shall see Rita also had a similar experience.

### Use in accommodation situations



As I described in 4.1.2 Accommodation, apart from when Jenny stayed with her second host family, she would usually talk with members of the host families she stayed with or her flatmate.

#### Use at work

At work, Jenny tried to join in her colleagues' conversation. According to her, it took her about five months to start to communicate more with her colleagues (J/int.fin/29sep06). She also tried to use what she learned from school with her colleagues, and sometimes her colleagues would have a big laugh (J/int.2/19may06; J/int.fin/29sep06). '... I tried to use the idioms for my tea room colleagues, and they, they, when I said that one, there was a big laughing, because it's correct way, but they think it's like old fashion expression, so it doesn't make sense with them. But they said it's correct way, but they never used that one' (J/int.2/19may06/p12). 'They understand what I say. Even I say correct, they laugh, because I am a foreigner, it was strange to them.' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p10). Although she did not say this was a problem for her, it could be an underlying problem. As we shall see Rita also mentioned similar situations when she tried to use what she learned from school with her colleague at the pub.

#### Use in other situations

Jenny tried to talk to people she met in different situations, for example, some ladies in the gym or drunk people in the pubs. Although she knew it was not possible to make friends with those drunken people she met, she did not mind talking to them. 'I don't mind. I want, I like, I enjoy meeting people.' (J/int.2/19may06/p17). Rita also liked meeting people.

She went for a job interview, where she needed to have a group discussion with people from different parts of Britain and different countries. Although sometimes she could not understand because of different accents or cultures, she still tried to give her opinions because she wanted to get through the interview.

### **(B) Not making use of the opportunities**

The target language community offers learners a lot of opportunities to learn and use the language. Nevertheless, learners may not make full use of those available

opportunities. Here are some situations when Jenny did not use these opportunities. The reasons she gave not to use the opportunities included that her English was not good enough, or it was an unimportant situation, or it was not a good relationship.

Sometimes Jenny could not understand what people said, she told me she would pretend that she understood and she thought it was quite natural to pretend. Or sometimes, if she did not think it was important, e.g. a joke, she would not ask again (J/int.fin/29sep06).

When I had the final interview with Jenny, she told me she only kept in touch with a couple of students after they went back to their own countries. I asked her the reason, and she said 'I don't bother because I don't want to send e-mails to everybody' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p40). Another participant, Linda, also was not keen on keeping in touch with the students she met in the school after they went back to their home countries. Written form of contact seemed not to be favoured by them, although it could also help them use and learn English.

#### **4.1.5 What did Jenny gain from those interpersonal contacts?**

As shown above, learning and using English in different situations with different people allowed Jenny to have opportunities to gain language ability.

With all the interpersonal contacts she had, she certainly made friends or met other people through them. It was her social gain. Working part time also helped Jenny financially.

She also gained some knowledge. She learned from a host family that in the UK females and males shared responsibility, which was different from Korea. In Korea, 'father power' was the most important and the strongest (J/int.1/18nov05/p22). She was happy to learn teenagers' language at work. According to her, through their language, she could also understand more about teenagers' culture. She said 'language is culture' (J/int.2/19may06/p11). Once she went out with her colleagues for a hen party, which they did not have in Korea. She thought it was very good. 'It's like one of the real tradition, culture in here. I really appreciate that.' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p29).

At her work she also gained some knowledge she did not have before. For example, she did not know what teacake was before she worked in the tea room. In

our group dinner, she told us a strange name of a pudding – Spotted Dick (J/d/14aug06). She also mentioned that she did not know the word ‘serviette’ until she worked in the fast-food restaurant. In Korea they use the word ‘napkin’ (Je/int.1/18nov06).

Through participating in my study, she had some opportunities to use her English or discuss her problems, and had opportunities to meet my native speaking friend and a Polish girl. She told me she was not confident enough to talk to people on the phone in English. Therefore, my friend and I tried to give her some advice about talking on the phone in order to make her less nervous. When we had dinner together, including Jenny, Geoff (another Korean participant), Judith (my Polish participant), a native speaker and I, we talked about various topics, for example, different cultures, language learning, British society, etc. It was an opportunity for Jenny to gain some cultural knowledge.

#### **4.1.6 What problems related to interpersonal contact did Jenny face in the host country and how did she deal with these problems?**

##### **(A) Language**

###### She could not understand people at work

In the tea room sometimes when she could not understand customers’ orders, she would ask them to repeat what they had said. She said when she asked about three times, the customers looked angry, and she had to ask for help from the manager. With some customers’ impatient reactions, she would just ignore them. As we shall see it was similar to Rita’s reaction toward some unfriendly customers at her work (J/int.fin/29sep06). After she had worked in the tea room for about 5 months, she said ‘I, now I still can’t understand, there are some different accents... some customers, like live, from different areas, sometimes I really can’t understand their saying. So, I was very worried.’ Luckily, the manager would comfort her and tell her that sometimes she could not understand customers, either (J/int.2/19may06/p9).

Although it was generally easier to understand her fellow students’ English than native speakers outside the school, she found it was easier to understand Asian

students' accents than European students'. 'It's like each Asian people can understand very easily... even they say different accents, anyway, same Asian accents can understand...but some European people, for example Spanish, it was difficult to...'. (J/int.2/19may06/p9-10). This situation was also described by Linda, Rita and Sharon. However she seemed not to worry too much, as she added 'but I think it doesn't matter' (J/int.2/19may06/p10). She also mentioned that students at school did not use slang, which was one of the reasons that she could understand them better than people outside the school.

According to Jenny, one of her colleagues in the tea room spoke very quickly and it was hard for her to understand that colleague. Luckily, she said that colleague did not mind repeating what she had said. She also said that it was easier to talk with just one person than two together. If she talked to one of her colleagues, she could understand, 'because I already knew what, what they are talking about'. And if she was with two other people she found it difficult to join in the conversation. 'Sometimes even I, I never get what, what we are talking about.' 'because quite really speaking quickly, and fast' (J/int.fn/29sep06/p26). It is probably because when only one person talked to Jenny, this other person needed to make sure that Jenny understood what they were talking about; also in that situation Jenny had more opportunities to ask for clarification or repetition. When there was another person or more joining in the conversation, she was easily neglected and without her participation the conversation could still continue.

At work some of Jenny's colleagues were teenagers and according to her, she could not understand what they said; she called them 'teenagers' words.' 'I think the old people say is very correct type say, but teenagers really...it's like not English for me.' (J/int.2/19may/p10&49). Or sometimes her colleagues would use slang, which made it difficult for her to understand. When she could not understand the words or slang that her colleagues used, she would ask them the meanings and learned them (J/int.2/19may/p10).

#### Others could not understand her

Jenny's problems with English were not only about being unable to understand others, but also about not being understood by others. However, although native speakers could not understand her, the teachers and the students in school could understand her. 'They can guess my English.' (J/int.1/18nov06/p7). Linda also said

the same. 'I can talk teacher, but I couldn't talk like real English people.' 'Because the teachers really can understand quickly what I am saying, but it was different, so...'(J/int.fin/29sep06/p19). If people could not understand her, she would try one more time, 'one more time, but after that they can't understand, I just give up, because there is no way' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p21).

#### She could only say 'yes' or 'no'

When she first arrived in the UK, her English was not very good. 'The first host family, just like first time we, we introduced our, us each other, and then actually, I can't, I couldn't speak very well, just if they asked something, I could only say 'yes' or 'no', or some one word or two words, like that, so..' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p15). She said it took her a long time to reply or say a long sentence, and she was worried that the host family would get bored with her. Therefore, she did not really talk a lot with them; she would just watch TV and then go back to her room (J/int.fin/29sep06). She also mentioned she could not understand her first family, 'probably I used to learn, like different accents, not like English accent' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p12). She thought she had to try to change to a British accent. In order to improve the situation, she tried to study hard, read books and watch TV to improve her listening comprehension.

#### She could not talk to native speakers

Like Linda, Jenny did not feel easy talking to 'foreigners', by which she means native speakers. 'When I talk to foreigners I have more tension, so couldn't speak English.' She said it was because 'foreigners' had 'different appearance' (J/int.1/18nov05/p8). However 'close foreigner' was alright for her, like the teachers in school, 'teacher is very comfortable for me' but not those she met first time (J/int.1/18nov05/p8). When she met people for the first time, she wanted to speak English correctly (J/int.2/19may06).

### **(B) Interpersonal relationship**

#### Bad relationship

Jenny did not get along well with the second host family. In our informal chat in a café, she told me she did not feel comfortable with the landlady. The landlady

blamed Jenny for not cleaning the oven, but in fact, according to Jenny it was the landlady who did not clean it. She also did not feel comfortable about the way her landlady talked to her. 'When I speak to, she wants, when she wants to speak to me, she not speak directly. She does, does speak around, others was directly speak to me.' 'Uncomfortable feeling' (J/c/13jan06/p2). Once, when Jenny had a friend to the house, the landlady asked the friend to pass a message to Jenny even when she was there with them. At that time she was thinking of moving to another place. Another problem Jenny had with that landlady was 'rules' in the house. 'She usually gave me some rules. You can't do that, and you, you haven't to go this, like, she, she like she's habit is making some rules for me.' 'I really mind...I really felt very uncomfortable.' (J/int.2/19may06/p19). Her attitude towards the landlady was to avoid her and she also decided to move to another place (J/int.fin/29sep06). Jenny told me she did not want to talk to the landlady and stayed in her room a lot of time. Apparently, she did not have much interaction with the landlady. She did not make friends with her colleagues at a fast-food restaurant and a hotel. 'We were not really interested in each other.' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p25). It apparently affected her opportunities to use English.

#### Lazy colleagues at work

In her last interview, Jenny said some of her colleagues were lazy, and did not like doing the washing up. She was angry with them, but she did not say anything. 'I really angry because... I don't know. In Korea, I really would tell them, but here, this job is quite important for me, then I don't, I want to get along with everything. So, I thought just I'd better do, do myself.' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p31). She also mentioned that a new member of staff was lazy and tried to take charge of her. Unfortunately, she was the manager's sister-in-law, so she could not say anything. 'I really angry about that, but just let ... because I, I have got only like one month more, I, I am not working any more, so I just patient just one month.' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p31). Her attitude was similar to Linda's, choosing to be quiet although in her mind she was not happy.

#### They did not want to speak English

In school during the break time, students from the same country usually spoke their own language together. 'They seem don't like to speak English during the break

time.’ (J/int.1/18nov05/p16). Jenny also told me that most of the colleagues she met in the fast-food restaurant and the hotel were from Poland, and most of the time they were talking to each other in Polish. ‘...but every, every people who work together, they are all Polish, and they talk all Polish. They didn’t help at all to learn English.’ (J/int.fin/29sep06/p24). ‘Well... except me, most people were Polish and they didn’t want to speak English. They usually speak Polish. Well, I don’t, I didn’t enjoy it.’ (J/int.2/19may06/p46-47).

#### It was not easy to make friends with native speakers

Although she had some native speaking friends, she did not think it was easy to get to know local native speakers and make friends with them. ‘Hardly ever, have no chance to meet other foreigners or English.’ (J/int.1/18nov05/p18). ‘...we have no chance at all... we only have a chance to meet our students’ (J/int.2/19may/p44). ‘...it’s my case really lucky everybody said. Because they know and I think so, it’s impossible to meet actually. So, like some of students didn’t, never met any local people here, they just say their family. So...no chance.’ (J/int.fin/29sep06/p60).

She did not think native speakers were interested in making friends with foreigners. She thought they were ‘close mind’ and ‘they have not enough patience to listen.’ (J/int.fin/29sep06/p61). As we shall see, Linda and Sharon had similar opinions.

Nevertheless, native speakers should not be the only ones to be complained about. ‘When we go to night club, usually just enjoy each other in our group’ (J/int.2/19may06/p17). I noticed this kind of situation when I went to a night club with them. The group of students from the language school were sitting in one corner together, drinking and chatting within the group. One or two in the group did not talk much, and were just drinking most of the time (J/nc/03mar06).

### **(C) Topical issues**

#### Jokes, she could not laugh at

Sometimes customers would tell Jenny jokes, but she could not understand them. However she laughed although she could not really understand or she did not think the jokes were funny. ‘the gentleman gave, give me a little joking. But I can’t understand, but the situation I have to laugh.’ ‘Sometimes I really try to understand

also, but I can't laugh a lot at all, because it's not funny to me.' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p30). The difficulty she had might be because of the linguistic problem or cultural background difference. Linda also mentioned that she could not understand British humour.

#### **4.1.7 What kinds of effect did these interpersonal contacts have on Jenny as a language learner and user?**

##### **(A) As a learner**

###### Her English improved

In her last interview, she said that she 'could speak more naturally than before (J/int.fin/29sep06/p2). According to my observation, compared to the first time I met her, in her second interview, I found she could talk more and did not pause much. It was probably the case that her English did improve and also I was not a stranger to her anymore, which made her more relaxed when she talked to me.

###### She was motivated to learn

Jenny was motivated to learn English in some situations. In order to be able to communicate with her host family better, she tried to study hard, read books and watch TV to improve listening comprehension. She was motivated to learn 'teenagers' words' because she wanted to join in her colleagues' conversations (J/int.2/19may06). At work she wanted to be close to a colleague and talked with her, so she tried to study hard. It seemed that gaining a friendship was her motivation to study hard, and at the same time also increased her opportunity to use English.

##### **(B) As a user**

###### More time to use English

After her close Korean friend, Kelly, went back to Korea, Jenny was very sad and felt lonely. She even did not want to go to pubs with others, or make close friends with others, because she thought they would have to go back home eventually (J/int.2/19may06; J/int.fin/29sep06). Nevertheless, the close friend's leaving also



increased her opportunities to use English. 'I didn't realised that she, she said for me every thing to everybody, but after her left, I was in trouble, because I have to say by myself' (J/int.fin/29sep60/p32). 'When I felt very like homesick, I usually ring to my colleagues, because teachers or students...I think...it doesn't work. But I feel, when I feel very lonely, I usually ring my manager' (J/int.2/19may06/p18). Apparently, her opportunity to use English increased. In her first interview, she mentioned that when she felt lonely, she would go talking to Korean students. It might be because she felt close enough to her colleagues after several months working together or she felt more confident in using her English.

#### Felt confident

She felt her English improved and felt more confident than before. She said she could not communicate well with her first family due to her poor English ability. However, when I had the last interview with her, she said 'now if I can meet another host family, I think I can get along with them very... very well, because I can speak what I am thinking' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p2). She felt confident when she talked with other international students. 'Some other international friends with me, we can talk really well. Even I, even I speak wrong, they can understand wrong grammar' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p4).

#### Lost confidence

From all the interviews I had with her, it appeared that Jenny liked her first host family. Nevertheless, she could not understand or speak well with them, which made her feel 'really uncomfortable' and she also 'lost confidence' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p2 & 19). She was also worried that that 'they will be not really interested in' her (J/int.fin/29sep06/p2). This lack of confidence lasted for about 4 to 5 months (J/int.fin/29sep06).

She had a good time living in the third host family; however, she did not contact them after she moved out. She said that she was not confident talking to people on the phone. She described the reasons, 'I have been hurt, hurt with phone, phone speaking....And when I first came here, I really wanted to do part-time, so I catch some works on newspaper, and I tried to gave phone calls. And I couldn't understand, so I am really not confident yet' (J/int.2/19may06/p26). Apparently, this experience still affected her 6 months later. 'I am still not confident especially

phone talking. Just like if talk, just like this, I can see your face or some situation, so, I easily understand you, but on talking I really, I really confused, so I really mind about talking on the phone' (J/int.2/19may06/p23).

#### Avoidant attitude

Her unpleasant experience of living with the second host family made her adopt an avoidant attitude. 'I, even I didn't want to talk to her and help, I just stayed all day in my room.' 'I didn't see her at all at that time.' 'Just... anyway, she seems to bother using kitchen together, so I only had to have like ready cook, in the microwave, which I don't, I didn't like it.' (J/int.fin/29sep06/p35). It obviously affected her learning English from and using English with the host family.

## 4.2 Linda

**Table 4.2 Data relating to Linda**

	Date	Methods of data collection	Key
1	18-11-2005	<i>First interview</i> (together with Rita, in school)	L/int.1/18nov05
2	13-01-2006	Informal chat (in a <i>café</i> with other students)	L/c/13jan06
3	10-02-2006	Group meeting ( <i>dinner</i> in Eric's house, including Sharon, Eric, and a native speaker, Terry)	L/d/10feb06
4	17-02-2006	<i>School party</i> (observation)	L/sp/17feb06
5	18-02-2006	Making <i>trifle</i> (observation/chat, including Linda's landlady and Rita)	L/tm/18feb06
6	18-02-2006	<i>Second interview</i> (together with Rita, in Linda's accommodation)	L/int.2/18feb06
7	27-02-2006	<i>Third interview</i> (in Linda's accommodation)	L/int.3/27feb06
8	03-03-2006	Informal chat and observation (in a <i>night club</i> with other students)	L/nc/03mar06
9	04-03-2006	<i>Final interview</i> (in Linda's accommodation)	L/int.fin/04mar06

### 4.2.1 Background

Linda is from Taiwan and she is the only child in her family. She did not seem to worry about spending money. She came to Britain after she finished her technical college and stayed here for 6 months. Linda's main purpose in studying English abroad was to improve her English. According to her, she did not learn a lot in the college and she did not know what kind of job she could do after she graduated. She thought studying English abroad could help her to have better opportunities to get a job. Moreover, Linda knew that English was important, so she told her father she would like to study English abroad. Linda told me that her father wanted her to see the world, and he did not care how much her English would improve. In Linda's first interview, she told me that study abroad would let her learn to be independent, too. She also said 'I thought as my family could afford to let me study abroad, why not?' (L/int.1/18nov05/p3/t). In a later interview, she added 'change her environment' as another reason to study English abroad. She broke up with her boyfriend; therefore, she wanted to change to a new place (L/int.3/27feb06). One of the reasons Linda chose Britain was that her English teacher was planning to study in Britain and she thought she could have someone she knew nearby. Also Linda's father thought UK seemed safer than America and British people seemed gentle.

This was Linda's first time going abroad on her own, so it was difficult for her in the first week. She would cry when she called her mother. Her mother told her if she did not like staying, she could just pack and go back to Taiwan immediately, even though they had already paid for 6 months' tuition fees. Luckily the situation got better after she met some Taiwanese students in school.

Like Rita, Linda attended both morning and afternoon classes in the language school. She stayed with a lady who ran a B&B and a Korean student, Kelly, and a Japanese girl moved into the same house later on. Linda had a short term relationship with an Englishman. Although the relationship did not last long, she said she would like to have an English boyfriend again if she had the opportunity. Linda did not have any part-time job like some of her friends did. But she said she would like to get one if she comes to Britain again. Some of her friends from the language school had part-time jobs and it seemed that the benefits, including

language gain and social gain, they had received gave her a positive attitude toward having a part-time job.

After she went back to Taiwan, she kept telling her parents that she wanted to come back to Britain (my e-mail contacts with her). Although her parents have promised to let her come again, she has still not managed to do this. Since she returned to Taiwan, I have talked to her on-line several times and I also obtained some information from her blog. She told me she has been having English classes since she went back to Taiwan. She kept saying that her speaking ability decreased and she did not have many opportunities to practise speaking. I tried to encourage her to use English when I had a chat with her through MSN, but she used English to talk to me only once.

#### **4.2.2 In what situations did Linda have her interpersonal contacts?**

Linda's main interpersonal contact sources were the host family and school friends. She had an English boyfriend, but the relationship only lasted about two months.

##### Accommodation

The landlady was the only member of the host family and she was running a B&B. There were also other students, Korean and Japanese, from the same language school staying in the same house. Therefore, for Linda, the interpersonal contacts she had in the host family include the landlady, her housemates and sometimes the B&B customers.

According to Linda, she got along well with her landlady and she thought she was lucky to stay in this family. Her landlady would spend time talking to her and the other students during the dinner time, usually between 5.30 pm to 6.30 pm. Sometimes the landlady also talked to them during breakfast time. There were other situations when Linda talked to her landlady. For example, the landlady would ask for Linda's opinions before she went out on a date (L/d/10feb06). She met the landlady's boyfriend once. Linda's landlady sometimes also asked Linda about Linda's friends or told Linda about her boyfriend or her past. Rita went to the house to celebrate Linda's landlady's birthday (L/int.1/18nov05), and another two friends of Linda's had Christmas dinner with Linda's host family (L/c/13jan06). Linda went to the theatre with her landlady once, which was encouraged by her

Korean housemate, Kelly. At first she did not want to go because she was worried about having nothing to say to her landlady (L/int.2/18nov05). She and Kelly also invited the landlady to a restaurant. However, they never watched TV together, because they all had a TV in their own room. And the landlady would go back to her own room after dinner. Although Linda knew there were advantages in watching TV with the host family, for example she could ask questions if she could not understand, and also disadvantages, for example she had to watch what the host family wanted to watch, she preferred to have her own TV. She mentioned that one of the Taiwanese students could do different things with the host family because she did not have a TV in her room (L/int.3/27feb06).

Linda did not talk about her Japanese housemate much; it might be because the Japanese housemate did not stay there long. When I had my first interview with Linda, she told me she did not like her Japanese housemate and Korean housemate, Kelly; both of them moved into the house after her. She thought they took the landlady's attention away from her, because their English was better than hers (L/int.1/18nov05). I will describe this more in 4.2.6 (B). However when I talked to her again in our group dinner, she had become friends with Kelly and they ended up being very close friends (L/d/10feb06). Kelly even went to visit her in Taiwan (L/m/14sep07). In the last interview, Linda told me she really liked Korean people. Kelly used to go to Linda's room and have a chat with her, and they also went shopping together (L/int.2/18feb06; L/int.fin/04mar06). They also set up a study plan together, but the plan did not last long, only about two weeks. According to Linda, she learned a lot of English and ways to improve English from Kelly. More examples of how Linda learned English from and with Kelly will be described in 4.2.4 (A).

As Linda's landlady was running a B&B, Linda had opportunities to meet some of the customers at breakfast time. They came from different countries or different parts of Britain. Some customers would come to her and talked to her patiently and slowly (L/int.1/18nov05; L/int.fin/04mar06).

### School

The language school also played an important role during Linda's stay. In school, teachers, staff and other students were her personal contacts. A couple of times she and other students invited a teacher to go to a pub or to have a meal before the

teacher left the school (L/int.3/27feb06). Not surprisingly, she spent a lot of time with Taiwanese students. They took a trip together, went out together, and spent the weekend in the Taiwanese student, Eric's, house. Inevitably, when she was with Taiwanese students, she only spoke Chinese. Taiwanese students gave her psychological support when she first arrived in the UK, especially in the first few days. She felt secure and safe after she met Taiwanese students in the language school (L/int.1/18nov05). For her Taiwanese students always gave each other help when any of them needed it (L/int.1/18nov05); (L/int.3/27feb06). However, Linda said she did not learn much English from Taiwanese students, only vocabulary (L/int.3/27feb06).

Apart from Taiwanese students, she also met students from other countries, for example, Japan, Korea, Spain and Italy. Usually they would have chats in school, and they also went out to pubs or night clubs together. With some of the non-Taiwanese students, she did not have too much individual contact after school (L/int.3/27feb06). Once she was quite close to an Italian girl, but according to her, the Italian girl became distant when a group of Spanish students came to the school. Also, that Italian girl liked to go to pubs every night, which Linda did not really like, so she became less close to her. The language school also arranged parties for the students, which were opportunities for her to have interaction with other students.

### English boyfriend

Having a native speaking boyfriend or girlfriend is considered good for language learning and this idea was mentioned by Linda, Rita and Sharon. When we were discussing having a boyfriend in the UK, both Linda and Rita told me that they would like to have a native-speaking boyfriend, not someone of another nationality (L/int.2/18feb06). After we finished the second interview, Linda told me that she was seeing an Englishman (L/int.2/18feb06). Unfortunately at that time they discontinued their relationship, although they still contacted one another several times through sending texts. For her, it was a good experience and she thought it was good for her English, too.

### Others

Another Taiwanese she had regular contact with was her English teacher from Taiwan, who was doing her Master degree in a British University. Linda went

travelling with her and they went to stay with a host family during New Year holiday together. This Taiwanese teacher seemed to be the one that influenced Linda a lot. She was one of the reasons Linda chose to come to Britain. This Taiwanese teacher also thought Linda's English had improved too slowly and wanted Linda to move to another place (L/int.1/18nov05).

There were also other opportunities in which Linda would have interpersonal contacts. For example, when she needed to order a drink in the pub, ask for information from the bus driver, or when she needed to get train information.

Participating in my study was also a contact for her. Although she studied in the UK for six months, I did not start my contact with her until her second month. As with Rita, although most of the time I conducted the interviews in Chinese, we needed to use English when people of other nationalities joined us. Linda also met a native speaker when I arranged an informal gathering in Eric's house.

### **4.2.3 Why was Linda in these situations?**

#### To improve her English

As described in 4.2.1, her main purpose in studying English abroad was to improve her English. Therefore, she decided to stay with a host family because she thought that the host family would talk to her at mealtimes (L/e-m/15oct07). In order to improve her English, she also talked to students in school and went to pubs with them. For her, going to pubs and restaurants were opportunities to learn English, for example, learning names of drinks or dishes.

One of the reasons she wanted to have a native speaker as her boyfriend was that she could practise her English. This seemed to be a very practical reason, and my other Taiwanese participant, Rita, also had the same idea. 'At first, 50% of the reason I wanted to go out with him was because I wanted to practise my English... I think having an English boyfriend will motivate me to learn English. I will want to find topics to talk to him about and I think that is very motivating' (L/int.3/27feb06/p53/t). She wanted to have a native speaker as a boyfriend, because if the boyfriend was not a native speaker, she might copy the mistakes he made in English. Her English ex-boyfriend could tell the mistakes she made and corrected them (L/int.fin/04mar06).

### For social reasons

Linda went to pubs for social reasons. Usually, the students from the language school would go out for farewell drinks when students were leaving. She also liked to go to pubs to have chats with her friends, and she and her English boyfriend used to go to pubs for their date.

### Feeling lonely

Linda gave me 'you want to have someone to keep you company' as another reason to have a boyfriend when studying abroad (L/int.2/18feb06/p31/t). Moreover, she agreed with Rita that having a boyfriend could make life less boring and time could pass quickly (L/int.2/18feb06).

### Other

Other people, who had experience studying in language schools in the UK, suggested to Linda that for her first visit to England it was better to stay with a host family (L/e-m/15oct07/t). She agreed and thought that if she stayed with a host family, she could be looked after, and she could have English food (L/e-m/15oct07).

## **4.2.4 Whether Linda used her interpersonal contacts in these situations for language learning and use purposes? If yes, how? If not, why?**

### **(A) Making use of the opportunities**

#### Learning from accommodation situation

Apart from learning English from the landlady, Linda also learned English from her Korean housemate, Kelly. Linda seemed to spend quite a lot of time with her. By talking to Kelly, Linda learned and used English. 'She would correct my English and teach me new words' (L/int.2/18feb06/p62/t). I asked her how she practised her speaking and she said 'I just talked with my Korean housemate, and if I used wrong words or could not understand, she would correct me' (L/int.3/27feb06/p38/t). When Linda had English problems she would go to Kelly and ask for help. 'Whenever I finished my chat with my landlady or if she said something to me but I



could not understand, I would ask Kelly to come with me to my room straight away and then ask her what the landlady had said, or what the words were and asked her to write them down for me' (L/int.fin/04mar06/p94/t). Once they set up a study plan together – they both needed to do grammar exercises according to the plan, and if they did not meet the target, they would be fined £5 every time they checked their progress. They checked it two or three times a week. Although it did not last long, it motivated/forced her to study. She also asked Kelly how to improve her English or how to memorise new words. For Linda, Kelly's English was good and she wanted to know how Kelly learned. She thought she was lucky to have a housemate who could help her with her English.

#### Learning from others

As Linda's boyfriend was English, he sometimes taught Linda how to study English. Linda also mentioned she learned from other Taiwanese students but only vocabulary. In fact, according to Linda, she also discussed how to study English with other Taiwanese students.

#### Use in accommodation

As I described in 4.2.2 Accommodation, Linda had opportunities to use English with her landlady and her housemate, Kelly, and she also had opportunities to use her English with the B&B guests of her landlady. She would talk to them and try to understand them. Once she met an English teacher from America. 'Because she is an English teacher, she knows the problems we face when we learn English. She spoke slowly to me and I could understand what she was talking about' (L/int.1/18nov05/p47/t). If the guests were quiet, Linda would only say hello, but not chat.

#### Use with friends from the language school

In the school context, Linda would talk to other students during the break time, go to school parties, or go out with the students. These occasions provided her with opportunities to learn and use English. After she moved up to another level of class, during the break time, she would stay in her own class talking to students from other countries instead of going to talk to Taiwanese students in other classes

(L/int.fin/04mar06). She thought it was because she became more confident after moving up to that class.

### **(B) Not making use of the opportunities**

In the third interview Linda told me that she did not think she had learned a lot from her landlady, because she went out a lot during the weekend to meet her Taiwanese friends, and did not spend enough time with her landlady. Therefore, she did not talk to her landlady as much as her Korean housemate did (L/int.3/27feb06). That meant she did not use her English at home as much as her Korean housemate did. Also when she met other Taiwanese people, she did not use English, either.

Once she, Rita and Eric met a man in a pub, who was interested in teaching English to non-native speakers, and he offered to teach them English. In the end, they did not accept the offer because Linda could not understand his Scottish accent. And other reasons were that she felt he was a bit strange and he had tattoos (L/int.3/27feb06).

Her Taiwanese teacher, whom she came to Britain with, gave her an English storybook to read, but she did not read it. She said 'I didn't read it at all. ... I have books from school that I should read and study but I haven't done so, so why should I choose this one?' (L/int.fin/04mar06/p62/t). She refused the opportunity offered her to learn and use English. It is probably because her idea of learning English in the UK is through listening and speaking, but not through reading or writing. She mentioned her main purpose was to improve speaking and listening.

#### **4.2.5 What did Linda gain from these interpersonal contacts?**

Linda gained her language ability by learning English from people around her and using English with them, for example, learning English from her landlady and her Korean housemate, and communicating with her boyfriend.

She learned how to learn and improve English from others, for example, Kelly and her boyfriend. Other people suggested to her that reading newspapers could help improve her English. She agreed with the idea, but she did not try to read newspapers. It appeared that in this case interpersonal contacts did not really help

her because she did not turn this idea into action. During my interviews with her, she would give a lot of theories or ideas about learning and improving her English, which she heard from others, but she did not take any action. Also she gave me the impression that she learned all these ideas or strategies after she studied in Britain. She seemed to try to tell me she learned and benefited a lot by studying in the UK. However, she acknowledged that some of these ideas were given to her by others in Taiwan already but she just ignored them. It seemed that she gained a lot of ideas about learning English but did not make any effort to apply them.

Linda also had different knowledge gains. Through intensive contact with Kelly, Linda knew more about Korea and Korean people. She also learned how to make trifle from her landlady. These were cultural gains for Linda.

Linda met people and made friends with them, mainly in her accommodation and school situations. Through these two places, she gained friendships. She and Kelly became close friends. Linda and Eric seemed to get along very well. 'He (Eric) would tell me things about life' (L/int.fin/27feb06/p85/t). After they went back to Taiwan, their friendship continued. And according to her, she also learned how to get along and live with people.

#### **4.2.6 What problems related to interpersonal contacts did Linda face in the host country and how did she deal with these problems?**

##### **(A) Language**

###### She could not understand European students

Linda did not have problems understanding Asian students' English, but she had some difficulties in understanding European students' English. For example, she thought Spanish students spoke very fast and their pronunciation was different (L/d/10feb06). Not being able to understand some students' English made her tend to talk only to people of certain nationalities. 'I prefer to talk to Asian students, because I can't understand Spanish students' English. Talking to Spanish students drove me crazy. I really can't understand their English' (L/int.3/27feb06/p74/t). A similar situation was also mentioned by other participants.

### She could not understand native speakers

Linda said there were too many new words for her, which was difficult (L/d/10feb06). She also had problems in understanding native speakers who had accents which she was not familiar with. She felt frustrated when she could not understand what other people said. She had different strategies when she had difficulty understanding native speakers' English, for example, she would avoid talking to them (L/int.fin/04mar06), sometimes she would smile (L/int.1/18nov05), or 'sometimes I have to catch important word and to guess, to guess what did she say' (L/d/10feb06/p45). Moreover, if she was in a situation in which she needed to have a response, she would ask politely again.

### 'When I talked to native speakers, my brain suddenly became blank.'

According to Linda, it was not easy for her to talk to native speakers, including her landlady. 'When I met Asian students or other non-native speakers, I could talk with them fluently. But when I talked with my landlady, I started to become less fluent' (L/int.2/18feb06/p13/t). 'When I thought of talking with native speakers, I started to feel panicky.' 'When I talked to native speakers, my brain suddenly became blank' (L/int.3/27feb06/p40&41/t). She felt nervous and was worried she would make mistakes. '...sometimes I don't like speak English, because when I speak English, I have to speak, think if my grammar is correct. I, I, I very care about my grammar. If I speak, I have to think my grammar, my grammar is correct.' (L/d/10feb06/p38). She knew that she needed to talk to native speakers in order to improve her English, but she was afraid to do that, and she also knew learners needed courage to do that. When she could not express herself clearly in English, she felt very embarrassed. She told me she felt like studying more but did not know what to do. 'I think I need to get rid of the fear.' 'The fear of speaking English and then do not be afraid of making mistakes' (L/int.fin/04mar06/p28/t).

On the other hand, she was not worried about talking English with her English boyfriend. 'Because he needs to have patience. If he likes me, he needs to be patient to listen to me speaking English' (L/int.3/27feb06/p63/t). She also told me that she was not nervous when she was talking with my English friend, Terry. She said she could tell that he was listening to her patiently and she thought he could understand her English. She also agreed that because he was introduced by me, this made her less apprehensive.

Although she was afraid of talking to native speakers, she did not have problems in talking to Asian students. ‘Only when I speak with Asian students, I don’t feel afraid.’ (L/int.fin/04mar06/p12/t). ‘Maybe it was because our English was not very good, and we didn’t have to worry too much when we spoke English.’ (We = Asian students) (L/int.3/27feb06/p41/t).

#### She could not ... because her English was not good enough

When she was with Taiwanese students whose English was better than hers, she would depend on them a lot. For example, she would let them order drinks for her. Also she felt uncomfortable speaking English in front of them. ‘I feel uncomfortable speaking English in front of people whose English is better than mine’ (L/int.fin/04mar06/p78/t). Linda also mentioned that she would feel particularly uncomfortable speaking English if a certain Taiwanese student was with her, because she would often correct Linda’s mistake. ‘For example, if (name) is here and I am talking to a native speaker, and when I make a grammar mistake, she will point out my mistake, and I will stop talking’ (L/int.fin/04mar06/p79/t). On the other hand, she told me she did not have any problems if the school teachers, her landlady or I corrected her mistakes.

Linda thought her English was not good enough, so she did not think of having a part-time job (L/int2/18feb06). It was similar to when Rita started to think of having a part-time job. However, with her father’s encouragement, Rita started to look for and got a part-time job.

### **(B) Interpersonal relationship**

#### Ignored by the landlady

In her first interview she told me that because her Korean and Japanese housemates’ English was better than hers, her landlady paid more attention to them and did not talk to her properly. She felt upset and cried. ‘You just felt yourself being ignored totally. When you were having dinner, for the whole hour, you only said a few sentences, about three or four. Don’t you think it’s ridiculous?’ (L/int.1/18nov05/p30/t). She talked about this problem to other Taiwanese students, and they told her she should interrupt and join in the conversation. However, Linda said she could not, because when she was ready and tried to say

something, the other two housemates would speak before her. ‘... I could have interrupted if we had talked in Chinese, but not in English. My English was worse than theirs, how could I interrupt?’ (L/int.1/18nov05/p33/t). During the interview, she said she would wait for another week, by which time the Japanese housemate would leave and there would be only two students in the house, so probably the situation would then improve (L/int.1/18nov05). She also said that she did not want to mention the problem to her landlady because her landlady was very kind to her and she did not want to bring her landlady problems. She concluded that her landlady preferred to speak to those whose English ability was better. ‘Sometimes I felt my landlady was not patient to interact with me. My English is not as good as Kelly, so I can’t catch a lot of what she says, and I don’t think my landlady talked to me with patience’ (L/int.3/27feb06/p25/t).

#### Native speakers were not patient

In her opinion, native speakers did not have patience to listen to people whose English was not good, including her landlady and school teachers. ‘I think in fact, British people don’t have patience to listen to you, listen to those whose English ability is not so good to speak English’ (L/int.3/27feb06/p8/t). ‘In fact, sometimes the teachers in school are not patient to listen to you, I feel’ (L/int.fin/04mar06/p18/t). She said the same in her second interview (L/int.2/18feb06). At our dinner gathering, she gave me the reasons – ‘Because I think maybe they don’t have enough patience to listen, listen to I speak English, because too slowly and maybe some vocabulary I don’t understand and I don’t, I can’t...’ (L/d/10feb06/p83). It seems that her language ability affected her opportunities to talk to native speakers. Sometimes she met B&B customers who she thought were not patient enough to talk to her, and she would just have her breakfast quietly (L/int.4/04mar06). In her final interview she said ‘I think if I speak slowly, native speakers should be patient to listen to me’ (L/int.fin/04mar06/p19/t). She seemed to expect that native speakers should put themselves in her position because of her foreign identity.

Although she pointed out that native speakers were not patient, she also agreed with Rita that not only native speakers, but most people would be impatient when speaking with those whose language ability was not as good as their own (L/int.2/18feb06). In fact, she mentioned that at first she thought Kelly did not like

to talk to people whose English ability was lower than hers (the Korean housemate) (L/int.1/18nov05).

#### It was not easy to socialise with native speakers

As with other participants, Linda mentioned that it was not easy to meet native speakers and make friends with them. When I asked her how many native-speaking friends she had, she told me only one – her landlady – although she had an English boyfriend too (L/d/10fec06). ‘I didn’t speak English with English. And I always just with the students, other students’ (L/d/10fec06/p76-77).

She thought if she wanted to make friends with native speakers, her English needed to be good. ‘I think if I can speak English very well, I can make a lot of English friends’ (L/d/10feb06/p87). She seemed to imply that she did not make friends with native speakers due to her English ability. I asked her if she tried to talk to native speakers, she told me no because ‘they don’t speak with us.’ (L/d/10feb06/p84). She admitted that she was too passive to make friends with native speakers. She said she did not know how to. The problem is if she always maintained a passive attitude, the situation would never be changed. For example, whenever she went out with her friends from school, they always just talked to each other within their own group. She also admitted that going out with school friends did not help her to improve her English very much. One of the teachers said to them that if they wanted to improve their English, they should speak to native speakers, but not to the students from the school, because they might copy each other’s mistakes. But the teacher did not tell them how to, or in what way or where they can have the opportunities to talk to native speakers (L/int.fn/04mar06).

#### They did not want to speak English

As my other participants also mentioned, students of the same nationality would usually stay together and talk to each other in their own language (L/d/10feb06). Although she seemed to complain about this, she did the same and did not try to make efforts to improve the situation. ‘It’s impossible, I think speaking to people from your own country in English is impossible’ (L/int.3/27feb06/p63/t). Her English boyfriend thought they were just lazy, and she seemed to agree with him – ‘I think because we come from same country, so, we are lazy to speak English to each other. So we always speak Taiwanese or Chinese with...’ (L/d/10feb06/p52).

#### She did not want to make friends with some students in school

She also told me she did not really like the students from a certain country, which was also what Rita and Eric told me. 'I dislike talking to students from that country the most' (L/int.2/18feb06/p22/t). It seemed that sometimes students would influence each other's opinions to a certain degree. I noticed that it seemed to apply to Linda in many ways. She often mentioned what other people had told her or other people's opinions.

#### **(C) Topical issues**

##### British humour, she could not understand

Another difficulty for her when she had contact with British people was with British humour. 'I can't understand their humour. Sometimes I don't think the joke was funny, but they just laughed and laughed' (L/int.fin/04mar06/p8/t).

She usually did not talk a lot and did not know how to have a chat with native speakers. 'I don't know how to have a chat with British people, because I don't understand their sense of humour' (L/int.fin/04mar06/p89/t).

#### **4.2.7 What kinds of effect did these interpersonal contacts have on Linda as a language learner and user?**

##### **(A) As a learner**

##### Her English improved

As mentioned above, she benefited from the experience of living with a Korean student. She spent time talking to her and learning English from her. '..she speaks very good English, and I can learn English from her' (L/int.2/18feb06/p62/t). Her boyfriend also helped her with her English learning, for example, he taught her how to memorise and learn vocabulary.

##### She was motivated to learn

Having an English boyfriend definitely motivated her in learning and using English. Rita told me that other Taiwanese students could tell Linda was really motivated to



learn English and studied hard during the time she was seeing that English boyfriend. 'Because you want to talk to/communicate with the person you like, I think that will motivate you to learn' (L/int.fin/04mar06/p43/t). 'During that period of time, I really wanted to learn English. And other Taiwanese students noticed my English improved.' 'I needed to send him texts.' (L/int.3/27feb06/p53/t). 'I also thought I could speak English quite well, and he thought my English was good and I should speak more English' (L/int.3/27feb06/p62/t). It seems that her confidence increased too.

In the school context, when she was praised by a teacher, she was happy, felt confident and encouraged to study more. 'The teacher said I was the best that day, at that time I felt, I wanted to study English more' (L/int.fin/04mar06/p3/t).

Other people's good English ability also motivated her to learn and use the language. 'Whenever I saw her (a Taiwanese girl) talking fluently with native speakers, I would feel like talking like her' (L/int.fin/04mar06/p77/t).

During a certain period of time, she also thought that her landlady did not like to talk to her. 'She seemed not to like to talk to me, because when we had dinner, my Korean housemate was sitting there and I was here, I could feel that my landlady always looked at my Korean housemate. I didn't feel comfortable' (L/int.fin/04mar06/p88/t). She was not happy, but she also thought that she needed to study hard to improve her English so that she could understand her landlady and talk to her.

## **(B) As a user**

### More confident to speak English

When Linda took the train for the first time in the UK, she needed to get information about changing trains at different stations. It was only about a month since she arrived in Britain, so according to her, her English was not very good. Because of her language ability, she needed to ask the staff at the train station to write down the information for her. She said a member of staff was very unfriendly and seemed to look down on her, and also made 'impatient' sounds. She didn't feel comfortable but she needed the information, so she had to be polite. 'What could I do?' she said, 'I was in a foreign country' (L/int.1/18nov05/p37/t). She felt like crying whilst she was waiting for the train with her luggage on a cold day. In order

to get home safely, she tried her best to ask people for help, including the members of staff at the train stations and four Asian passengers, with whom luckily she could communicate in Chinese. According to her, after this experience, she became more confident in speaking English (L/int.1/18nov05). ‘I became less afraid of speaking English after that incident’ (L/int.1/18nov05/p39/t).

#### Lose confidence to speak English

When Linda was corrected by a teacher on her pronunciation, she lost confidence in her pronunciation and did not want to speak. Sharon and Jenny also remarked about this teacher and the pronunciation class. A comment about students’ pronunciation from that teacher stuck in her head and made her lose confidence. ‘And since we come from the Asia, when we speak English, we...and didn’t... the English people will think we sound very boring, and they don’t want to talk with us’ (L/d/10feb06/p40). ‘So when, when he teach, when he teach about us about class, I feel nervous, so I can’t speak English well when he teach me about pronunciation. So, he always “oh...” (with bored intonation)’ (L/d/10feb06/p41).

#### Time to use English

When Linda was seeing her boyfriend, the time she spent with Taiwanese students became less. In terms of English learning and using, it was good for her. Spending time with Taiwanese students had a negative effect on Linda’s opportunity to learn and use English. ‘I have been, I have been here for about 5 months, but I think my English is, has improved too slowly. Because I always speak Chinese with Taiwanese students, I, I didn’t speak English with different countries, different people’ (L/d/10feb06/p60).

### **4.3 Rita**

**Table 4.3 Data relating to Rita**

	<b>Date</b>	<b>Methods of data collection</b>	<b>Key</b>
1	18-11-2005	<i>First interview</i> (together with Linda, in school)	R/int.1/18nov05

2	16-01-2006	Informal chat (together with Eric, in <i>Eric's</i> house)	R/E's/16jan06
3	17-02-2006	<i>School party</i> (observation)	R/sp/17feb06
4	18-02-2006	Making <i>trifle</i> (observation/chat, including Linda's landlady and Linda)	R/tm/18feb06
5	18-02-2006	<i>Second interview</i> (together with Linda, in Linda's accommodation)	R/int.2/18feb06
6	22-04-2006	Observation at <i>work</i> (chat with other students, too)	R/w/22apr06
7	28-05-2006	Visit a <i>native</i> speaker's house with Sharon (observation /chat)	R/n's/28may06
8	03-06-2006	<i>Third interview</i> (in my accommodation)	R/int.3/03jun06
9	19-06-2006	<i>Final interview</i> (in Rita's accommodation)	R/int.fin/19jun06
10	27-10-2007	Informal chat ( <i>short visit</i> with Eric, in my house)	R/sv/27oct07

### 4.3.1 Background

Rita is from Taiwan and came to Britain after she finished college. This was her second time studying in Britain; therefore, she did not feel homesick and felt quite confident about staying. She decided to come to Britain because she had been here several years ago and liked it. One of her cousins was studying in the southeast of England. She wanted to improve her English first and then to decide if she wanted to go to a British university later on. To become independent was another goal Rita wanted to achieve. She also hoped to be able to make friends with people from different countries.

She knew there would be differences between Taiwan and UK, so she prepared for it and was ready to accept the differences. She seemed to be quite positive about many things, which can be seen from the findings below, e.g. unfriendly customers' attitudes. She studied in a language school in the south of England for two months on her first visit. During her 10-month study in a language school this time, she decided to take a diploma course in Fashion Marketing at a British university. During her stay, her grandfather died so she had to go home for three weeks. At that time she had only been in her part-time job for two weeks. Her grandfather's

death upset her and made her think of dropping out of her course and going back to Taiwan for good. But her father told her to continue because all their relatives knew she was studying in the UK. Her father's expectations of her were to have a part-time job for experience and to get a degree.

Unlike Jenny and Sharon, my Korean participants, Rita attended both morning and afternoon classes in the language school. When she was studying in the language school, she stayed with a host family, some distance from the school, and the room she stayed in was comfortable, with its own bathroom, a small fridge, a microwave and a TV. She started at the language school in September and got her part-time job in a pub five months later. It seemed that she was the most active person among my participants, which we can see from the latter sections, and liked to make friends with other nationalities. 'I don't know why some people hate to know or meet people.' 'I think to make friends makes me happy.' 'If I didn't see anyone I know when I was walking around the town, I would feel depressed. Even if I only met one or two, I would feel very happy because I had said hello to or greeted people' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p135/t).

Here is how she described her living and learning experience in the UK in her final interview. 'My life in Britain is colourful and full of variety.' 'My learning in the language school needs to be improved.' And 'my learning from daily life here is various and plentiful' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p127/t).

Rita took a pre-Master course in Fashion Marketing in Manchester after she finished at the language school. She continued her Master course in Fashion Marketing in the same university. She was also the vice-president of the Taiwanese students' association in the Manchester area. I met her again fifteen months after she left the language school.

#### **4.3.2 In what situations did Rita have her interpersonal contacts?**

##### Accommodation

Rita stayed with a family consisting of the landlady and the landlady's husband. She had opportunities to talk not only to them but also to the relatives of the host family.

Rita got along well with her host family. 'I think my interaction with my host family is very good' (R/int.1/18nov05/p43/t). She would spend time talking to her

landlady at mealtimes or after dinner; she said she usually talked to the host family for about one or two hours. Topics about daily life were commonly talked about. She told her landlady about her day, her school, her school friends, the weather, and her part-time job. 'British people like to talk about weather' (R/int.1/18nov05/p42/t). Rita's landlady also talked about her day and work etc. However, Rita said she did not talk to her landlady's husband very often. It was not easy for her to talk to men who were of a similar age to her father, because to her they appeared to be a kind of father figure. Also it was not easy for her to understand the landlady's husband's accent (R/sv/27oct07); he was quiet and he did not ask Rita questions, which could have kept her talking. During the Christmas and New Year, Rita also met some of the host family's relatives and spent some time with them, talking or playing games. According to Rita, they were friendly people and 'they did not make you feel that you were a stranger or it was difficult to integrate with them' (R/E's/16jan06/p2/t).

In her third interview, she told me that the time she spent with the host family had decreased since she started to work more frequently in the pub. She would have dinner with them three or four days per week instead of seven days or would have dinner on her own, which reduced the time she was able to talk with them. On the other hand, she was not unhappy with the change. She said 'when I am at home, the latest time I talk or spend with my landlady is about half past eight or nine o'clock in the evening. But, when I go to work, I talk or spend time with my colleagues or customers until midnight' (R/int.3/03jun06/p59/t). Therefore, she spent more time using and learning English at work.

### School

Rita spent a lot of time with Taiwanese students before Linda and Eric went back to Taiwan. She went to Eric's house a lot. In fact, a group of about three Taiwanese students, used to go to Eric's house after school or at the weekend. Eric's house was like a base for them. Inevitably, when they were in Eric's, they spoke to each other in Chinese or Taiwanese most of the time. Also they would cook Chinese food and watch Taiwanese TV programmes together. She said whenever she came out from Eric's house, she felt like she was leaving Taiwan and stepping back into Britain again (R/int.3/03jun06). In her opinion, if you felt homesick, you needed someone from your country to talk to, and the host family would make you feel

more homesick. Rita also went shopping, went to pubs, and went travelling with Taiwanese students. Rita and several Taiwanese students also tried to study English together after school.

Rita not only spent time with Taiwanese students, she also socialised with students from different countries, such as Japan, Korea, China, Poland and Russia. She seemed to get along with them most of the time. She did not like certain students but it did not affect her social life too much at school. She went out with them, visited pubs, and had BBQs together, etc. From my observation at their school party, I could see Rita actively trying to talk to students of different nationalities. Because Rita did not like the behaviour and attitude of some students from one particular country, she did not want to socialise with students from that country. After Eric and Linda left, she became close to Sharon, my Korean participant. They started the course around the same time and were sometimes in the same class. Rita sometimes went to the café where Sharon worked to meet her, and sometimes Sharon went to the pub where Rita worked. In her last two interviews. Rita mentioned a lot about a Japanese student, Mari, who she met in school. She seemed to admire and appreciate that student. According to Rita, she learned a lot from her although in the beginning Rita's confidence was undermined by that student's good English. Rita went out with her several times and when the student's boyfriend visited her, Rita also met him. Rita also said she liked to go to school because of this student. It seemed this Japanese student influenced Rita quite a bit.

She and other students also went out with a teacher a couple of times.

### Work

Rita's part-time job appeared to give her a tremendous opportunity to meet people, to learn and use English. She had a good relationship with her colleagues, and although in the beginning some customers seemed to be critical, many of them ended up praising her and being friendly to her. She thought working in a pub was fun. Apparently she was in general an active person. She stayed on after work, listened and talked with her colleagues, visited her colleagues' homes and went out with them. (She told me that once she even tried marijuana with her colleague. She said she would like to try new things. She seems to be a curious person and appears to like taking risks.) (R/int.3/03jun06). She particularly got along well with one male colleague called Sam and appreciated him teaching her and being patient with her.

To customers, she also tried to be polite and tried her best to meet their requests. Some customers went to the pub regularly and she would talk with them, but sometimes she could not remember the less frequent customers. One customer approached Rita in another pub, but she could not remember her. But after that day, whenever Rita saw that customer again in the street, she would say hello and have a chat with her.

#### Other

Apart from those people she met through her accommodation, school and work, Rita also had other contacts. She was introduced to some people from different countries through her language school friend, who was working in a pub. Her social network expanded through those she had known already. She discovered that it was a good way to get to know more people (R/int.3/03jun06). However, Rita did not try to keep in touch with them afterwards. The only contact would be when they saw each other in the pub and said hello to each other. Although her social network expanded, she did not really make good use of this kind of social network.

Rita had some other superficial contacts. She talked to people she met in pubs, for example a Thai student and a Chinese student from a college, and people she met in town, like a mother in a queue; she talked to people for information when she was travelling. She told me in a later meeting that these superficial contacts did not really help with her language learning.

Participating in my study was also a contact for her. She told me that I had become another friend to her and she could get some advice from me, for example about her job interview or university study, which helped to relieve the pressure on her. Although most of the time I conducted the interviews in Chinese, we needed to use English when people of other nationalities joined us. Rita also met a couple of native speakers when I arranged informal gatherings for my study. She seemed to enjoy talking to them. She exchanged e-mail addresses with one of them, but I am not sure if Rita contacted her afterwards or not.

### **4.3.3 Why was Rita in these situations?**

#### To improve her English

For most of the students who come to study English in Britain, the main purpose is to improve their language ability. This also applied to Rita. Staying with a host family, having a part-time job and going to pubs with friends were all in order to have opportunities to learn and use English.

She wanted to have a part-time job to improve her English ability; however, she was afraid of looking for one because 'I felt my English was not good enough, and I was not capable of doing the job' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p65/t). She wanted to have the opportunity but at the same time she was afraid of taking the first step.

She wanted to have a job which allowed her to speak English with others, so she did not want to have a job of washing dishes; on the other hand, she thought her English was not good enough to work in a restaurant, where she would need to take orders. She liked to go to pubs and with others' encouragement she went to ask for a job in a pub.

#### For social reasons

Rita went to the pub for social reasons. For example, she went to the pub for farewell drinks when students from school were leaving. She also went to pubs to meet her friends. 'I want to go to the pub because some people I knew might be there...if I go there I can talk to them. Yes. Maybe I don't meet them every time, but when I meet them there I can talk to them.' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p110/t).

She told me that most of the students in school were female, so she thought working might give her opportunities to meet British men. In the beginning she thought 'going to a pub' was a good way to meet men and start a romantic relationship, but experience told her that 'a pub' is a good place for friends to meet and have a chat, not for meeting new people. This is similar to Jenny's opinions. Interestingly Rita also mentioned that she went to the pub to watch football, which she never did in Taiwan. She seemed to begin to integrate into the host culture.

#### Influenced by others

Rita's father told her to find a part-time job to get some experience and to know how people work. Her father told her salary was not important, having experience was more important. 'I said to my father that my English was not good enough, so I was afraid of looking for a part-time job. My father told me to tell the employers that I would work for them for free and they didn't have to pay me until they



thought I was good enough. He thought the purpose for me to get a part-time job was to have experience, not for money' (R/int.1/18nov05/p13/t).

Another reason motivating her to look for a part-time job was that Linda, my other Taiwanese participant, had an English boyfriend. "When I knew Linda had got a boyfriend (English boyfriend), I thought 'Wow, she's got someone to practise English with now, but I don't have anyone. That's too bad.' So, I told myself I needed to do something to improve my English ability" (R/int.fin/19jun06/p65/t).

#### Feeling bored and curious

Rita said she started to go to Eric's house because she had nothing to do on her own. Also she and other students felt bored in the evening and they felt like going out, so they went to the pub together regularly. At first she was curious about the pubs in the UK, which could be very different from those in Taiwan.

### **4.3.4 Whether Rita used her interpersonal contacts in these situations for language learning and use purposes? If so, how? If not, why?**

#### **(A) Make use of the opportunities**

##### Learning from accommodation situation

She listened and talked to the conversations between her landlady and the landlady's family and relatives. However, Rita said after she had a part-time job, her landlady did not correct her English as much as before.

##### Learning from work

Rita listened to her colleagues' conversations. She tried to stay with them and although she sometimes could not follow their conversations, she did not back away from the opportunities. 'When I couldn't talk to them, I listened to them.' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p83/t). She usually stayed in the pub after finishing her work because she wanted to learn English and know what her colleagues talked about. She made efforts to integrate herself with her colleagues. She would ask if she did not understand.

### Learning from or with friends from school

From her school friends, Rita learned a lot, such as from the Japanese student, Mari. She learned new words from her conversation with Mari; she tried to repeat or copy what Mari said. Rita also mentioned learning English from Kelly, Linda's Korean housemate. 'Having classes with her lets me learn a lot of extra things, for example, the words she learned from TV or from people on the street' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p50/t). According to Rita, these two students had higher English ability than herself. According to her, by talking with international students she could learn about their cultures and also English. 'When you are communicating with them (international students), you may use words/vocabulary from different areas. You are exchanging vocabulary, so you can still improve your English' (R/int.fin.19jun06/p53/t). Moreover, sometimes after class Rita and other Taiwanese students stayed in school to do and discuss homework together. Rita and Eric tried to read English novels together and when they went running, they tried to talk to each other in English. But unfortunately, those activities did not last long.

Rita went to see a Shakespeare play with her school friends because she wanted to have something to talk to people about, and in the future hopefully she would understand if people talked about it.

### Learning from other situations

Like many language learners, Rita would listen to others' conversations, pick up words and learn them. For example, she learned words like 'mannerism' and 'pub crawl' during our informal gathering.

### Use in accommodation

From what I mentioned in 4.3.2 Accommodation, we can see how Rita used her English in her homestay situation. Here is one more example. Once when she knew the host family was planning to go somewhere, she asked if she could go with them. She thought it was a good opportunity for her to practise her English and also to develop a closer relationship with them.

### Use at work

At work, Rita tried to use the English she had learned. For example, once she learned 'cheeky mare', 'cheeky monkey' and 'cheeky git' from a colleague. Two days

later she used 'cheeky git' to describe that colleague, which amazed other colleagues and also made them decide to teach her more. It showed them that she was learning. She used what she had learned from school at work, but her colleagues sometimes told her these words were old-fashioned and taught her the ones they usually used.

She also tried to find opportunities to use English with her customers. 'Sometimes at work, if I was not busy and there were some customers, I would look around to see if there were any customers I had talked with before. If there were any, I would go to them and have a chat with them' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p111/t).

#### Use in other situations

She liked to go out with others. Certainly this increased her opportunity to use English. 'Whenever people asked me to go out, I always said yes' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p31/t). This attitude was very different from Sharon's. Sharon usually said no to those who asked her to go out. As Rita said, although she usually said yes to others when they invited her to go out, she would not ask others to go out with her. She seemed passive in creating new opportunities, but on the other hand she was active in using the existing opportunities.

When Rita and another Taiwanese student, Linda, were learning how to make trifle with Linda's landlady, she had more interactions with Linda's landlady than Linda did. Rita repeated what the landlady said, gave responses, asked questions and helped the landlady.

Rita showed me her small note book, which she used for writing down new words or phrases she learned from school or work. She would try to use those new words or phrases when she talked to others.

#### **(B) Not making use of the opportunities**

Rita told me that she did not really want to talk to students whose English was worse than hers. One of the reasons was that she did not want to learn incorrect English. It seems that in her opinion those who have poorer English do not speak English correctly. Another reason was that Rita thought they could not understand her English and she had to explain again and again. 'Sometimes I could speak very quickly and they could not understand me, so it's difficult to keep the conversation

going' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p1). She felt that this was something she did not want to do and she did not have enough patience to do. Sometimes learners complain that native speakers do not have patience with non-native speakers because of non-native speakers' low language ability. In fact, some learners also notice that those learners who have higher language ability also do not have patience to talk to those with lower ability.

Rita also mentioned that at the later period of her study in the language school, she did not talk much with new students, especially those who stayed for only one or two weeks. She thought the conversations and questions were just repeated over and over again. Rita mentioned too that she felt there were not enough common topics between her and new students to talk about.

Although Rita would stay in the pub after finishing her work, she would not ask her colleagues to stay because she did know what to chat with them about. It was not easy for her to initiate a conversation. However, she was able to keep talking if someone else kept asking her questions.

Rita knew some people through her friends, but she did not particularly try to keep in touch with them. However, when she happened to see them again, she would always go to them and chat with them. She told me she did not keep in touch with them because she did not know what to say to them. I asked her to explain what she meant by 'did not know what to say to them'. She said it was because they had different backgrounds, different lifestyles, and in terms of language ability, she was not able to express what she really wanted to say. She was not confident enough in these situations. According to her, she was good at socialising with people in Chinese (R/sv/27oct07).

#### **4.3.5 What did Rita gain from these interpersonal contacts?**

There seems to be no doubt that her knowledge of English improved. She learned more words and phrases, she could recognise different accents, and learned day to day English from her colleagues.

From her host family, her work and her contact with friends, Rita knew more about cultures and customs from different countries. For example, she learned to make trifle from Linda's landlady and, when I arranged for her and Sharon to visit an English family, they talked about the drinking culture in Taiwan, Korea and

Britain and other issues related to culture and society. Rita observed customers when she was working. 'I just looking around the bar and someone... what are they doing and find something different between England and Taiwan.' (R/n's/28may06/p50). She and other Taiwanese students went to a pub near Eric's house, and they played games and placed bets on horse races, which were recorded by the pub landlord.

Definitely she also gained knowledge related to her work, for example, the names of drinks, how to make drinks, matching beer with the glasses...etc. 'Now when customers ask me what kinds of lager or bitter we have got in the pub, I can tell them. I know those drinks very well' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p78/t).

Moreover, she experienced a social gain by making friends with people she met in different situations. She had good relationships with her colleagues and they accepted her poor English. When she was in a bad mood or had problems with customers, her colleagues would comfort her (R/int.3/03jun06). She also made friends with some regular customers and sometimes they gave her tips or bought her a drink, too. 'There are interactions between me and customers, and I make friends there. Also, I can feel that I am living in the UK because at school most of the students are from Asia' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p1/t).

Rita's ability was also approved by critical customers. 'You are the best' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p91/t) one customer said to her. 'They became to like me and I felt the sense of achievement' (R/int.3/03jun06/p52/t). She felt more confident.

It appears that Rita gained a lot from her interpersonal contacts. She thought what she had gained from her part-time job was more than she had expected. She believed her colleagues made a huge difference to these expectations.

#### **4.3.6 What problems related to interpersonal contacts did Rita face in the host country and how did she deal with these problems?**

##### **(A) Language**

She could not understand European and Arabic students' accents

At school, she found it difficult to understand Arabic and European students' accents, especially the latter. 'I just couldn't understand them (European students), even when they were talking with simple English or talking about the same things as others' (R/int.2/18feb06/p29/t). Sharon, Jenny and Linda also had a similar experience.

#### She could not understand native speakers

There were no problems for Rita in understanding her host family's and school teachers' English because they knew how to talk to foreign students. It was also not too difficult for her to understand her fellow students' English, apart from the problem with accents. Students in school usually spoke slowly. But she had difficulty in understanding people's English at work. She said in the beginning she could not understand the different British accents of customers or her colleagues, or equally if they spoke too fast or linked words together. She felt isolated. When this kind of situation occurred, she needed to keep saying 'sorry' to them and asked them to repeat what they had said. 'In the beginning, they (customers) were afraid of me. They were afraid of ordering from me because I could not understand their English. Sometimes it took them time to order drinks from me' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p88/t). If some customers were impatient when she asked them to repeat, she would just ignore their reaction and would try hard to make sure she could understand or she would ask customers to wait and asked for her colleagues' help. She said sometimes people could not be bothered to talk to her because they thought she could not understand them. She also could not understand some of her colleagues because they used a lot of slang, and she needed to ask them to explain those words or phrases to her.

Unexpectedly, she mentioned that some teachers in school were not interested in talking to students whose English ability was not good. They paid more attention to those students who had better English.

#### 'When I faced native speakers, I felt my English ability decreased rapidly.'

During the second interview, Rita said she did not have problems in talking to non-native speaking students, but could not talk to native speakers. At that time she told me that when she talked with her host family, her English ability decreased by half. Three and a half months later, she said that she was not worried about her language

ability when she talked to school friends, teachers at school or her host family, but she still would feel nervous when she faced other native speakers. 'When you speak to the host family, because they are used to talking to foreign students, you don't have to speak English correctly and they can still understand you' (R/int.3/06jun06/p60/t). 'When I faced native speakers, I felt my English ability decreased rapidly. I was worried that they could not understand my English' (R/int.3/06jun06/p94/t). Sharon, Jenny and Linda also mentioned this kind of situation. Rita told me once she needed to go to the train station to ask for information, and before she went, she prepared what she should say. But when she got there, she forgot what she had prepared and was unable to say those sentences properly.

#### Others could not understand her

On her first day at work, she needed to repeat what she said constantly to her manager and colleagues. She thought to herself 'How can I work if I can't speak English properly?' (R/int.2/18feb06/p14/t). Luckily her manager gave her some encouragement and most of her colleagues were patient with her.

### **(B) Interpersonal relationship**

#### An unfriendly colleague

When she started to work in the pub, one of her colleagues was not very friendly to her. He was not patient when she asked questions, especially when she needed him to repeat things. 'Sometimes he just ignored me. When customers ordered, he did not want to help me and just watched' (R/int.2/18feb06/p15/t). She felt under pressure when she worked with him.

#### Unfriendly customers

At work she met some unfriendly customers, who criticised her or said unkind things to her. In these situations, she would say 'sorry' to them, smile and try to be polite to them, or she would tell them she would try to improve. She told me it seemed that her native speaking colleagues did not get any criticism although the way they served the customers was the same as hers. One particular female customer made Rita feel racially discriminated against. On the other hand she would

look at the bright side of those negative responses. ‘Perhaps I am too sensitive. I feel that they (customers) didn’t like me. When I served them, they usually corrected me... and they said it in an unfriendly tone... I thought they didn’t have to be so unfriendly to me. But, on the other hand, I thought they were teaching me, so it was ok.’ (R/int.3/03jun06/p52/t). She also said ‘Although in the beginning I thought they were trying to find fault with me on purpose, later I thought that maybe they just wanted to have a chat with me’ (R/int.3/06jun06/p101/t). ‘If they didn’t like me, they wouldn’t spend time looking for my faults... And because of this, I had opportunities to talk to them and practise my English’ (R/int.fin/19jun06/p103/t).

#### It was not easy to socialise with native speakers.

When she went to pubs or night clubs with school friends, they usually stayed together and did not mix with others, especially with native speakers. ‘You stay in your little circle. Your group has your own community, and outside your group is another community. Your group members talk to each other happily..., well, in fact, those outsiders do not understand our English... It is not easy to socialise with native speakers’ (R/int.3/03jun06/p31/t).

#### She did not want to make friends with students in school

Towards the end of her stay, Rita did not feel like making friends with those who only stayed for a short time. ‘Every time we just asked the same questions, like ‘Where are you from?’ etc. And when we started to know each other more, it was time for them to leave. So I felt too lazy to do the same thing repeatedly.’ ‘I didn’t exchange contact details with those who only stayed for two or three weeks’ (R/int.fin/19jun06/p2 & 3/t).

Because of certain events, Rita did not feel comfortable with students of a certain nationality. This made her lose interest in making friends with them.

### **(C) Topical issues**

#### Unfamiliar topics

Learners’ language ability is not necessarily always the cause of learners’ passive or reluctant responses; new or unfamiliar topics or content can also discourage learners from participating in conversations. Although Rita had quite a few opportunities to



talk to the landlady's family or relatives, she sometimes did not know what to say and sometimes could not join in when they were playing games. In this case, she would just listen to their conversations or watch them playing games. She did not try to avoid meeting them or talking to them.

She also mentioned that she sometimes could not follow the topics her colleagues were talking about, for example, films or TV programmes. In this case, she would just sit there and try to catch some words from their conversation.

### Lack of topics

Surprisingly in the last interview, Rita told me she did not have many topics to talk about with her host family. From what she told me in the earlier interviews she seemed to talk a lot with the host family, especially the landlady, and she also said after she had the part-time job, she had more topics to talk about with her host family. Perhaps she still talked a lot with her landlady, but the variety of topics was still limited.

When she first started to work, she did not know what to talk to her colleagues about. She mentioned that her colleagues had already worked together for some time, so they had more things to talk about together. It was similar to Sharon. There were also some unfamiliar situations in the café, so Sharon could not join in her colleagues' conversations. Rita also recognised that she did not know what to say to people and sometimes she preferred others to ask her questions to keep the conversation going. 'I am kind of person... If you ask me, I will answer all your questions.' She found asking questions was not easy. 'The most difficult part for me is to ask questions. It's still the same. When I have a chat with my colleagues, it's difficult for me to ask questions' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p41 & 62/t).

### She did not understand customers' orders

As Rita had never worked in a pub, she sometimes did not know the drinks customers ordered. She needed to ask customers to explain to her or point the drink out for her. When a customer first ordered 'Mickey Mouse' from her, she thought the customer was joking. She told me she learnt that 'Mickey Mouse' was half bitter and half lager. Sometimes if any of her colleagues was with her, she would check with the colleague about customers' orders. In the beginning she would write down

the names of the drinks and asked teachers at school to teach her how to pronounce them.

#### **4.3.7 What kinds of effect did these interpersonal contacts have on Rita as a language learner and user?**

##### **(A) As a learner**

###### Her English improved

Rita thought her English improved, and she could understand different people's accents better.

###### More opportunities to learn English

Rita learned a lot of English at work, especially from one of the male colleagues called Sam. 'Other colleagues are those who I can practise English with, and Sam is my English teacher.' (R/int.3/03jun06/p50/t). At the same time, when other colleagues realised that Rita had learned and used some new English from Sam, they would teach her more.

###### She was motivated to learn

Rita thought that what she learned from work was more fun and interesting, which seemed to motivate her to learn more from her colleagues. She gave me some examples which she did not learn from school, such as 'they are taking the piss out of me' (R/int.3/03jun06).

As mentioned above, when Rita knew Linda had an English boyfriend and became very active in learning English, she told herself that she needed to study English hard and find opportunities to learn and use English. She was motivated to learn English.

###### She learned quickly through interaction with people

Rita mentioned that she could learn quickly and efficiently if she learned through conversations with others. 'You can remember new words more quickly when you learn through talking.... It is not easy to remember new words by writing... because you can remember the sound' (R/int.fn/19jun06/p54/t). (In my first interview

with Rita and Linda, I was told that Rita's speaking ability was much better than her reading ability.) From my observations of her interaction with others, I found that she was a very quick learner and could pick up new words or phrases quickly and would try to use them as soon as she had the opportunities to do so. For example, she learned 'let the jelly set' when she learned to make trifle. She picked up the verb when Linda's landlady tried to explain how to make jelly and later she used it during the conversation (R/tm/18feb06).

### **(B) As a user**

#### More time to use English

Most of the interpersonal contacts Rita had offered her a lot of opportunities to use English. Her time to speak English also increased after Linda and Eric went back to Taiwan. As mentioned above, when Linda and Eric were still studying in the language school, Rita spent a lot of time with them and inevitably Chinese or Taiwanese was the language they were using to talk to each other.

Working in the pub gave her opportunities to use English, as she said 'working at the pub, you have a lot of time.. and you meet people. They sit at bar and you can chatting with them, so it's more opportunity to talking' (R/n's/28may06/p32).

She liked to meet people and make friends, which also encouraged her and let her have more time to use English. Although she felt nervous when she spoke to native speakers, she would try hard not to lose those opportunities.

#### More topics to talk about

The topics between her and others, including her host family, also increased after she started to work in the pub.

Rita said when she was with the Japanese student, they would talk about many things, such as fashion, TV programmes, magazines, Japanese culture and Taiwanese culture, etc. She told me she became good at chatting with people due to all her chatting and gossiping with that student. It is not difficult to understand that all the opportunities of chatting helped her have more topics and things to talk to others with and also made her more confident in talking to people.

#### Less confident and more confident

While Rita kept telling me that she talked a lot with the Japanese student, Mari, and learned a lot from her, Mari's good English ability also undermined Rita's confidence. 'I am afraid of those who are very confident. I don't know why. Her English was so good that I was worried, I was worried to speak English in front of her' (R/int.fin/19jun06/p38/t). It was similar to Linda. It seems to happen to some language learners that they become reluctant to speak or avoid speaking in front of learners who have higher language proficiency than them.

Although some customers criticised Rita, others gave her confidence too. A customer said to her once 'You are very good, not like me, not able to speak any other languages. This gave me great encouragement' (R/int.3/03jun06/p53/t).

## 4.4 Sharon

**Table 4.4 Data relating to Sharon**

	<b>Date</b>	<b>Methods of data collection</b>	<b>Key</b>
1	20-11-2005	<i>First interview</i> (in Sharon's accommodation- flat)	S/int.1/20nov05
2	13-01-2006	Informal chat (in <i>Sharon's</i> accommodation – second homestay)	S/S's/13jan06
3	10-02-2006	Group meeting ( <i>dinner</i> in Eric's house, including Linda, Eric, and a native speaker, Terry)	S/d/10feb06
4	17-02-2006	<i>School party</i> (observation)	S/sp/17feb06
5	22-04-2006	Informal chat (in a <i>pub</i> with other students)	S/pb/22apr06
6	28-05-2006	Visit a <i>native</i> speaker's house with Rita (observation /chat)	S/n's/28may06
7	04-06-2006	<i>Second interview</i> (in Sharon's accommodation- second homestay)	S/int.2/04jun06
8	20-06-2006	<i>Final interview</i> (in my accommodation)	S/int.fin/20jun06

### 4.4.1 Background

Sharon is from Korea and still had three months' university to finish when she attended the language school in the UK. She stayed in Britain for 10 months. According to her, the main reason that she came to Britain was that she had a lot of pressure from her study, and she needed a year off from the university. Therefore, studying English abroad was a good excuse to get away from the pressure. She also mentioned her parents wanted her to study English because English was important. They agreed to her studying English abroad. She chose Britain because when she was young she read a book about King Arthur and Stonehenge. Her parents wanted her to go to Australia, but she did not want to. One of the reasons was that the Australian accent was different. She also did not want to go to Canada because there were too many Korean people there. She considered America but realised it was difficult to get an American visa and she thought America was dangerous. Moreover it was easy to travel to the European continent from Britain. She seemed happy that she could live without her parents and had freedom. She said in the first interview 'I need freedom world' (S/int.1/20nov05/p12).

Sharon only attended morning classes in the language school. At first, Sharon stayed with a host family – an elderly couple – for one month. Then she moved to a flat and shared with an English girl, who was training to be a hairdresser and used to bring friends back to the flat. After three months, Sharon decided to stay with a host family again, and this time she stayed with an English lady. She stayed there until she went back to Korea. She had a part-time job in a café and in her last interview she told me that she enjoyed working there. She sometimes would decide to have one or two weeks off from the language school.

According to Sharon, she changed her mind very easily. She said the only thing she did not change in the UK was that she did not withdraw from my research, which was very encouraging for me.

Sharon seemed to be a contradictory person. For example, she mentioned some other host families were better than hers because they invited students to go out together, but she refused to go out with her flatmate when she stayed in a flat. In fact, she turned down many people's invitations to go out together. She seemed to feel dissatisfied easily. Sharon did not think she learned English from her flatmate or host families, but she would then say her flatmate helped with her English.

#### **4.4.2 In what situations did Sharon have her interpersonal contact?**

The source of Sharon's interpersonal contacts mainly comprised her accommodation, which included two host families and a flat, the language school, and her workplace – a café.

#### Accommodation

During her ten months in the UK, Sharon stayed with two host families and in a flat. Sharon applied to stay with a host family when she was in Korea through the school's agent. Unfortunately her first month in Britain staying with a host family was not a happy one. According to Sharon, she did not get along well with her first host family, particularly the landlady. She only stayed with them for one month. During this month, she seldom talked to the landlady and the landlady's husband and subsequently ended up spending a lot of time in her room. The problems she had with her first family will be described in section 4.4.6.

After spending one month with the host family, Sharon moved to a flat, which she shared with an English girl, who was nice and kind to her, according to Sharon. The flatmate's boyfriend spent about 5 or 6 days a week in the flat, so Sharon's interpersonal contact in the flat basically included the flatmate and the boyfriend. Sometime the boyfriend's brother and the brother's girlfriend came to the flat at the weekend. Here Sharon spent more time talking to the flatmate than the previous host family; they talked about daily life and jobs and made jokes. Sharon also talked to her flatmate about her problems with friends, school and work. They sometimes watched TV together or cooked together. Sometimes if Sharon stayed in her room for a long time, her flatmate or the boyfriend would knock on her door and check if she was alright, or invited her to watch TV together. But, Sharon sometimes did not feel comfortable spending time with them in late evening, because 'usually after 8 o'clock... they're very, very friendly and very, very in love situation' (S/int.1/20nov05/p24). When she stayed in the flat, her flatmate and her flatmate's boyfriend sometimes helped with her English. Strangely, later when I asked if she learned some English from her flatmate or the boyfriend, she told me she did not. These kind of inconsistent answers appeared in some of my interviews or informal meetings with Sharon.

At Sharon's second homestay there was only the landlady, but another Japanese student from Sharon's school moved in after Sharon. Compared with the first host

family, Sharon got along with the landlady better and spent more time with the landlady talking and doing things together. They usually had dinner together, and after dinner they would watch TV and then had a chat. They usually talked about things that happened in daily life, job, school and weather, etc. According to Sharon, she usually spent more time with her landlady than her Japanese housemate did. During the second interview Sharon told me she went to a church wedding of one of her landlady's friends. On the same day Sharon and her landlady also went to have afternoon tea and visited a small town. The landlady also taught Sharon how to make cakes and other English dishes. Although this second host family was better than the first one, Sharon thought she spent more time talking in the flat than in the second host family. Although there were a couple of unpleasant situations, in general Sharon felt happy with her second host family and felt safe and comfortable. She told me she had a 'much more comfortable life' and she felt it was a 'real home' (S/int.fin/20jun06/p27). However, Sharon sometimes still thought of changing her host family. I asked her the reason, and she told me 'Because just we've heard, I've heard lots of nice home stay' (S/int.fin/20jun06/p30). Sometimes it would appear that the information exchanged between students or the opinions of others can be influential in altering their initial conceptions. The Japanese housemate moved to the house later than Sharon; she also arrived in Britain later than Sharon. Therefore, sometimes the Japanese student told Sharon about her problems at school, with the host family and about her homesickness. However, the relationship between Sharon and her Japanese housemate seemed not as close as that between Linda and Linda's Korean housemate. According to Sharon, they had different personalities and her housemate drank and smoked too much, which she did not like. She mentioned that her housemate wanted to go travelling with her, but she did not want to, because her housemate's English was not good and she drank too much (S/int.2/04jun06).

### School

At school Sharon met students from Korea and other countries. In her first month, she was close to a Japanese student because they started the course on the same day, but Sharon only went out with her once. However a month after she arrived in Britain, she got to know some Korean students in school, so she started to spend more time with them, talking during the break time in school, going out with them and cooking Korean food with them. The situation lasted from October to

February. During these months she had several problems with Korean students, so she eventually decided not to talk to or spend any more time with them. She said she told herself one of her purposes in coming to Britain was to learn English, so it was not a problem for her not to have any Korean friends here (S/S's/13jan06; S/int.fin/20jun06). She once invited a couple from Spain to her flat to have Korean food. Although the Spanish couple invited Sharon and her flatmate to have Spanish food, they did not go. When a Polish student asked her to go out, she refused even though she said the Polish student was her close friend here (S/int.2/04jun06).

### Work

Sharon had a part-time job in a café and her interpersonal contacts in her workplace were mainly between her and her colleagues, who were British and non-British. As sometimes the café was not very busy, Sharon's colleagues spent a lot of time talking to each other. In the beginning she rarely talked to her colleagues, and most of the time she just listened to their conversations. Sharon said at that time she did not feel close to them and she could not understand their English and the things they were talking about (S/int.1/20nov06). In the café, her colleagues talked about everything; they liked to talk about their life, their relationships and others. Luckily the situation changed a few months later when some of the problems Sharon had faced, which will be discussed in a later section, started to be resolved and she began to join in her colleagues' conversation. She also went out with her colleagues as a group several times.

Sometimes Sharon talked to customers in the café too, although mostly the conversations were just polite social exchanges, like greeting and talking about the weather. She noticed that an old couple came to the café almost every day, but she still did not take the opportunity to expand her conversations with them.

### Other

Apart from the above three main sources of interpersonal contacts, Sharon also had some other situations in which she met people, for example, she met me several times for informal meetings and formal interviews. When we had informal gatherings she also met a couple of native speakers through me. Sharon seemed to enjoy talking to them and told me that she could understand them well. However, I



recognised that those two native speakers spoke to Sharon slowly and clearly, as they were experienced in talking to foreigners (S/n's/28may06).

#### **4.4.3 Why was Sharon in these situations?**

##### To improve her English

For most of the students in the language school, staying with a host family seems to be a common choice. They expect to improve their language ability through their interaction with the host family. This also applied to Sharon. 'I need English speaking time.' (S/int.1/20nov05/p3) was one of the reasons why Sharon looked for a part-time job.

##### She needed money

Unlike Rita, 'money' was one of the reasons that Sharon wanted to have a part-time job. 'I need money now,' she said (S/int.1/20nov05/p2). In the last interview she explained more about the 'money' issue. According to Sharon, she did not want to ask for more money from her mother, because if she had done so, she felt her mother would have expected to see more improvement in her English ability. Sharon was concerned that people back in Korea, including her parents and friends, might want to know just how much her English had improved.

##### For social reasons

She wanted to meet more English people; therefore, she decided to look for a part-time job. However, at the time when we were talking, she had doubts about this thought, because she found it was difficult to talk to English people. 'I used to be think about that, now, I don't know. It's very difficult, speak with English people. Yes, it's not easy' (S/d/10feb06/p84).

##### Bad relationship

She decided to move to a flat because she realised she was not getting on well with her first host family. She did not talk to the family much and also had other problems there, for example, she was only allowed to have a shower after dinner, and she was also asked to help with the housework, which she did not feel was right as she was paying to stay with this host family (S/d/10feb06; S/int.fin/20jun06).

Apparently Sharon's expectations of the host family and the host family's expectations of Sharon were rather different.

#### Others

In her first interview Sharon mentioned that the town where she was living was small and boring, and she only had morning classes at school and life was a bit boring and the same every day. Having a part-time job helped her get rid of the boredom.

After staying in a flat for approximately three months, Sharon decided to move to a host family again due to some practical problems within the flat and some uncomfortable feelings towards her flatmate. She said her flatmate did not respect her privacy and she was annoyed by her flatmate's using her shower gel and shampoo without asking her (S/S's/13jun06).

#### **4.4.4 Whether Sharon used her interpersonal contacts in these situations for language learning and use purposes? If so, how? If not, why?**

##### **(A) Making use of the opportunities**

#### Learning from accommodation situations

When Sharon stayed in the flat, if the flatmate could not understand her English, the flatmate would tell Sharon directly. Then, Sharon would write down the words or sentences to let her flatmate correct the mistakes and pronunciation. However, Sharon did not think that she had learned English from her host family (S/int.2/04jun06).

#### Learning from work

Sharon used to listen to her colleagues' conversations, which she thought very useful for learning English especially in relation to pronunciation and accent. 'I listening and I think about their pronunciation. Understand some...?' (S/int.1/20nov05/p26). She also picked up a lot words from her colleagues' conversations and learned them. Sometimes at work, if she heard some customers

talking and she could not understand, she would go to her colleagues and ask them to explain to her.

#### Use in accommodations

As described in 4.2.2 Accommodation, Sharon would try to talk to the host families, her housemate and her flatmate, although with the first host family she ended up not talking to them because of the landlady's cold responses. According to Sharon, compared with the second host family, she talked about a lot more topics with her flatmate (S/int.fin/20jun06).

#### Use at work

When the café was quiet, there was time for Sharon and her colleagues to chat together. In the beginning Sharon was quiet most of the time because of her limited language ability and unfamiliarity with the topics her colleagues were discussing. After a few months of passive attitude, Sharon started to join in her colleagues' conversations more actively. During her second interview, she told me an interesting story: because her colleagues talked about their boyfriends a lot and sometimes talked to her about their relationship problems, she decided to make up a story. The story was about a boyfriend she had in Korea and how they broke up; however, this story was untrue. Through this she also told them about the 'couple ring', which is part of Korean culture. She told me that in Korea a couple would usually buy the same type of rings to wear. It is interesting to see that her approaches and attitude had changed. Topics might be still important to her, but instead of finding existing topics, she started to make them up.

Sharon went out once with one of her colleagues but realised they did not have common topics to talk about. This may have limited Sharon's use of English.

#### **(B) Not making use of the opportunities**

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, it is believed that the target language community can offer language learners a lot of opportunities to learn and use the language. Nevertheless, with Sharon's case, the opportunities were not fully exploited and sometimes were dismissed deliberately by Sharon herself.

#### No topics, did not know the topics, did not like the topics

It seemed very often that Sharon did not make use of her interpersonal contacts to use or learn English due to topical issues, e.g. lack of topics, unfamiliar topics or uninteresting topics. They were also problems Sharon faced in the host country. I will discuss them in detail in section 4.4.6.

#### Lazy, exhausted, no need to learn

Although Sharon told me she would pick up words from her colleagues' conversations and then learn them, she also said 'they usually speak to me new words, but... I never tried to memorise them' (S/int.fin/20jun06/p16). The reasons she gave me were that she was lazy and she was not desperate to learn English. It looked like 'laziness' had stopped her making an effort to use the opportunities to learn and use English. (She did not want to go out with a Polish student from school because she said she was lazy.)

Before Sharon went back to Korea, she stopped making efforts to learn new words from her colleagues because she was soon to go home and she felt exhausted by many things (S/int.fin/20jun06). Perhaps she thought she would not need English after she went back to Korea, so it was not necessary for her to learn more.

#### Nothing special

In our dinner gathering, she told me she would not go to the school party held the following week. This kind of party is usually a good opportunity for learners to meet their fellow students and at the same time talk to school teachers informally. In her opinion, the school party, which she had attended twice already, was 'nothing interesting', 'nothing special', or 'every time is the same' (S/d/10feb06/p36 & 43).

#### Preferred to stay alone

Sharon's personality may have also affected her use of the opportunities to learn and use the language. She told me she preferred to stay alone in her room when she went back to her accommodation. '... some distance between me and flatmate that's better than closed, and just stay alone my room is more comfortable than stay with them.' (S/int.fin/20jun06/p12). From my observation during my contacts with her, it seemed that she was not very open to her real feelings. We can see that personality affects her willingness to communicate.

### Others

Going out with non-Korean people could have been a good opportunity for Sharon to use and learn English. Apart from those topical issues, other reasons why she did not want to go out with them included 'they are couple', 'I can't speak English very well', 'if they are friend, I will go with them... they are just flatmates' (S/int.1/20nov05/p21 & 22) or 'just lazy' (S/int.2/04jun06/p47). Her 'not my friend(s)' attitude appeared to affect her willingness to build up social relationships.

#### **4.4.5 What did Sharon gain from these interpersonal contacts?**

Sharon learned and improved her English through her interpersonal contacts. When she did not understand, her flatmate and friends and colleagues would explain to her. Sharon seemed to appreciate her flatmate pointing out errors, and she said 'in school when we have some problems, they didn't mention about that' (S/int.fin/20jun06/p10). She learned new words and grammar from her colleagues and by talking to people around her she was able to recognise different accents. 'The pronunciation, sometimes they taught me their pronunciation and then I can improve my listening and sometimes I can, I correct my, the grammar' (S/d/10feb06/p85). She said people noticed she spoke with a Birmingham accent because she spent time talking with her manager who was from Birmingham (S/int.2/04jun06/p29). The improvement in her spoken English was also noticeable to others as was the increase in her confidence in using the language. 'You, your English is also improved. Yes, you are more, more confident speaking' (S/n's/28may06/p78).

Meeting people, including British and those of other nationalities in school, at work, in accommodation and through participating in my study was a social gain for Sharon. She met people herself and also met people through others, for example her flatmate and through me. But unfortunately she did not try to extend her social networks through these contacts.

When Sharon stayed with her second host family, she had an opportunity to attend a wedding in a church with her landlady, which Sharon thought was beautiful. The landlady also taught her to make cake and cottage pie. Living with British people let Sharon experience different ways of living and customs. She was surprised that

some people started having relationships as young as 17 or 18. From her point of view learning culture was more important than learning English. However she did not really give me examples or show me her involvement in cultural learning, aside from attending the church wedding with her landlady.

#### **4.4.6 What problems related to interpersonal contact did Sharon face in the host country and how did she deal with these problems?**

##### **(A) Language**

###### She could not understand others

Like many language learners, Sharon had difficulty understanding others' English in the early stages of her study abroad. She could not understand the words people used and had difficulty with the different accents people had, especially at work. However, she did not have any difficulty in understanding school teachers' English because they spoke clearly and slowly. When she faced this kind of difficulty she would adopt different strategies, such as pretending there were no problems, making efforts to understand or giving up. For example, Sharon could not understand a manager's English at work, and when the manager talked to her, she 'just smiled and just disappeared and ran away. Just...mm... and asked another, I asked another colleague what she told me' (S/int.2/04jun06/p12). When Sharon could not understand her flatmate's or the flatmate's friends' English, sometimes she would just smile, sometimes she would ask them to explain to her, and sometimes she would use a dictionary. When Sharon started to work in the café, she did not talk much to her colleagues. According to her, that was because she was not close to them and she could not understand them well.

Also, for her, it was easier to understand British people's accents and pronunciations than her fellow students', especially European and Arabic students.

###### Others could not understand her

For language learners to understand what others say and to be understood by others are both important. Sharon had problems being understood because of her pronunciation and accent. Here are some examples: 'my landlady couldn't

understand sometimes, every time... said pardon, pardon.' 'I didn't want her pardon. So, I didn't ask to my landlady' (S/int.1/20nov05/p18). In contrast with her first host family, Sharon's flatmate tried to tell Sharon directly if she could not understand Sharon's English. Then Sharon would write down what she was trying to say and her flatmate would correct the mistake and correct also Sharon's pronunciation. Sharon's colleagues told her after she worked there for a few months that in the beginning they did not think they would ever be able to talk to her because they could not understand her pronunciation and accent. 'They thought they wouldn't speak with me forever because they think they couldn't speak with me. At that time my English was really, really horrible, so they couldn't understand at all' (S/int.2/04jun06/p15). In order to let her colleagues understand her English, Sharon sometimes needed to say things twice. Also she knew that her colleagues could not understand her pronunciation, so she tried to improve her pronunciation by listening to and thinking about theirs.

Sharon also mentioned that the students she met at school could understand her English but English people could not understand her English. Therefore, she did not think her fellow students were good candidates with whom to practise and improve her English (S/int.2/04jun06).

#### English was not good

In the beginning, Sharon did not want to go out with her flatmate because she thought her English was not good enough. In our last interview, Sharon was still not very confident about her speaking. 'I can understand people's English, just I can't say English when I tried to speak most like them, and I can't' (S/int.fin/20jun06/p68).

### **(B) Interpersonal relationship**

#### Bad relationship with her first host family

Sharon did not have a pleasant time with her first host family. According to Sharon, her landlady was not friendly and could not understand Sharon's English, which really put her off talking to her landlady. 'I think, they think just, just, students just money.' '...sometimes I tried to talk to them but just for my landlady and the answer is just yes or no, so, I can't speak continue' (S/int.1/20nov05/p15 & 17-18).

She only stayed with the host family for one month, and during this month, she seldom talked to the landlady and the landlady's husband, and subsequently ended up spending a lot of time in her bedroom. When they had breakfast and dinner together, they hardly talked to each other. Sharon discussed the problems with her fellow students and eventually decided to find a flat. She told the school she did not like English food and she wanted to move to a flat, where she could cook for herself. She did not tell the school the real reasons; she said she did not want to cause more problems.

With her first host family, Sharon became reluctant to talk to them and took an avoidant attitude towards them. She lost her willingness to use her English and communicate with native speakers, which is supposed to be one of the main reasons language learners decide to learn the language in the target language community.

#### Arguments in school

During Sharon's study in school, she had a couple of arguments with the school staff and with other students. She had an argument with one of the teachers and decided to move to a higher class. Sharon also had arguments with some Korean students, and after those arguments, she decided to avoid all Korean students and only made friends with students from other countries.

#### They did not want to speak English

In school students from the same country tended to stay together and talk to each other in their own language. Sharon also spent a lot of time with Korean students until she had arguments with some of them.

#### Did not want to make friends with students in school

There were quite a few short course students who only attended the language school for two or three weeks, and the turnover of students was very quick. Long term students, like Sharon and Rita, gradually lost interest in talking to new students about the same topics and questions and also using simple English. Rita even admitted that she did not have the patience to talk to students with lower levels of English ability. Apparently, this kind of situation does not only occur between native speakers and language learners, but also between language learners themselves.



### 'My life is in Korea.'

Sometimes she gave me the impression that she did not want to integrate herself into the target language community, and did not have a desire to play an active part in it. She would also say things like 'My life is in Korea, not here' (S/n's/28may06/p35), and she also thought her flatmate was just a 'flatmate' not her friend (S/int.1/20nov05).

## **(C) Topical issues**

### Lack of topics

'Topics' seems to be an important issue in Sharon's interpersonal contacts. In fact, she turned down many invitations to go out with her school friends, flatmate and colleagues because she was worried that she did not know what to talk about with them. In fact, in a later interview she said she regretted not accepting the invitations. When Sharon stayed with the second host family, her flatmate texted her and invited her to go out. Sharon once again refused the flatmate's invitation by ignoring the text. Her reason was that she did not have topics to talk about with her flatmate (S/int.2/04jun06). Likewise when one of her colleagues offered to take her shopping, she said yes to the colleague at first but avoided mentioning it again. She said she would not feel comfortable if she did go out with her colleague because they did not have topics to talk about to each other (S/int.2/04jun06). 'No topics to talk' put her off going out with people. Even after working in the café for seven months, Sharon still thought she did not have topics that she could talk to her colleagues about. As far as she was concerned, her colleagues could talk about their private lives in the UK, but her life was in Korea. She did not think her colleagues could understand or would be interested in life in Korea. So, she would just listen to her colleagues' conversation or work alone (S/n's/28may06).

### Not interested in the topics

Sharon would not join in people's conversation if they were talking about things she did not like or did not find familiar. 'I have a lot of opportunities which I can speak with English people, just I don't make any opportunities..... Just I don't like any topics which I can't speak with them' (S/int.2/04jun06/p18). At work, Sharon

sometimes would avoid joining in her colleagues' conversation if they were criticising others. For example, some of her colleagues at work did not get along with the manager, but Sharon was friendly with her. Therefore, when her colleagues started to criticise or say something bad about the manager, Sharon would walk away and avoid joining in the conversation or just listen without responding (S/n's/04jun06; S/int.fin/20jun06).

It seemed that the problems with topics limited her social life and decreased her opportunity to build up friendships and social networks. As a result, her opportunities to use English were also constrained.

#### **4.4.7 What kinds of effect did these interpersonal contacts have on Sharon as a language learner and user?**

##### **(A) As a learner**

###### Her English improved

Through interactions and spending time with non-Korean people, Sharon's English ability improved. The improvement was noticed by others and herself.

###### She was motivated to learn

After Sharon had an argument with a teacher in school, she tried to move to a higher class. In order to move up a class, she had to take a test and she had to study hard. It appeared that the argument with the teacher motivated her to study. But the argument also made her reluctant to go to school. She had a feeling that all the teachers' attitudes towards her changed after the argument and that week was a difficult time for her (S/int.fin/20jun06).

A new teacher in the school told Sharon that she could not understand her English, which appeared to undermine Sharon's confidence. On the one hand, she started questioning herself - 'What have I done here?' and if she really had improved her English (S/int.fin/20jun06/p50). On the other hand, she started to plan to take another English course to improve her pronunciation and accent. Another teacher at school told Sharon that her pronunciation had not improved enough. Sharon felt guilty because she agreed with that teacher's comments and realised that she should

have talked to native speakers more and have taken some lessons in pronunciation and intonation.

From what she told me in above examples, it is interesting to see how unpleasant events or comments can motivate people's learning.

### **(B) As a user**

#### Less time to use English

Those unsuccessful interactions between Sharon and her first host family made Sharon decide to limit her contact with the landlady and the landlady's husband; it took away Sharon's opportunities to use English in that environment. On the one hand Sharon lost her opportunities to talk with the host family; on the other hand, by spending more time in her room, her time for studying might have increased.

#### More time to use English

Because of unhappy arguments with some Korean students, she decided to avoid all Korean students and only made friends with students from other countries, which really increased her opportunities to use English.

#### Became active in participating in conversations

After Sharon was told by one of her colleagues that her English had improved and her colleagues could understand her English more than before, she started to talk to them more and felt happier. She started to joke with them and make up stories related to the topics which her colleagues were talking about. She became active in participating in her colleagues' conversations. However, when I asked if she started to be more active in finding opportunities to talk to her colleagues after she knew that her colleagues could understand her more, her answer was 'the same' (S/int.2/04jun06/p16). It seemed that being understood encouraged her to participate more when the opportunity was there, but did not encourage her to look for more opportunities.

#### More topics to talk about

About two months before Sharon left Britain, her interaction with her colleagues had become relaxed and natural; she did not worry about what to say to them; that

is to say she did not to worry about topics. She did not have to be worried about topics because she knew about the things happening at work and the things her colleagues were talking about. In other words, she had been there long enough to have had some shared experiences with her colleagues. As she said ‘the happy moment is when I had conversation with them very naturally, and after the work, after the day I am usually very happy’ (S/int.fin/20jun06/p25).

In this chapter I have presented each of these four participants’ findings based on my research questions. From those findings we can see that there are similarities and differences in relation to the situations they face, and also similarities and differences in the way they deal with these situations. In the following chapter I will discuss in detail some of the main issues of these findings and how they are linked to the theoretical frameworks I reviewed in Chapter 2.

## **Chapter 5 Discussion**

Having presented the findings individually in the previous chapter, in this chapter firstly I will summarize the common patterns and differences across the findings for my four participants. Then I will discuss in detail some of the findings and emergent issues in this present study with reference to other research on language learning in the L2 environment. Finally, I will discuss to what extent existing theoretical frameworks reviewed in my Literature Review Chapter and usually applied to language learning in the L2 environments are useful in explaining the findings in this study.

### **5.1 Overview of my participants' language learning experiences in the UK**

As I have stated in Chapter 2, living abroad and studying the living language in the native speaking context are generally considered desirable and optimum circumstances for language learning and acquisition. English language learners decide to come to Britain to learn and improve their English with the expectation that they will have many opportunities to talk to native speakers. My participants came to Britain with the same expectations. However, after they arrived in the country, they unfortunately realised that their contact with native speakers was limited to their host family and not as they had anticipated. Therefore, they started to look for more opportunities to have the desired contacts, although my findings showed that (maybe due to their limited imagination) the range of these opportunities was very narrow. Jenny, Rita and Sharon had a part-time job, and Linda had a relationship with an Englishman. 'Part-time jobs' and 'native partners' were for them the means for learning English, which may be different from immigrant learners.

My findings also showed another major problem that my participants had – it was not easy to socialise with native speakers. Linda complained about native speakers,

including her landlady and school teachers, saying they were not patient enough to talk to foreign students. However, the colleagues Jenny, Rita and Sharon met at work seemed patient with their limited English ability and helped them with this. 'Being patient' seemed to be an important issue for Linda. She seemed to expect native speakers to be patient with all learners. She thought 'a boyfriend' should be patient, so an English boyfriend would talk/listen to her with understanding. She would avoid talking to native speakers who she thought were not patient enough to listen or talk to her, e.g. customers from her landlady's B&B. 'Topics' was another commonly mentioned issue that prevented them from interaction with others.

During their stay in the host country, they all faced different problems, most of which were related to language. For example, they found it was not easy to understand native speakers, and they also felt that sometimes native speakers could not understand their English. But they all stated that they did not have any problems understanding or being understood by their fellow students and school teachers. Interestingly, however, they all had problems understanding European students' accents. It would be interesting to know whether European students have problems understanding Asian students' accents.

Attending language school gives them opportunities to meet students from their own country or other countries, and sometimes furthers their learning with one another, for example, Linda's and Rita's experiences. In some ways this contact with their fellow students compensated for the limited contact they experienced with native speakers. For example, when Linda realised that the contact she had with the Korean housemate, Kelly, was more beneficial than that with her landlady, she committed more time and energy to Kelly. But one disadvantage of this type of relationship is that it can limit their further opportunities to socialise with native speakers.

Learners who decide to stay with a host family expect to have first hand target cultural experience and to use the target language with native speakers (Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight, 2004). My findings revealed that this was not always the case. Jenny's and Sharon's experiences, for example, led to avoidance of the host family, which resulted in very limited interactions. Other anticipated benefits, such as help with learning, integration with the family, e.g. an outing, etc. did not materialise. This reveals that the expectations of students and host family can be very different.

Another problem highlighted in my study in relation to this group was that differences in students' language proficiency affected their interaction – the one with more advanced ability was not patient enough to talk to the one with more limited ability. It appeared that this type of problem was not only limited to native speakers and language learners. Other findings of my study that I found interesting are that Linda was reluctant to speak English in front of other Taiwanese students, and Sharon's commitment to socialising was self-limiting because she always reminded herself that her life was in Korea.

The level of 'expectation' seemed to be an issue. Some of my participants' expectations about the target language community, native speakers' attitude towards foreign students, host family etc. appeared to be higher than what they actually encountered. Therefore, they had to look for ways to overcome these disappointments. Through this they began to reconstruct their relationships to the target language and community respectively. How they constructed these relationships was different and individualistic, according to their personality and personal expectations. I will discuss this in detail in 5.3.

## **5.2 My study and other studies**

### **5.2.1 Functions of learners' social networks**

All my participants' social networks reflect Bochner et al's (1977; 1985) types of social networks. At language school they met people from their own countries. They all spent quite a lot of time with learners from their own country, especially the Taiwanese participants, that is within their monocultural networks. Apart from the teachers and the staff in the language school, they all had contact with native speakers outside the school, including the host family, the flatmate in Sharon's and Jenny's cases, the colleagues at workplaces, an English boyfriend, or people introduced by people they knew, e.g. a native speaker introduced by me. They were all therefore participants within bicultural networks. At the language school, they made friends with students from different countries; at the workplace, Sharon met

people from the Czech Republic and Jenny met people from Poland. These are their multi-cultural networks.

As I mentioned above, all my participants got involved in the three types of social networks Bochner et al (1977) proposed. Nevertheless, my data shows that the functions of these three different types of social networks for my participants are different from those for international students – academic sojourners, in Bochner et al's (ibid) studies, which I will discuss in more detail below.

Different from Bochner et al's (1977) findings, which showed multi-cultural friendships were less salient or frequent than either co-national or host national bonds, multi-cultural friendships seemed to play an important role for my participants. My participants spent a lot of time with their fellow students inside or outside school. My data shows that relationships between learners from different countries facilitate learners' language learning, i.e. linguistic gains and learning strategies. In Linda's and Rita's cases, the fellow students from other countries helped them with their English learning; they did not only provide companionship for recreational or non-task oriented activities. Perhaps we should recognise that multi-cultural networks can have not only a recreational function but also an academic function. McDowell and Montgomery's (no date) study with university level students also showed the strong academic support between international students.

It seemed that for all my participants, spending time with learners from their own countries decreased their opportunities to use English. However, in the cases of Rita and Linda, they tried to study English together with another Taiwanese student, Eric, outside the classroom. They decided to stay at school to do extra English study after class; Rita went running with Eric and according to her, they tried to talk in English while they were running and they also planned to read English novels together. During my interviews with Linda, she usually mentioned how she and other Taiwanese students discussed how to improve their English ability. These show that the functions of monocultural network among students are more than 'to provide a setting in which ethnic and cultural values can be rehearsed and *expressed*' (Bochner et al (1977: 291).

Moreover, sometimes the bicultural network did not really facilitate my participants' language learning, e.g. Jenny's second host family and Sharon's first host family. Some studies, for example Magnan and Back (2007) and Isabelli-García



(2006) focus on how contact with native speakers helps learners improve or learn the target language. However, my data revealed that sometimes learners learn the L2 or the way to improve the L2 from fellow students from other countries or their own country. Indeed, the native speaker myth is a myth but actually interactions with non-native speakers prove to be helpful instead.

Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) conducted a study with two groups of Chinese students who were taking a one-year foundation course in academic English language in a British university. Some of their findings are similar to mine, for example, reluctance to interact with British people because of language ability, and feeling less intimidated speaking English with other international students. And most of the students commented that they had little opportunity to mix with British people, which was one problem my participants also mentioned. However, many of the students in Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's study preferred to share a house with other Chinese students. Although they were aware of the reduced opportunities to speak English, they could gain more psychologically. This is different from my participants. Although sometimes my participants, like Jenny and Sharon, moved from one place to another, they still stayed with British people. Students in these two studies were all learning English and realised the difficulty in mixing with host nationals. However, the way they evaluated the problem was different. This was probably due to their ultimate aims – the university students stayed for a degree course in various subjects, and learning English was only a part of that study period. For them, finding further opportunities to mix with British people was less important than the close contact they had with their co-national fellow students, which enabled them to adjust to living and studying in Britain over a longer period of time. On the other hand my individual language students would be in the host country for possibly a shorter period of time, and improving English and experiencing British culture was their main learning purpose.

### **5.2.2 Power relations, identity and opportunities**

In Norton's (2000) study with five immigrant women learning English in Canada, she examined those women's investment in English learning. She discussed in detail how individual woman's identities changed during their learning and using English,

and how those changes facilitated or constrained their learning. Some situations she discussed were similar to my study. For example, like Eva and Mai in Norton's study, Sharon, Rita and Jenny managed to develop relationships with their colleagues at their workplace, and in Rita's case, even with the customers. But, the difference was that my participants seemed to react less strongly about the unequal power relation between themselves and native speakers than Norton's participants.

Perhaps my participants' identities as student sojourners made their experiences different from those of immigrants in the host country. As I previously described in Chapter 2 where I distinguished different types of learners in the L2 environment, immigrants may feel more pressure to be accepted into the society. In Norton's study, her participants did not want to be recognised as immigrants. In contrast, my participants did not seem to have any problems being seen as foreigners who are learning English. Sometimes this identity might even benefit their language use and learning. For example, Jenny, Rita and Sharon all stated their work colleagues were patient with them and taught them English because their colleagues knew they were students.

Linda had her identity as a foreigner, especially a foreign student. She did not really struggle to be recognised as an English language speaker; she thought of herself being a foreign language learner all the time. In comparison to Linda, immigrant women, like those mentioned in Norton's study, might be more eager to be recognised as an English speaker. Therefore, they reacted strongly when native speakers did not recognise their language ability, for example, Katarina was angry that her teacher did not think her English was good enough to take a computer course (Norton, 2001).

In the study of social/academic relationships between non-native-English-speaking (NNES) students and native-English-speaking (NES) domestic students, Leki (2001) found that in the course projects the domestic students demonstrated their powerful position and disregarded NNES students' potential contributions to the projects. The limited English ability was the main reason why NNES students were marginalised. Their limited language ability was not accepted by the NES domestic students, and also because of the limited language ability, NNES students were seen as incompetent. Their potential contributions were refused. In contrast, my participants' poor English ability seemed to be accepted in their community of practice, e.g. their workplace. Jenny, Rita and Sharon all mentioned that their

colleagues were patient with their limited English and were willing to help them improve it. Perhaps the nature of the community of practice resulted in this difference. In the academic area, especially university level, people are expected to have good language ability. Another reason can be the identities the people bring with them when they join their communities of practice. My participants were recognised as English language learners, but Leki's participants were university students, who were expected to have a certain level of English ability.

### **5.2.3 Willingness to communicate – WTC**

Both Kang (2005) and Cao and Philp (2006) adapted a qualitative approach to examine L2 learners' willingness to communicate. In Kang's study, she examined 4 Korean students' WTC in L2 through a conversation partner programme in a university, where non-native and native speakers of English had face-to-face conversations. Cao and Philp focused on classroom situations where 8 international language learners had enrolled for an intensive English programme at a university-based private language school. Therefore, there were not any native speakers involved. Unlike these two studies, the situations I observed or my participants mentioned were not restricted to institutional situations. My study focused on outside classroom situations and like Kang's study, both native and non-native speakers were involved. Although, the contexts researched in these three studies are different, there are similarities between the findings. For example, issues related to interlocutors and topics were revealed. Both Kang and my studies show that interlocutors' warm and active response affect learner's WTC. All three studies reveal that topic familiarity and interest also decide learners' WTC.

I found Kang's findings interesting. In her study, she claims that learners' opinions about interlocutors, topic and conversational context affect their psychological conditions of security, excitement and responsibility, and therefore affect their WTC during a conversation. And she concludes that learners' WTC in L2 can 'dynamically emerge and fluctuate during a conversation situation' (Kang, 2005:277). I could see that this kind of 'dynamic' change was also evident during my observation of my participants' interaction with others. My study also shows that topical issues were the reasons my participants were reluctant to take up opportunities where communication was possible. Kang's study shows that the English fluency of the

non-native-English-speaking interlocutors affects her participants' WTC. Her participants showed reluctance to speak English in front of non-native speakers who were more fluent than they were. My participant, Linda, also showed this kind of concern. However, my findings also suggest that non-native speakers can also be reluctant to speak English with other non-native speakers who are less fluent than they are, for example, Rita.

#### **5.2.4 Host family – the primary source of native interaction**

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the language school emphasized the advantages of staying with a host family. However, it seemed that sometimes the expectations between my participants and their host family were different.

For learners the host family is usually the primary source of native interaction outside the classroom, and the mealtime is the opportunity for the most interaction (Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart, 2002). Although my participants did not complain about the amount of time they spent with the host family or activities they were involved in like Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight's study (2004) reported, they did show slight disappointment about these issues. And they hoped they could be involved in more activities which the host family did. In my final interview, Linda told me that in the future she would like to stay with a host family who have children of her own age so she can go out with them. There were also slight problems related to daily life around the house, for example, the time of day Sharon was restricted to using the shower. Also she was not happy when her first host family asked her to help with the washing up. She did not feel that she should do these kind of household chores particularly as she was, in her view, a paying guest. These may appear to be minor issues, but they had quite an effect on their relationships.

#### **5.2.5 Native-speaking partner – a desirable interpersonal contact**

'Except for situations involving love or money, it is almost impossible to imagine a situation in which adults would be continually exposed to the same good quality and quantity of language that a child received' (Steinberg, 1993: 210). My participants spent a great deal of money coming to Britain to learn the English language, so they

would expect to receive good quality and quantity of language. Also following stories from others, they were anticipating another source of exposure to the quality and quantity of language. All four participants wanted to have an English boyfriend. Linda and Rita particularly wanted to have a native speaker as a boyfriend because they wanted to practise English. Immigrants who have a native-speaking boyfriend or girlfriend possibly want to integrate into the host community gradually. However, for Linda and Rita, they see a native-speaking boyfriend as a means to improve their English. It is also different from some Japanese female English learners who see forming a relationship with White Western men as a goal and learning English as a means to this goal (Piller and Takahashi, 2006). In fact, when Linda was seeing her English boyfriend, she was motivated to learn English. It appeared that having an English boyfriend not only gave her opportunities to practise her English as she expected, but also gave her motivation to learn.

### **5.2.6 Non-native speakers – workplace**

In order to have more opportunities to use and learn English, Jenny, Rita and Sharon looked for a part-time job. They expected to meet more native speakers at work. One interesting point Jenny mentioned is that most of the colleagues in one of the places she worked were Polish and they all spoke Polish together; therefore, she did not have the opportunity to use her English. Maybe learners who want to have a part-time job in order to practise their English need to be aware of this kind of situation, especially since more people have come from other EU countries to work in Britain.

## **5.3 Revisiting the theoretical frameworks**

### **5.3.1 My participants' communities of practice**

All of my participants belonged to communities of practice in some form, and they all learned from their respective communities of practice. They were all part of the community of practice formed by language school students. And at the same time

they all belonged to other communities of practice. Jenny, Rita and Sharon joined their communities of practice at the workplace, and Linda formed a community of practice with her Korean housemate, Kelly. Linda and Kelly studied English and discussed how to learn English together; they talked about their lives in the UK together. They had shared concerns/passions, which were learning English, improving their English language ability and surviving in the UK as international students. They talked to each other every day and arranged to do the English grammar exercise together, and whenever Linda had problems in English, she went to her Korean housemate. They obviously interacted mutually and regularly. Through talking and discussing about their lives in the UK and studying English and discussing English problems together, they learned the way to survive in a foreign country and also improved their English ability. They consequently developed their shared repertoire. The community of practice formed by Linda and Kelly contained three characteristics of Wenger's (1998a) definition of community of practice, namely mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire.

While my participants thought of having a part-time job in a café or in a pub, and going to pubs or to night clubs for socializing, they never mentioned voluntary work or pursuing a shared interest, e.g. joining an art club, salsa class, ramblers association, or drama group. This may be the reason why I was unable to find a wider range of communities of practice that they were involved with. Although Jenny mentioned that she tried to go to church and a sports centre, the outcomes were not satisfactory. The reasons she gave included not having time to go to church again and people in the gym just doing their own work-outs which limited the interaction to just social greetings. We can see that they had limited experience in finding opportunities where they could have 'mutual engagement' and interact regularly (Wenger, 1998a; no date).

According to Wenger's (1998a) definition of 'community of practice' and the example he gave about family as a community of practice (see 2.4.1), the data I gathered from my participants did not show that any of them became a part of the families they stayed with. Their relationships with the host family remained more like 'host and guest'. Like Linda and Rita said, they just talked about what they did every day at school or at work, and they mainly talked to the host family at dinner.

In Linda's case, after dinner Linda, the landlady and Linda's housemate(s) went back to their own rooms and watched TV. It seems that it is not easy for a language learner to join a host family as a member of that community of practice, but it is more likely that he or she can become a member of that home. When a language learner becomes part of the 'host home', he or she usually gets involved more in the family events, which leads to more opportunities for using and learning the L2. It might be, of course, possible that a language learner becomes a part of a host family and therefore a member of that community of practice, for example, by getting married with a member of the host family, which would then result in them joining in that community of practice. I was told an example of this happened in the language school where I conducted my research (10-July-2008, informal communication).

I found the concept of community of practice important in understanding where my participants learned. However, as I stated in 2.4.1, there are many varied communities around people, but not all of them are communities of practice. And if we take the position of people learning through interaction with others in the social world, we may say people learn in those different communities, but not necessarily in communities of practice. My findings have also revealed that in order to have the whole picture of my participants' opportunities to learn English, sometimes I need to look for these opportunities through communities in general (e.g. church, gym or neighbourhood), especially when I came to see that the host family may not necessarily be a community of practice. Nevertheless, I did find that my participants were involved in communities of practice. Therefore, in the next section I will look at the legitimate peripheral participation of my participants within their communities of practice.

### **5.3.2 Legitimate peripheral participation of Jenny, Rita and Sharon**

I have suggested in 2.4.2 that legitimate peripheral participation cannot be evident until there are more than two members within that community of practice. My findings revealed that it applied to the community of practice formed by Linda and her Korean housemate, Kelly. Therefore, in this section, Linda's case will not be included.

As Lave and Wenger (1991: 100-101) emphasise '(T)o become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources, and opportunities for participation'. At their workplace Jenny, Rita and Sharon tried to become a full member in their community of practice in different ways.

Rita actively engaged in her community. She knew that in order to have access to the wide range of ongoing activity and resources in that community, she needed to become part of the social network at the workplace; she had to build up friendships with her colleagues. Therefore, from the beginning, she tried to stay in the pub after work and tried to socialise with her colleagues, even though she did not have anything to say. She wanted to know what her colleagues talked about. This non-participation was for her participation in the future. Rita made an effort to become part of the community at work. During working hours, she listened to others' conversations and learned from them. And she also tried to go out with her colleagues, which was very different from Sharon. Sharon usually avoided the opportunities to go out with her colleagues. Sometimes she also seemed to want to separate herself from her colleagues, as she said her life was in Korea and did not think her colleagues would be interested in her life in Korea.

Like Rita, in order to access opportunities for participation, Jenny also tried to build up friendships with her colleagues. She wanted to learn her colleagues' language – according to her it was 'teenagers' language' – in order to understand what they were talking about and join in their conversation. Jenny expanded the relationship with her colleagues to outside the workplace. She moved to a colleague's house and also stayed in a flat with her manager's niece. When she felt homesick, she would also call her manager at her workplace. Jenny's relationship with her flatmate particularly helped her overcome the difficult time she had in London. Jenny's workplace was not only a place where she could have exposure to English and use it, but also a place where she gained emotional and practical support. Her relationships with her colleagues apparently were very different from Sharon's relationships with her colleagues. Sharon's relationships with her colleagues seemed to be more limited to within the workplace, not outside the workplace.

My findings appeared to show that it took Sharon a longer time than Rita to become part of the community. It might be partly due to their personality; however,



it also might be because of the type of workplace or the work colleagues they had. I went to their workplaces and I found the age of Rita's colleagues similar to hers, but in Sharon's workplace I saw that her colleagues appeared older. This might not necessarily be the main reason, but it could affect how they interact with others. But for some of us, it is easier to talk to older people than younger people.

They all had different experiences in their peripheral participation, but there were some similarities among them. At the workplace, they all had access to their native-speaking colleagues' conversations, which could be seen as expert performances of native speakers. In Rita's case, she also had access to conversations between her colleagues and customers at the bar area. They quickly developed their English, especially the work-related English. Learning the language of the pub or café – names of drinks, for instance – this could be an example of joint enterprise with the shared repertoire. Because they gained access to social networks within the workplace, they were able to practise English on a regular basis and become more proficient in using English. Interestingly, in order to increase their interaction with their colleagues and be accepted as an English speaker, Jenny and Rita brought the English they learned at school to their workplace.

As I mentioned in section 2.3.2, when language learners find a job in the L2 community, they may become part of a community of practice formed by their colleagues at work. In some ways, like native speakers, learners need to go through a newcomer's stage, e.g. being unfamiliar with the new situation and trying to access different resources. However, it seems to be more difficult for language learners because of the language ability. In the beginning both Jenny's and Sharon's colleagues had difficulty understanding their English, and they also had problems understanding their colleagues. It took them a few months to start participating in their colleagues' conversations more actively. According to Sharon, her colleagues could not understand her English; therefore, they did not talk to her a lot in the beginning. Sharon could not easily access their conversations because of her English ability. Limited language ability made it more difficult for Sharon to get access to ongoing activities in this community of practice and blocked her opportunities for participation. Also, different from their native-speaking colleagues, the main outcome for my participants from their participation in the community of practice was that their L2 ability improved, which was actually one of their purposes in having a part-time job.

### **5.3.3 My participants' imagined communities and their non-participation**

In Norton's (2001) study, Felicia's imagined community of Peru was marginalised by her teacher, which resulted in her withdrawal from her class. Sharon's attitude of 'my life is in Korea' stopped her actively participating in her colleagues' activities. It seemed her 'imagined community' – her Korean identity – made her reluctant to take up these opportunities to use English. Her imagined community resulted in situations of non-participation. Maybe it was this identity which also prevented Sharon's willingness to communicate. That means learners' 'imagined community' may affect their WTC. One thing interesting here is that Sharon came to Britain because she had a lot of pressure from her study in Korea; it seemed she wanted to escape from her own country for a while. However, her Korean identity sometimes became an obstacle in respect of her learning and use of English.

Learners have their language learner identity and also bring with them their own heritage cultural identity or identification with their culture of origin. In Sharon's case, her heritage cultural identity seemed to stop her interacting with others; on the other hand, as far as I am concerned a learner's heritage cultural identity can be a good source for interaction with others, for example, talking about his or her own country. It can also be something that non-co-nationals or host nationals will be interested in. It can be a symbolic resource that language learner can bring to their opportunities to learn. As I mentioned in 2.5.2, Norton's (2000) Polish participant talked about Europe, which led her to more opportunities to use her English.

In my study, my participants were afraid of talking to native speakers. Jenny and Linda were worried about making mistakes in front of native speakers, and Linda also did not like to speak English in front of a certain Taiwanese student because that student would correct Linda's English. It seems that they were 'sensitive to negative reinforcing behaviours of others' (Schumann, 1978b: 170) and they did not want to lose face. However, there may be another interpretation.

Learners hope they can speak as well as native speakers; they want to be a member of that community – their imagined community. For most learners, native speakers speak the target language correctly. Being part of this imagined community means that they should not make mistakes and they should speak correctly.

Therefore, Jenny and Linda were worried about making mistakes in front of native speakers. Sharon said she did not want to speak to native speakers because she could not speak English as well as English people would. In Norton's (2001) study, she found her participants felt uncomfortable talking to people who belonged to their imagined community. This finding seems to relate to my participants also; they all mentioned that they felt nervous or uncomfortable talking to native speakers. My participants could be concerned that if they did not speak well, the other members of their imagined community would not recognise them as members. It seems that a learner's imagined community of native speakers can motivate them to learn. However, in some situations it can also cause learners to become non-participatory in conversation or unwilling to communicate.

As I discussed in 5.2.2, my participants seemed not to have problems being seen as English language learners and sometimes this identity might have benefited their language use and learning. Language learners would make mistakes from time to time. This seems to conflict with what we have just discussed about their imagined community of native speakers. The possible explanation can be that it is due to their ambivalent desire to learn and practice English. Their investment in English seemed to be affected by other investments that may conflict with the desire to speak (Norton, 2000). In this case it is their imagined community of native speakers.

#### **5.3.4 My participants' investment in English**

My participants' investment changed over time and space. Rita changed her investment in learning and using English from her host family to her workplace. She spent more and more time with her colleagues and she noticed the investment was worthwhile. She gained symbolic resources – English ability and friendship – and these symbolic resources brought her more opportunities to gain more symbolic resources and helped her access a British university. When Jenny and Sharon realised that they did not get along well with their landlady, their investment in the host family became less and they started to have an avoidant attitude. In Linda's case, when she realised she could have more return from her investment in her Korean housemate, Kelly, than from her landlady, she decided to spend more time with Kelly.

My participants' investment in English and how they make use of their opportunities to learn and use English can be better understood with reference to their purpose in coming to Britain, their relationship with others, and changes in their identities across time and space.

According to Sharon, her main reason to come to Britain was because she had a lot of pressure from her study in Korea and she needed time away from it. Also for her, English might not be very important if in the future she found a job which is related to her study in her university. It seemed English sometimes did not really matter for her. Maybe this is a possible explanation why she just let opportunities to use or learn English flow away. For example, she refused her flatmate's or her colleagues' invitations to go out, which could have been good opportunities for her to use and learn English through interaction with them. On the other hand, English was important for Rita because she needed it for her further study in a British university. Therefore, Rita would look for as many opportunities as she could to use and practise her English. That is why Rita seemed to be the most active learner among my participants.

The relationships with others affected my participants' language learning and use. Relationships affected how my participants committed themselves to learn. For example, Rita got along well with her Japanese fellow student, and she knew she could talk to her and learn from her. While Rita was committing herself to their relationship, she was improving her English. Good relationships motivated my participants' learning. However, my findings also showed that bad relationships could also motivate learners' learning. For example Sharon did not want to study with the teacher who she had an argument with, and so she decided to study hard to move up to a higher class. And when she had arguments with other Korean students, she decided to mix with students from other nationalities but not Korean students, which increased her opportunities to use her English. During the time she had problems with the school and fellow students, she decided to have a few weeks away from the school and concentrated on her workplace. According to her, she learned a lot during that period of time. In Jenny's case, after her close friend left for Korea, she realised she needed to speak for herself. Therefore, she had more opportunities to interact with others in English.

Linda felt she was marginalised at the dinner table. According to Linda, her landlady paid more attention to her Korean and Japanese housemates, who Linda

felt had better English ability than she did. She did not have opportunities to join in the conversations. She was not given the opportunity because the landlady chose to talk to the other two housemates, whose English was better than Linda's. In this case, the landlady was the one that had the power to decide who could talk and whom she wanted to talk to. Linda also said when she tried to say something, the other two girls would have taken her turn already. Again the ones with more symbolic resource – language ability – had the power to control the conversation. As we can see this use of power occurs not only between native speakers and learners but also between learners themselves. With this experience of non-participation, Linda was given an identity as a less capable English speaker. If we borrow Wenger's (1998a) point of view, she was in the community but in a position of marginality. She said she could only listen to them; that is to say the way she participated in that community is by listening. She was upset about the situation, but she did not try to make efforts to change the situation. Her attitude was 'wait and see'. Linda also stated that she could talk more with her landlady when there were only the two of them. Jenny also mentioned that it was easier for her to talk to just one colleague. If there were more than one, it was difficult for her, because she could not follow the conversation. It is understandable because when there are only two talking to each other, one needs to make sure the other one understands. If we borrow Wenger's point of view again, sometimes Linda would take the position of peripherality. When she and Rita were learning to make trifle with her landlady, in the beginning Linda was quiet. Most of the time she was listening to what the landlady said or the conversation between the landlady and Rita. But, in the later stage, Linda started to talk to her landlady. It appeared that she was claiming her right to speak, and in the beginning the non-participation was for her later participation.

In Sharon's case, she developed a strategy – making up a story – to initiate her willingness to communicate. The strategy Sharon developed can also be explained in that she wanted to be seen as the one to have the resources and be able to have some contribution during conversations. It is similar to Eva in Norton's (2000) study. She was not silent any more during their coffee-break conversations. When Sharon realised the topic about boyfriends was mentioned a lot, she wanted to be part of the group and share the same experience.

It is interesting to see that Jenny did not mind talking to a drunken woman to practise her English. Maybe it is because as she said ‘every day my desire is improving my English’ (Je/int.1/18nov05/p26). In contrast, when Linda and Rita were offered an opportunity to learn English with a native speaker, they decided not to take up the offer. As I described in Linda’s findings, the reasons included that the person had got a Scottish accent and had tattoos. Linda and Rita seemed to be more selective. Linda and Rita were not sure whether or not to commit their time and energy to someone that they did not know and someone with an accent they were not familiar with. It is interesting that by living in Britain for several months, I would feel they had learned and accepted that people had different accents, but they still preferred someone with an accent they were familiar with. It seems to conflict with their idea of talking to native speakers, who may have different accents, to learn English. Perhaps in their imagined community, they want to speak BBC English, and when they meet a native speaker who is not in their imagined community, they refuse to accept him or her.

Sometimes ‘unequal investment in social interaction’ happens (Norton, 2001:73). Sharon’s experience with her first host family highlighted this situation. When she tried to talk to her landlady, the landlady just answered with yes or no, which made it difficult for Sharon to continue the conversation. And also Sharon wanted to be understood, but when the landlady kept saying pardon to her, Sharon gave up talking to her. It seemed that the landlady had little investment in understanding and talking to Sharon. It also referred to what my participants mentioned, that they felt more comfortable talking to people who showed patience in listening to them and who tried to understand them. Their interlocutors showed their investment in the conversation.

### **5.3.5 My participants’ willingness to communicate in the L2**

Although in some situations the target language speakers or those who have more power decide if the learners are given opportunities to practise the language, sometimes it is the learners who decide whether or not to make use of the opportunities or if they are ready to take the opportunities to speak. In this case, willingness to communicate is a useful framework to be used to examine how language learners take the opportunities to use the language.

My participants mentioned about the difficulty talking to native speakers. One of the reasons was their English was not good enough. It seemed their perceived competence prevented them from interacting when the opportunities arose. This corresponds with findings from other studies (for example, Yashima et al, 2004). One of the main reasons that blocked Sharon's access to conversations with her first landlady was her limited language ability, as Sharon thought her landlady could not understand her and did not have the patience to converse with her.

However, there were times when the interlocutors were acquainted with them or would show a higher level of patience, which would motivate their willingness to communicate. My participants seemed to be more willing to communicate with people they knew, and also those who had experience talking to foreigners, for example, teachers from school, the host family and my native-speaking friend, Terry, who had experience in hosting foreign students. Linda told me, her brain would become blank when she met native speakers whom she did not know well or met for the first time. She also mentioned that she did not have problems talking to native speakers whom she knew already.

The opinion of native speakers not being patient with foreigners was shared among my participants. With this opinion in mind, learners may unconsciously choose not to communicate with them. It appears that my participants had a negative attitude towards many native speakers; they did not think native speakers were patient enough to talk to foreigners. With this shared opinion, it might also affect their willingness to talk to native speakers, although they did not really say so.

As I mentioned in 5.3.4 one of the reasons that Linda and Rita did not accept the offer made by a native speaker to teach them English was that he had tattoos. It seems to correspond to one of Kang's findings (2005) which states that participants' perceptions of an interlocutor's appearance could influence their being motivated to have conversation. One of the participants in Kang's study mentioned that when he conversed with a tutor who had a tongue piercing, he felt unpleasant, and this feeling resulted in him not being motivated to continue the conversation.

The issue of topics was also mentioned a great deal by my participants, in that the lack of topics, or being unfamiliar with or uninterested in topics became another obstacle in the way to interaction. These topical issues may affect their 'readiness to enter into discourse' (MacIntyre et al, 1998:547). The learner may want to initiate a

conversation but may feel unable to do so because they do not have a subject or topic they feel comfortable enough to discuss.

‘No topics’ was mentioned a lot by Sharon, and she used this as an excuse not to take up the opportunities to socialise with others. It was also mentioned by Linda – because she did not know what to talk to her landlady about, which was why she did not want to go to the theatre with her landlady. Interestingly, in order to talk to her English ex-boyfriend, Linda would make more effort to think of topics to talk to him about. It seems that desire to communicate with a specific person (MacIntyre et al, 1998) overcame her problem of lack of topics and enhanced her WTC. Although Rita mentioned a similar problem regarding topics, she further explained that if the others kept asking her questions, she was able to keep the conversation going. ‘No topics’ or ‘don’t know what to say’ seems to be a common problem many learners face. It is probably that they have topics to talk about but they do not know how to express it in a L2.

When my participants mentioned that they did not have topics or anything to talk to their host family, flatmates or work colleagues about, it might have been due to cultural differences between the groups in question. For example, some of the general everyday topics discussed freely in Western society may be difficult for L2 learners to discuss or join in because of their reserved nature. One thing interesting is that one of the reasons Rita did not talk to her landlady’s husband much was because to her he represented a father figure. This may have been influenced by her cultural background.

When Linda moved up to a higher class, she became more confident. According to her after she moved up to that class, at lunch time she would stay in her classroom and talk to other students in English. It seemed that her more capable identity made her more willing to communicate with her fellow students in English. One interesting point that came from Rita was that she was not willing to communicate with fellow students who had a lower English ability than hers. In her first interview, Linda also mentioned that her Korean housemate did not like to talk to those who had lower English ability than herself. It seems that power relationships of this kind are not only confined to interaction between native speakers and learners, but also between learners themselves.



From the discussion above, we can see social contact and language learning interact over time during language learner sojourners' experience: studying the L2 with other learners after class, discussing how to improve the L2 ability with other learners, learning the L2 by talking to the host family, colleagues at work, native-speaking friends or non-native-speaking friends. It is indeed evident that learners learn language through interacting with others. However, if the interaction is merely superficial, learners may not benefit from the level of learning they might gain if they are involved in a community of practice. With this understanding, the importance of communities of practice in the L2 environment needs to be emphasised in language teaching.

### **5.3.6 Conclusion**

Before I make a conclusion for this chapter, I would like to look at Rita's experience at work again to review some of the concepts I have discussed in this study.

Rita had not had any experience working in a pub before. She started her job as a newcomer without knowledge of working in a pub – she did not know the names of the various drinks, she did not know how to serve or talk to customers. She started to learn by participating gradually in activities within the pub. She learned by observing and interacting with her colleagues – old-timers. The power relationship emerged when a colleague watched her struggling to serve a customer without any intention of helping her. The colleague had the resource – the knowledge – but Rita could not access it. In order not to be marginalised and to be able to participate peripherally in this community of practice, Rita stayed in the pub after finishing her work to socialise with her colleagues. In this community of practice, sometimes customers were also a source of learning, for example, she learned from a customer that there was a drink called Mickey Mouse, and he also taught her how to make it. While she was learning knowledge and skills in this community of practice, she was also learning English. Rita learned a lot of English from her colleague, Sam, which she did not learn from school. When talking to her other colleagues, Rita used the English she learned from Sam. She tried to use what she had learned and tried to show that she could also use 'their' language. She wanted to identify with them. With the help of Sam, a language expert in that community of practice, Rita gained her identity as a willing language learner and also an identity as a capable English

language user and one who understood ‘their’ language. Her colleagues started to teach her more English. Language ability gain seemed to be a by-product of participating in that community of practice, but in fact, it was the main product Rita was hoping to get. When one of their regular customers said to Rita that she was the best barmaid, her identity changed – from a novice newcomer to an experienced old-timer.

To conclude, the frameworks I have discussed in Chapter 2 can apply to all my participants, although certain concepts may apply more to one person than another. For example, my data has revealed that Rita is a type of learner who would like to learn through and can benefit a great deal from her interpersonal contact. She has shown that she is capable of using and creating learning opportunities within her social networks. Therefore, her learning trajectory can be better understood by the concepts of ‘community of practice’ and ‘legitimate peripheral participation’. Sharon appears to be more self-contained, in that she believes she is the one to control her own learning path. Therefore, many situations of her language learning and use can be explained better by factors within the concept of WTC.

Generally speaking the theoretical frameworks I have discussed in this thesis can apply to language school student sojourners. With the concept of community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), learners’ learning possibilities can be examined. However, whilst learners’ legitimate peripheral participation can be also examined, in some situations more time may be needed in order to investigate if learners can fully participate. The problem with language school student sojourners is that they usually do not stay for long periods of time in the host country. From my findings, I can also see how my participants invested in their English learning and their commitment which they had changed over time and space. With this conclusion, therefore, I believe that the frameworks I have discussed in this study can apply not only to my participants but also to other language school student sojourners in general.

## **Chapter 6 Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how individual language school learners' social networks/interpersonal contacts in the host country affect their language learning and use. Applying the frameworks widely used in examining immigrants and international students for academic purposes in the L2 environment has enabled me to comprehensively understand my participants' learning experiences in the UK, although the study also shows that certain concepts may apply more to one person than another. In this chapter, I will conclude my study with implications that have emerged from my findings, advantages and limitations of this study and suggestions for future research. Then I will complete this chapter by revisiting my personal experience as an individual language school learner, an international student for academic purposes and an immigrant through marriage.

### **6.1 Implications of the study**

#### **6.1.1 Implications for language schools**

My findings show that individual language school students seem to have a limited range of activities where they can be involved with local people. I suggest that private language schools need to provide more information to learners about access to local communities, make arrangements for them to take part in these communities, or ask learners to carry out projects which involve local people. International students studying for academic purposes or learning the L2 in a university or a college context usually have more variety of choices of extracurricular activities and voluntary activities on and off campus than private language learners do. Private language school learners need more advice and information from the school. For example, with the advantage of learners' living in the real community, private language schools can provide more information to learners about access to activities in various associations, clubs or charities in the

local community. The school can also provide students with information about local evening classes, where local people would usually attend. Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004:260) suggest, '(T)he program that had the most success in connecting students to the native perspective outside of the host family was the one that required student participation in an organization tailored to their interests.'

The findings of this study also show that multi-cultural social networks enhance learners' learning. The language school teachers can encourage collaborative learning doing projects involving local communities and people. Through the project, learners can benefit from the learning through participation in their particular community of practice. In that community of practice, they can deal with any problems they may face with the project together, e.g. how to access and build up relationships with the local community and people, how to solve the issue of power relations within the local community. Sometimes learners may not be confident enough to contact local people, so working with others may help. The ideal situation can be attending the morning classes and getting involved with projects in the afternoon. Apart from excursions, the language school can arrange for learners to take part in local activities or voluntary activities. This is one way that learners can experience real life in the host country. Study abroad should go beyond attending classes and sightseeing.

In my study, learners sometimes revealed how dissatisfied they were with their homestay situation. It suggests that there might be a lack of monitoring by the language school with regard to the host families' responsibilities in relation to the support and hospitality given to the students in their care. Therefore, in addition to the general satisfaction questionnaire given to the students towards the end of their stay, I feel that language schools should set up a regular monitoring procedure in line with the 'Code of Practice for Homestay Accommodation Providers' detailed in 1993 by the British Tourist Authority (Appendix I) to ensure that the general requirements for homestay students are met. This procedure could also include occasional and informal discussion with students regarding their host families during their course. Staff can act as 'the eyes and ears for the school' as Impey and Underhill (1994) suggest. With regard to the general satisfaction questionnaire given to the students, the feedback sometimes may not accurately reflect reality because some students do not want to cause problems for the host family (e.g. Sharon in my

study), and also some students may have difficulty in completing the questionnaire due to insufficient language ability. Another important implication for the school is the students need to be carefully placed in host families (Campbell, 1996).

There are also some other points that may be considered. When institutes advertise their programme of study, ideas of learning and using the L2 from and with non-host nationals can also be introduced. Language schools or agents need to give more information or arrange pre-departure programmes for individual learners before they depart for the host country. Usually learners in group study-abroad programmes are more informed and trained. Additionally, teachers in learners' own countries or in the host country can discuss or introduce topics about living and surviving in the host country to learners, how to interact with people in a L2 and how to recognise and take advantages of opportunities to speak when they arise.

### **6.1.2 Implications for me as a researcher**

It seems to me that the benefits, in terms of learning English, which my participants had from their non-native-speaking social network were more than I expected. It showed that I also had a 'stereotypical' image that learning in the target language community was generally achieved through interaction with native speakers.

I feel it is not easy to conduct a study with this kind of student group, especially if it has to be carried out over a longer period of time. It may not be difficult to conduct a single questionnaire exercise or do a one-off interview, but with longitudinal research there will always be the possibility that the students will leave or suddenly disappear, which would leave the study without conclusion.

Because of the time limit, this study did not include the school staff, host family and my participant's colleagues at work. In the future, if I have the opportunity to do a similar study, I will include these groups as part of the study. Although I only include the learners in my study, the findings are valuable guidance for involving them in further studies.

## **6.2 Advantages and limitations of the study in terms of research methodology**

In my study I conducted several interviews with my participants respectively and also had various contact with them between these interviews. I found this regular contact helpful for my data collection and I realised that the familiarity over time created a 'comfortable' atmosphere which prompted my participants' confidence and their willingness to interact with me. This enabled me to collect rich data. These multiple interviews also helped to solve the problems related to the limitations of interviews I discussed in 3.4.2. For example, my participants would sometimes remember things they forgot to mention in a previous interview which would enable me to develop a more complete picture of their experiences. With the information I gathered during my various interviews I have found that there are still a lot of interesting findings in my data which I can analyse and interpret from different aspects. However, because of the limitations of the thesis, I was not able to present all of them for this study. But hopefully I can revisit this data in the future and discuss aspects which I was not able to discuss at this time.

As I have just mentioned, due to the limitations of the thesis I was not able to use all the data I had collected from all of the 11 participants, who were a mixture of male and female learners with Asian or European background. The majority of them were aged between 20 and 25. The four participants I have focused on for this thesis coincidentally were all female of similar age with Asian background. In the future, if I have the opportunity to analyse the data of the other participants, I believe the findings revealed will be different, dependent upon the gender, age or background. The common patterns across the findings for male participants with mixed backgrounds will be different from that of this present study, for example, the problems they faced, the way they dealt with these problems, their expectations and how they socialised with others.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2 most of the studies in WTC have been conducted with a quantitative approach using questionnaires. In contrast, my study has been conducted with a qualitative approach with the help of interviews and observation. The value in using observation and interviews, especially multiple interviews, to investigate learners' WTC is that WTC is a situational construct and the interview

process and observation can capture the changes of learners' WTC over time and space. And therefore I was able to recognise the variables influencing my participants' willingness to communicate.

Different methods were used for data collection, which was intended to ensure data triangulation (Leki, 2001). However, written forms of data collection for this study, like diary and e-mail, turned out to be unsuccessful. The findings of this study are mainly from the in-depth interviews, informal chats with the participants and informal group gathering, and supported by some field notes of observations of my participants' social activities and my on-line contact, MSN, with them. However, the interview data was not just from one-off interviews, so I believe the reliability of the data was assured.

Another limitation was when I interviewed the Korean participants, Sharon and Jenny, I had to use English. English is a second language for me and my participants, which may not allow us to express ourselves clearly sometimes, although most of time we did not have problems in communicating. However, I am unsure, if in the future I have the opportunity to do research, whether or not I would like to interview people in a language other than their first language. It is not easy when the interviewee's and the interviewer's first languages are different, and both need to communicate in a second language. Nevertheless, in saying so, I do not mean that the data I collected from my Korean participants is not reliable or not valuable.

### **6.3 Suggestions for further study**

From my study, I have found that individual private language school learners need more support and guidance. There are many of this type of language learner and for many language schools they are the main source of students all year round. However, this area of study has been neglected. They need more researchers' attention.

Many studies, including this present study, have been conducted from learners' perspectives. However, by listening to my participants and having discussions with some of my English friends, I have realised that while we are listening to learners'

voices, it is also important to listen to the voices of the host nationals, including the host family. Sometimes host nationals have problems talking to L2 learners. Moreover, it can be easy for learners to start mentioning all the negative feelings they experience in the host country when they realise that there is someone willing to listen to them – in the case of my study I was the person that listened.

From my data, I found the relationship between learners themselves and learners from other countries played an important role. As I mentioned in 2.2.2, in Isabelli-García's study, when she talked about social networks, she did not take L2 learners from different countries into account. She only talked about learners' relationships with other learners from the same country and with native speakers of the host nationals. Another important group, people from other countries, was neglected. It seems that the relationships among non-compatriot foreign students or non-native English-speaking students enrolled in the same schools are neglected in research.

I think it will also be interesting to see how learners' identities are influenced after they return to their own countries. Therefore, if I have the opportunity to do a similar study again, I would like to include the initial period when learners return to their own countries. Or do another in-depth interview like the last interview I did with my participants, but in their own countries.

## **6.4 Revisiting my experiences**

In Chapter 1 I mentioned why I was interested in this group of language learners. One of the reasons was that I have been a language learner staying in target language communities. At the beginning of the research, I often 'remembered' this identity. However, in the later stages of my research, I started to recall and recognise my other identities, which were a student for academic purposes and an immigrant who married an Englishman, which happened during my research period. Therefore, I would like to complete this thesis by discussing some of my own experiences, which I have discovered were related to some of the empirical studies I have mentioned in this thesis.

Previously I myself was a language learner in Spain and England. In Spain, I rented a room from a Spanish single mother with another two Spanish female university



students. There I experienced misunderstandings through bad communication and cultural differences and ended up avoiding interacting with them. At that time my Spanish was not fluent enough to participate in conversations between the landlady and the other two girls. They spoke very quickly. My limited Spanish ability inhibited me from communicating with them. And because of this they thought I was strange and unfriendly. However, one thing I found interesting was that when I told the landlady I wanted to move out, we started to argue. Suddenly my Spanish became fluent, although it was not necessarily accurate. My willingness to communicate was raised because I felt I needed to deliver my message – in this case to defend myself. This corresponds to what Kang (2005:282) proposes – situational WTC in L2 appears to ‘emerge under psychological conditions of excitement, responsibility and security.’ It was my ‘responsibility’ to convey my message. I then moved to stay with an old Spanish lady. There I had more opportunities to talk and I also learned Spanish cooking. In Spain, I went not only to a language school, but also to a ceramic class where I met local people and had opportunities to learn and use my Spanish. It was a community of practice for me. Although there was a teacher, he was more like an organiser, and most of the time we learned through participating in ongoing activities and discussing ideas with each other. In the beginning my interaction with them was mainly limited to social greetings, and usually I would just listen to their conversation. Most of the time I had no idea what they were talking about, partly because of my limited Spanish ability and partly because I did not know the related knowledge about ceramics or the topics they were talking about. Some of them had joined the class before and they knew each other already. They were obviously old-timers in that community. Although there were other newcomers to this community, they were also Spanish and were able to participate in the conversation more easily than me and learn more quickly than me. Obviously my legitimate peripheral participation was affected by my language ability. In terms of learning and use of my Spanish, I had access to my Spanish colleagues’ conversations, which could be seen as expert performances of native speakers. When I started to talk more with an old Spanish man, telling him about news I heard from TV or some Spanish cultural events or traditions I learned from the language school, he and others started to see me as a capable Spanish language user and one who tried to integrate with the society. They eventually started to interact with me more and consequently I gained more symbolic resources, such as language

ability and other knowledge, and with these resources I was able to participate more and make use of opportunities to talk people outside this community of practice, for example with my landlady and neighbours. My experience of learning in a community of practice in some ways was similar to that of my Taiwanese participant in this study, Rita. When I was in Spain, I was not very active in making friends with learners from other countries. I regretted this after I went home. However, one thing I noticed about myself during this period in Spain was that I found it easier to talk with older people. Maybe this was because they had more time and patience to listen and talk to people. In Britain, I stayed in a host family with another two learners from the same language school. During my stay, I did not talk to the host family very much, and I felt that this was the kind of host family who would only take in students for financial gain. I also did not talk much with my housemates as they had their own friends. I talked more with other Taiwanese students or other students in my class, mainly Japanese students.

I also belong to a group of students studying abroad for academic purposes. I have stayed in campus accommodation and also shared a house with other international students. I have also stayed with an English couple for a short period. Being an academic sojourner, I have interacted more with international students. It was probably because the accommodation I stayed in had mostly international students and the courses I have taken consisted mainly of international students. The host nationals I have known were mainly staff and teachers in the departments I was in. It is true as Bochner et al's (1977) suggest, the function of host nationals for the international academic sojourners is 'to *instrumentally* facilitate the academic and professional aspirations of the sojourners'. I had this kind of help from the English couple I stayed with, but it is not the only help I had from them. I also gained cultural knowledge from them and most importantly they became 'life advisors' for me.

During the period of doing this present study, I married an Englishman and decided to live in England. I now have an immigrant identity. I have started to know more English people and socialise with them. I have been experiencing the transitional periods and I can recognise the changes. When I was a language learner in Spain and England, my purpose was to improve my language ability and experience different cultures. At that time social contacts for me were the way I could practise my language and learn about different cultures which I could bring

home with me. Having an identity as an L2 speaker was important. When I was an academic sojourner, lectures and assignments were my priorities. Language improvement was still important, but the social contacts, especially on campus, were more for experience or knowledge sharing. For some people, they even do not need much social contact; they may stay in their room or the library most of the time reading and writing for their study. After I 'gained' my immigrant identity, when I was working in a café, learning or practising English was not my main purpose. I wanted to know people, and it was a good opportunity for me to get to know the neighbourhood, especially local people. As I finish my study, I look forward to becoming involved in the 'real' world. However, I am sure sooner or later I will have similar experiences as those immigrants in different studies have. I am also sure that I will benefit greatly from this study myself in the future.

## Appendix A: Letter to Prospective Participants

25 November, 2005

Dear Student,

I am a research student at CELTE (the Centre for English Language Teacher Education) in the University of Warwick. I am working on my research about international students learning English in the UK. In my research I would like to find out about students' learning and living experiences in the UK. As you are studying English in the UK, you would help me greatly by participating in my research.

I hope that both of us will benefit from my research. During the process, you will have the opportunity to understand your own learning and personal development. Moreover, you can improve your English. For example by writing the diary or e-mail to me, you can practise your writing.

The activities you participate in during your time in the UK (over the next 6 months) will include interviews, diary writing, informal group meetings, and communicating with me by MSN and e-mail. You will remain anonymous when I report on the research. That means no-one will know the information is from you, except you and me.

Thank you very much for your precious time – I hope you will be able to help me. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely yours,

Pi-chu WU

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E-mail address: [Pi-Chu.Wu@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:Pi-Chu.Wu@warwick.ac.uk)

Mobile phone number: 07851801053

Address:

CELTE  
The University of Warwick  
Coventry CV4 7AL, UK

## Appendix B: Form of Personal Information

### *Personal Information*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_

Nationality \_\_\_\_\_

Educational background \_\_\_\_\_

Working experience \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been learning English? \_\_\_\_\_

When did you arrive in the UK? \_\_\_\_\_

Is this your first time staying in a foreign country? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, where did you stay before? \_\_\_\_\_

Your e-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Your phone number(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Your address in the UK \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you staying with a host family or a flat (on your own or with other students)?

\_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix C: Questions for the first interview

1. Why did you come to Britain to study English?  
Why did you choose Britain rather than another English-speaking country?
2. What do you expect to gain from your stay in Britain?
3. Before you came, what did you think you would like to do to in Britain to improve your English or learn British culture?  
Have you been doing those things to improve your English or learn British culture since you arrived? If yes, please give me some examples. If not, please tell me the reasons.
4. Could you please tell me your typical day here?  
(Answers may include their spending time with the host family and in school. I will ask more questions about how they spend time with the host family and other students.)
5. Could you please tell me any times when you use English outside the classroom and the host family?
6. Could you please tell me things you have observed since you arrived in Britain? Those things which are new, strange, impressive, upset etc. to you. What are their attitudes toward those things?

## Appendix D: Sample Translation of Transcription

1. 我當初會想跟他在一起一半是我想練習我的英語...我覺得交英國男友會讓你很有動力去想學英文。因為你會想找話題跟他聊天，我覺得那個很有動力。

At first, 50% of the reason I wanted to go out with him was because I wanted to practise my English... I think having an English boyfriend will motivate me to learn English. I will want to find topics to talk to him about and I think that is very motivating. (L/int.3/27feb06/p53/t)

2. 每次只要跟她(女房東)講完話啊，或者她跟我講什麼我不懂，對不對，我馬上拉凱莉去我房間，問她剛剛她(女房東)講什麼，那單字是什麼，趕快寫給我。

Whenever I finished my chat with my landlady or if she said something to me but I could not understand, I would ask Kelly to come with me to my room straight away and then ask her what the landlady had said, or what the words were and ask her to write them down for me. (L/int.fin/04mar06/p94/t)

3. 我看到亞洲同學，其他國家的人，我就可以跟他們聊的很順。可是我只要跟我的 home 媽聊天時，我就開始結巴。

When I met Asian fellow students or other non-native speakers, I could talk with them fluently. But when I talked with my landlady, I started to become less fluent. (L/int.2/18feb06/p13/t)

4. 你只是覺得你完全被忽略了。只是你在餐桌上吃飯，然後你整整一個鐘頭然後你講沒幾句話，總共三或四句。你不覺得很離譜嗎？

You just felt yourself being ignored totally. When you were having dinner, for the whole hour, you only said a few sentences, about three or four. Don't you think it's ridiculous? (L/int.1/18nov05/p30/t)

5. 我很想要去酒吧，因為我之前認識一些朋友。那可能去的時候，就可以有機會聊天。這樣子，對，雖然不是每次都會遇到，但是遇到的時候，就可以跟他們聊天。

I want to go to the pub because some people I knew might be there...if I go there I can talk to them. Yes. Maybe I don't meet them every time, but when I meet them there I can talk to them. (R/int.fin/19jun06/p110/t)

6. 因為如果你們溝通的話，你們會用到不同領域的單字。你們就是在交換，所以你還是會進步。

When you are communicating with them (international students), you may use words/vocabulary from different areas. You are exchanging vocabulary, so you can still improve your English. (R/int.fin.19jun06/p53/t)

7. 你跟 homestay 的話，他們會習慣那種學生英文，然後所以你不用講得很正確他們也可以了解你。我如果真的面對到英國人的話，我的英文突然急速下降。我擔心我的英文他們聽不懂。

When you speak to the host family, because they are used to talk to foreign students, you don't have to speak English correctly and they can still understand you.' 'When I faced native speakers, I felt my English ability decreased rapidly. I was worried they could not understand my English.(R/int.3/06jun06/p60/t)



## Appendix E: Sample Transcription in English

### (Jenny's final interview)

P: Can you say more about this one? You can't understand... what, what couldn't you understand?

J: Because probably... I am not get used listen any English, so I can't understand. I couldn't understand, so... like before I told you, I, if, I can't, I couldn't say anything to them because if I say something, it took long time. And it needs longer, long sentence, they couldn't understand either. So, just like... I thought that when I say something if it takes long time, they would be bored. So...

P: You mean the host family.

J: Yeah.

P: You just worried they don't have enough patience.

J: Yes.

P: So, do you think that's because you didn't learn from the school? So, that's why you couldn't talk to them.

J: No, it's just, jut first time, so...just it was...

P: So, you, you said, ok, so you getting lose talking to and less confidence. How did you go though those time. You think 'oh, I don't have any... confidence...'

J: Ah, to..

P: You, you don't feel like talking them because you think...

J: Yeah.

P: You don't think they could understand you.

J: I just, I just watched TV together, so, just, sometimes we talked a little bit, but usually watched TV, just watched TV. And then after that I just went to my room.

P: Why? Why did you went to your room? Why did you go to your room?

J: Because just after watch TV, I just...

P: You don't, you didn't stay...

J: Yeah. We didn't talk a lot at that time.

P: At that time, didn't you think 'ok' you have to, you wanted to force yourself to talk to them or you just give up? Not give up but...

J: Yeah, yeah... Just, actually, at that time I lost confidence, so, even if I, I can talk teacher, but I couldn't talk like real English people.

P: Why is that?

J: Because the teachers really can understand quickly what I am saying, but it was different, so...

P: So, you, you don't have any confidence. How did you improve? Did you...? How did you...? So, the situation continued. Didn't you try to improve the situation?

J: Yeah, until about four, four, between four and five months, I really not confident.

P: For the first four or five months you are not confident, you don't have any confidence.

J: Yeah, but I knew I, I was improved my speak little by little, but not really like this.

P: Yeah.

J: I really lean to Kelly, so I just let her talk every thing for me. But he's gone, she's gone, I have to talk myself. Then after that by the chance, I with Francis, so probably this time

P: You get more confidence.

J: improved a lot.

P: So, at that time, in the beginning you, you didn't have enough confidence.

Appendix F: Sample Transcription in Chinese

p. 83.

Rita's final interview.

R: 因為, 我沒有新章法跟他們聊, 我有新章法, 只有新章法聽他們講, then 像我很 like 我一個同事叫 Sam 的, 他真的很好, 他真的教我很多. Then 像, 一剛開始我都是跟他一起工作嘛. Then, 那剛開始可能大家不熟, 那 Then 是直到前一陣子, then 他就會教我很多 那種 slang 嘅, then 再來就是 .. 他會跟我

Yes. (3) use opportunity (7) experience

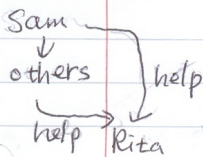
P: } 你上次有講.

= 教我說, 像有一次我們就在討論嘛. Then 我就跟他講說什麼是 'small talk' 呀?

<Tape 2>

P: 所以, 你就是英文方面都是有從同事那邊學到很多嘛, 對不對?

R: 對. Then '1' 也是 '1' Sam 的關係, then now 我會遇到 ~~不~~ 很多不會的, 我都會去問他. Then 像跟其他同事工作的時候啊, 就會講說, 你知道 Rita 她又帶到了什麼嗎? 新的這樣. Then they 就會很願意去教我一些, 其他其他, 變成是影响到其他同事也會願意教我一些, 有工作沒工作這樣的. 對啊, '1' 我很感謝 Sam, 是因為他 '1' 他的關係, '1' 很多同事 they 也會來教我, 不會就是像以前就是聊個很 simple 的 'conversation' 這樣, 問一下怎樣而已



那 P: 像, 你從什麼時候開始到他們, 你不是說 they 都會留下來聊天, 嘛, 你一開始就

## Appendix G: Sample of Data Analysis Process – Step 4

### What problems related to interpersonal contact did Sharon face in the host country?

- (D) Language
  - a. cannot understand (e.g. words, accents, pronunciation)
  - b. cannot be understood (e.g. pronunciation)
  - c. cannot speak English well
  
- (E) Interpersonal relationship
  - a. host family - not friendly
  - b. her flat mate didn't respect her privacy
  - c. students in school
    - same nationality always get together
    - students come and go, not stay long
    - problems with other students
  - d. argue with school
  - e. between colleagues and manager
  
- (F) Topical issues
  - a. lack of topics
  - b. not interested in the topic

## Appendix H: Sample of Data Analysis Process – Step 5

### What problems related to interpersonal contact did Sharon face in the host country?

(A) Language

- a. can not understand (e.g. words, accents, pronunciation)
- b. can not be understood (e.g. pronunciation)
- c. can not speak English well
- d. topics (e.g. difficult to find, do not like)

(A)

Like many language learners, Sharon had difficulty to understand others' English at her early stage of study abroad. She could not understand the words people used and had difficulty with the different accents people had, especially at work. However she did not have any difficulty in understanding school teachers' English because they speak clearly and slowly. Also, for her, it was easier to understand British people's accents and pronunciations than her fellow students', especially European and Arabic students. When she faced this kind of difficulty she would adopt different strategies, such as pretending there were no problems, making efforts to understand or giving up. For example, Sharon could not understand a manager's English at work, and when the manager talked to her, she 'just smiled and just disappeared and ran away. Just...mm... and asked another, I asked another colleague what she told me.' When Sharon could not understand her flatmate's or the flatmate's friends' English, sometimes she would just smile, sometimes she would ask them to explain to her, and sometimes she would use a dictionary.

For language learners to understand what others say and to be understood by others are both important. Sharon also had problems being understood because of her pronunciation and accent. The experience with her first host family made Sharon frustrated and made her decide to limit her contact with the landlady and landlord and spent most of her time staying in her room. 'my landlady couldn't understand sometimes, every time... said pardon, pardon.' 'I didn't want her pardon. So, I didn't ask to my landlady.' Different from her first host family, Sharon's flatmate tried to tell Sharon directly if she could not understand Sharon's English. Then Sharon would write down what she was trying to say and her flatmate would correct the mistake and correct also Sharon's pronunciation.

## **Appendix I: Code of Practice for Homestay Accommodation Providers**

### **Code of Practice for Homestay Accommodation Providers**

- To encourage the student to speak English as much as possible in my/our home
- To encourage the student to feel at home and to treat him/her as a member of the family rather than as a paying guest
- Not to host another student of the same native language at the same time unless by special arrangement with both the students and their schools/centres
- To provide a clean and comfortable student room meeting the physical requirements laid down by the British Council
- To provide a home environment in which it is possible for the student to carry on his/her English studies properly
- To provide the student with a balanced and appropriate diet
- To show due concern for the welfare, safety and security of the student during his/her stay
- To give the student reasonable and regular access to bathroom and laundry facilities
- To maintain a close liaison with the student's school/centre and so be in a position to help resolve any problems that the student may encounter during his/her stay
- To respect the student's different cultural background and be sensitive to the particular needs of the student

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