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by

Matthew Alan Cook

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**A More Natural Approach to L2 Learning and Use: Informal L1/L2
Conversations Between English-Speaking Spanish Learners and
Spanish-Speaking English Learners**

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by

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Report

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Dedication

This report is dedicated to the students from the French, Spanish and ESL courses that I have taught over the past 10 years of my career. You have made me laugh, made me cry, made me think and made me change my mind, all the while realizing that I have the best job in the world: language teacher.

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Thank you all!

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Matthew Alan Cook, MA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

SUPERVISOR: Dale Koike

Heeding the call by Firth and Wagner (1997) for a re-analysis of some of the “facts” of modern second language (L2) learning theory and research, the goals of this present study are to determine if: (1) informal conversations between a NS of English (NES) learning Spanish and a NS of Spanish (NSS) learning English reveal insight regarding the natural use and interaction of the first (L1) and the target language (TL); (2) informal L2 conversations in which the L1 is permitted present opportunities for L2 teaching, learning or socialization; and (3) provided that evidence of possible opportunities for L2 teaching, learning or socialization is found, does this indicate a need for permitting both informal talk and the use of the L1 in the L2 learning context. It was hypothesized that in informal conversations, learners would demonstrate intuitive approaches to L2 learning, teaching and socialization, and that observations of these phenomena could help guide research and pedagogy regarding the L2 learning context. It was also hypothesized that informal language exchanges would demonstrate that when

left to intuition, participants would provide quality NS input and modified NNS output for their partners as they alternated between L1 and L2 and between the roles of language teacher and language learner.

Previous studies have shown that the ability to control the language being used and the topic being discussed allows learners to access knowledge and linguistic structures that enable them to feel more comfortable using the L2 and less anxious about interacting in L2 conversations (Auerbach 1993; Tomlinson 2001; Lantolf and Thorne 2007). The design of this study was intended to address the concept of bi-directional informal discourse in learner/expert learner/expert pairs (i.e., participants who are each learners of their partners' L1) and the informal exchange of two languages in the L2 learning context. Although the importance of language learning and use in context have been described since the early 20th century in the work of Vygotsky, and the phenomenon of participant orientation and role-switching has also been examined in recent years, there have been relatively few studies that have looked at the nexus of social talk and reciprocal teaching by pairs of learner/experts as this context interacts with the use of the L1 and the L2 in an informal communication event.

Data for the study were obtained from audio recordings of four conversations between pairs of native Spanish speakers learning English and native English speakers learning Spanish with the goal of determining what the participants would teach to one other through the use of informal, unstructured conversation using both the L1 & the L2. In addition, all of the participants completed an exit interview questionnaire on their experience with the interaction as well as their general opinions regarding language

learning. The data showed that 7 out of 8 participants did teach (intentionally or unintentionally) both linguistic and extra-linguistic information from their L1 to their partners, and that in all pairs a local set of rules regarding the use of the L1 was established (including the pair in which no English was used). The pairs modeled an intuitive use of the L1 demonstrating the ability of the L1 both to bridge conversational gaps and to enable teaching and socialization in the L2. The data also show how the participants built a community of practice by setting and changing the language used, requesting explicit feedback or evaluation from their partners, bonding over language learning struggles, as well the linguistic and extra-linguistic information that the participants provided for their partners.

The results of the study indicate potential benefits both for the use of the L1 in the L2 learning context, and for allowing learners to teach from their own L1 while learning the L2 in informal conversations. However, the recordings and the exit interviews also show some potential problems for implementation (e.g., the possibility that a conversation may be carried out in just one language). The conclusions present implications and applications for the study, such as the establishment of language exchange programs as a supplement to traditional L2 classes, as well as the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Current second language (L2) research has reached a crossroads and the ever-blurring line between what is described as second language acquisition (SLA) and second language socialization (SLS) is creating unstoppable momentum towards the development of a more holistic and ecological approach to language learning and language use theory (Chaloub-Deville 2003; Lacorte 2007; Young 2009). The constant construction and deconstruction of paradigms in L2 theory has created a zero sum game in which proponents of the new tend to reject many of the conclusions of their predecessors. While some are content to accept this cycle of theory building and rejection, many researchers and teachers in the field are calling for a more realistic and complete vision of L2 learning that combines SLA and SLS (i.e., both learning and use), into one grand paradigm. Doing so allows for the consideration of competence through the use or repair of specific features or elements of the L2, that is, through a pseudo-structuralist analysis, but one that rejects an over-reliance on statistical data and instead takes into account the longitudinal process of language emergence in the individual. However, paradigm harmony also requires a focus on the processes of L2 socialization and participation through a qualitative analysis of language use in context. This sort of theory unification is not only possible, but it is also a rational step to take when considering that most SLA researchers view L2 learning as a process of both acquisition and socialization.

Chaloub-Deville (2003: 380), in her article on the future of SLA and the importance of the social interactional field, states that: “a good starting point would be an

analysis of naturally occurring discourse in social interaction to reveal the standards that apply in reality in particular settings”. A beneficial first step would be to catalogue patterns of entire events, considering social, cognitive, linguistic and other factors, in native speaker/native speaker (NS/NS) conversations in order to use these results as a measure for conversations involving a non-native speaker (NNS). This notion is seconded by Sford (1998), who says that the Participation versus Acquisition feud is obviated by the natural usage of language as seen in informal dyads that demonstrate how both processes are realized concurrently. The above authors seek an end to the schism between the acquisition metaphor and the participation/socialization metaphor by finding a synergy between internal cognitive processing and the sociocultural models.

The argument for ending the arbitrary dualism of language use and language learning is also supported by Lantolf and Thorne (2007), who declare that the time has come for the field to develop an approach that eliminates the unnatural divide between the social and the psychological (cognitive) processes. Lantolf and Thorne (2007) agree with Firth and Wagner (1997) that there are unbreakable bonds between the acquisition and socialization components of SLA/SLS. In his dialectic approach to L2 learning and use, Lantolf (2000) explains that the individual, and individual cognition, cannot be separated from society due to the undeniable fact that no individual exists apart from society. Much of Lantolf’s work, and much of the work based on Sociocultural Theory (SCT) in L2 research, is based on a set of principles established by Vygotsky (1956, 1962) that state: (1) language is a symbolic artifact of human culture that serves as a buffer, a “mediator”, between the individual (i.e., the individual’s cognitive processing)

and the rest of society; (2) language is the medium through which an individual's physical and then linguistic behavior is initially regulated by others, but through a combined process of both acquisition (individual cognition) and socialization (interaction with others and with the language itself), self-regulation will be achieved (Vygotsky 1956, 1962). The efforts of Vygotsky to address the crisis in psychology that had created an artificial wall between instinctual behavior and higher mental functioning laid the groundwork for Lantolf and many other modern theorists to declare that it is not only incorrect but also detrimental for L2 research to conceive of the individual (or individual cognition) in isolation, apart from other human beings.

In a seminal article challenging many of the fundamental concepts of modern L2 research, Firth and Wagner (1997) state that the field should re-focus on contextual and interactional dimensions of language, switch to an emic (participant relevant) view and broaden the database with a focus on the communication and participation success of L2 learners. They argue that the individual cognition model of SLA ignores the development of meaning in conversation as it is interdependently co-constructed in context-bound events in which both the learner and the interlocutor are responsible for building meaning or intersubjectivity. Furthermore, the authors state that it is problematic to assume that researchers can pattern or generalize interlanguage (a core component of many SLA models) because there are simply too many individual and contextual variables that must be considered.

In the same article, Firth and Wagner declare that modern L2 research is burdened by several false assumptions that are negatively impacting both research and pedagogy.

The authors state the field is under the thrall of the following flawed pretexts: (a) the NS is omniscient regarding the native language; (b) the NNS is subordinate and deficient; (c) NS/NNS conversations are a priori doomed to fail; (d) NS/NNS categories, although they are homogenized, blanket terms with no continuum or variety, are an acceptable categorical binary; (e) NS/NNS labels, although incapable of describing all other crucial and relevant facets of participant social identity, suffice for research purposes; (f) the presupposed duality of NS/NNS in a primarily monolingual world, although it completely ignores the multicultural, multilinguistic reality of language use and language users, is an acceptable conceptualization for theory and research; (g) a NS baseline (primarily obtained from experimental design) is the appropriate and best measure for the analysis of NS/NNS interaction. In this declaration, Firth and Wagner have fired shots across the bow of a previously inexorable juggernaut, challenging those who work in both L2 research and pedagogy. They believe, as do Chaloub-Deville, Lacorte, Young and many others, that the current focus of L2 research on the failure of individual cognition and the production of marked linguistic forms should be dismissed in favor of the analysis of communicative success and contextual factors that are responsible for communicative success.

Having addressed the large paradigm debate, it is time to focus on some of the specific issues analyzed in this study and how they have been discussed in the past. Two of the most obvious, and possibly most harmful, barriers to come out of the body of current L2 theory is denying learners the use of the L1 in the L2 learning context and suppressing the instinctual drive to socialize through informal conversations. Just as the

artificial walls between acquisition and socialization are being questioned, it seems rational that so should those barriers between the L1 and the L2, and between “formal” and “informal” language interaction and practice. One hypothesis in this study is that there are ample opportunities for good quality input in informal L1/L2 conversations, and that by permitting each participant the use of either the L1 or the L2 in informal conversation, opportunities for L2 teaching, learning and socialization would naturally present themselves. The idea of using different languages and different speakers to co-construct an understanding of the world, both linguistic and otherwise, includes and values the input of all participants, and the concept challenges much of the dogma that has been built into L2 learning theory. Previous research has shown that the ability to control the language (L1 or L2), as well as the topic being discussed, allows learners to access knowledge and linguistic structures that enable them to feel more comfortable using the L2 and thus less reluctant and less anxious in L2 interactions (Auerbach 1993; Tomlinson 2001; Nation 2003). This study puts these conclusions to the test.

Before proceeding, it is necessary both to define and explain the use of the terms “teaching” and “learning” in this study. The moments during which learning (acquisition) is actually taking place is still a mystery in L2 learning research, and due to this ambiguity it is difficult to identify both triggers for and instances of its occurrence.

As David Barker (2003) writes:

Unfortunately, a small detail often ignored in the rush to label some particular method or technique either brilliant or useless is that nobody really understands how humans learn languages... SLA research is a field where facts are remarkably thin on the ground and where it is difficult, if not impossible, to make sweeping generalizations... (Barker 2003: 2)

In full acknowledgement of the gray area in which these definitions lie, for the purposes of this study, the terms “learning” and “teaching” are used in a broad sense and the use of each will be grounded in the conclusions derived from the Output Hypothesis (Swain 1985, 1995). The Output Hypothesis assumes that the construction of comprehensible output contributes to language learning in that: (1) it creates opportunities for developing automaticity in the L2; (2) it provides learners a context for hypothesis-testing in the L2; (3) it allows learners the time for metalinguistic analysis of their L2 hypotheses; and (4) it permits a context for noticing (i.e., conscious perception) of both new and conflicting information in or about the L2 (Swain 1995). From this set of functions, and from concept of language emergence that is discussed later, comes the use of the word “learning” as it is applied in the analysis of the data for this study.

Just as the use of the terms “learning” or “acquisition” tends to be operationalized differently by individual L2 researchers (R. Ellis 1999), so can the use of the term “teaching”. It is hypothesized in this present study that, just as with learning, instances of teaching in a broad sense are likely to occur during the production of comprehensible output by a NS in an L2 interaction event. Furthermore, just as learning or acquisition can occur without a conscious decision by the learner to learn, (DeKeyser 2000; N. Ellis 2005), it can also be assumed that language teaching can occur without teaching being the explicit or intended goal of the person who is providing the input. In the design of this study, where NS pairs are each learners of their partner’s L1, opportunities for reciprocal L2 teaching and learning is found to be quite common.

However, it must again be conceded that the explicit goal of the teacher or the learner in these moments is difficult to determine from an outside perspective.

Heeding the call for a re-analysis of some of the “facts” of modern L2 theory and pedagogy that was put forth by Firth and Wagner (1997), the goals of this present study are to determine if: (1) informal conversations between a NS of English (NES) learning Spanish and a NS of Spanish (NSS) learning English reveal insight regarding the natural use and interaction of the L1 and the TL; (2) informal L2 conversations in which the L1 is permitted present opportunities for L2 teaching, learning or socialization; and (3) provided that evidence of opportunities for L2 teaching, learning or socialization is found, does this indicate a need for permitting both informal talk and the use of the L1 in the L2 learning context. Although the importance of language learning and use in context have been described since the early 20th century with the work of Vygotsky, there have been relatively few studies that have looked at L1/L2 use between learner/expert and learner/expert pairs in an informal interactional event. Finding evidence for both conversation-enabling use of the L1, and the possible teaching, learning and socialization opportunities found in informal L2 talk in which the L1 can be accessed as a resource, would be important for SLA theory and pedagogy because it would challenge the long-standing neglect and dismissal of the L1 and of informal talk as assets in the L2/TL learning context.

Chapter 2: Overview of the Report

Section One of the report provides an introduction to some of the current debates in L2 learning theory that relate to the study. The SLA versus SLS paradigm debate is introduced as well as a discussion of some of the controversial topics and terms in L2 learning research, such as the benefits of “informal talk”, the use of the L1 in the L2 learning context, learner/expert learner/expert pairs, and the operationalization of the terms “learning” and “teaching”. Section Two provides an overview of the report. Section Three expands upon subtopics in L2 learning research that were briefly presented in the Introduction, and includes background research relevant to the specific issues analyzed in this study such as language in context and communities of practice, “informal talk” and “imperfect speakers”, and the use of the L1 in the L2 learning context. The section concludes with the research questions and hypotheses of the study.

Section Four contains an explanation of the methodology and procedures used to obtain the data for the study, and includes descriptions of the participants and the study design. Section Five is a discussion of the results of the study. Results of the data are presented and discussed in six separate categories: (1) Setting and Changing the Language; (2) Explicit Requests for Feedback, Help or Evaluation; (3) Commiseration and Bonding over L2 struggles; (4) Language Teaching, in three subcategories: (a) grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation; (b) idioms; and (c) metalinguistic analysis; (5) Extra-linguistic Teaching; 6) Exit Interview Comments. Finally, Section Six presents the conclusion, implications for L2 learning theory, the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 3: Previous Research

3.1 Language in Context: Language Ecology and Communities of Practice

In a study that examines real language use by real language users, Young (2009) states that L2 learning theory must not neglect the social, political, contextual and individual factors that interact during the process of L2 acquisition/ socialization. Young says that the focus should not be on an analysis of linguistic structure development, but rather on the construction of the L2 social and self-identity that develops through practice in context. As evidence, Young points to child L2 learning studies that show construction of contexts for interaction in which social inclusion and peer bonding push L2 development (Young 2009). He finds more proof in adult learner diary studies (Schumann 1998; Pavlenko 2001a) that describe how L2 communication is a constant struggle for self-identity, in which it is not the linguistic structure that is the focus, but the social image and self-image of a learner who is struggling to communicate, and the L2 learning and L2 socialization that does or does not result from the struggle (Young 2009).

The impact of the affective filter is of great significance in the analysis of Young (2009), as well as those of Schuman (1998) and Pavlenko (2001a), and L2 socialization, which is seen as the express goal for the learner, is a battle for cohesion and constancy between L1 and L2 social identities. According to Young, studies of conversations in which a community of practice is established, show that successful L2 communication can occur with effortful co-construction, often despite the presence of marked forms (Young 2009). Under the sociocultural paradigm, the success of Young's communities of practice stems not from the expert NS-like production of a target form, but rather from

meaningful, co-constructed, participant-relevant interactions that serve to push both acquisition and socialization in the target language. Language is viewed as a tool of communication in social life and not, as it is often painted, as an abstraction of thought, or as a decontextualized object of production perpetually at odds with an idealized, theoretical grammar. Young insists that there is no set path for L2 acquisition/socialization and that broad generalization across learners and myopic microanalyses of single linguistic structures are highly unlikely to explain actual language use by actual language users.

Lacorte (2007) underlines the importance of context and the ecology of the language learning event as it relates to L2 learning and use. He states that quality input from interaction depends on multiple social roles operating in constant flux, and that social and linguistic context affect rate and order of acquisition. Individual factors are extremely important regarding classroom interaction. Age, aptitude, self-esteem, anxiety, extroversion, empathy and learning strategies all interweave along with the external dynamics and the collective factors in the classroom, such as the language-learning experiences, pedagogical theory and personal history of the instructor and other learners. According to Lacorte, the entirety of the language learning environment, and the dynamic, multifaceted interaction event must be the focus for the SLA/SLS researcher and teacher since any attempt to isolate individual variables will undermine the holistic analysis of language learning and use.

The development of the L2 through language practice in the context of a community is supported by Hall et al. (2006) who, in an article on multicompetence in

language learning and knowledge, state that the focus for L2 research should be on communities of practice and on the communicative successes of multi-contextual communicative experts. Brouwer and Wagner (2004) concur with this claim, and in a study of second language learning show that L2 learning is a social accomplishment that occurs in conversational contexts over time. In this sense, meaning in language is co-constructed and learning occurs in situated, social and evolving communities of practice. Atkinson et al. (2007) add further support for the analysis of communities of practice and language learning and use in context, proposing a holistic, sociocognitive approach with a focus on “the complex processes through which human beings affect coordinated interaction... and how they maintain that interaction in dynamically adaptive ways”(Atkinson et al. 2007:169). The authors state that L2 learning theory should shift away from an experimental focus on the internal cognitive processes of individual learners in isolation and instead observe the manner in which learners align themselves to the dynamic social, cultural, mental and physical context that surrounds them.

Whenever an experimental focus on any particular L2 structure or element of L2 learning is attempted, it inevitably removes the research from the original, natural environment: interaction and how interaction evolves over time. As Hall et al. (2006) state, linguistic elements of language knowledge are not part of a stable and acontextual system, but rather they are the resulting by-products of human experiences that operate in relatively automatized schema based on expectations. This is a notion supported by Arundale (1999), who states that the co-constitution of dialogue comes from the expectations that both participants have of the event and of one another. Koike (2010)

supports the conclusion that L2 interactions create patterns for further development of L2 competence. She claims that patterns of experiences create contextual frameworks in which a speaker's expectations about an event based on individual history (linguistic and otherwise) will aid the learner to learn and use linguistic structures and pragmatics in discourse. Each of these studies demonstrate that it is not a repertoire of linguistic features and structures that leads a learner to achieve L2 competence, but rather an awareness of and an adaptation to multiple social and linguistic sequences operating and developing in concurrence. This dynamic and evolving vision of language learning and use is often referred to as "language emergence" (N. Ellis and Larsen-Freeman 2006), a term which efficiently describes the multifaceted and adaptive system of L2 socialization and acquisition that takes place incrementally over time. This model of L2 learning accounts for the individual cognitive factors of L2 development and also demonstrates the essential role of dynamic co-constructed language events that are rooted in social context.

One of the most interesting finds to come out of the observation of the dynamic context of an L2 interaction event has been the manner in which a NS and a NNS seem to naturally create opportunities for both teaching and socialization in the formation of a community of practice. Kasper (2004) shows that loosely-structured L2 conversation is an excellent exercise in which learners can gain acquisition and socialization benefits as informal conversation is co-developed by the participants. In his study, Kasper describes the dynamic nature of participant orientations and the occurrences of role-switching in these conversations as well as the potential L2 learning and socialization benefits found

in such interactions. The study determined that relatively informal L2 conversations (in this case, a *Gesprachrunde* between a native speaker of German and a native speaker of English learning German) are an excellent context for learners to practice participant roles and discourse moves as each participant helps to create relevance and roles in co-production. Although the interaction in Kasper's study may initially be viewed as a language expert (NS) interacting with a language novice (NNS), as the talk proceeds, the purpose of the conversation seems to shift from a language-teaching event (corrective feedback from the NS and modified output from the NNS) to an L2 socialization event as the pair bonded in the creation of their own community of practice.

Kasper's study demonstrates how complex L2 interactions between NS/NNS pairs can be: though the expert/novice or NS/NNS roles were always available for participants when they choose to assume them, as the conversation developed, the roles of the participants and the goals of the conversation were constantly changing. This dynamic exchange provided opportunities for quality input and corrective feedback from the NS, and modified output and L2 practice for the NNS. Regardless of the specific intentions of the participants during these teaching and learning moments, the interaction can still be viewed in a broad sense as containing episodes of both L2 language learning, teaching and participation. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that both acquisition and socialization benefits can be found in informal talk and, despite the presence of marked linguistic forms, a learner can succeed in communicating and becoming socialized during L2 language practice.

3.2 “Informal Talk” and “Imperfect Speakers”

For decades, the pursuit of ideal speakers producing ideal speech had been the goal for much L2 research and this model often led to the rejection of unstructured L2 output in conversation as a potential resource for L2 acquisition (Izumi 2003:169). As Long (1996) states in a paper on the role of the linguistic environment in SLA, “free conversation is notoriously poor as a context for driving interlanguage development” (Long 1996: 448). Another by-product of this strain of theory is to critique the presence of “imperfect speakers” in the L2 context as either a distraction or a detriment to learners (Krashen 1982). Though Krashen was addressing the possible creation of an L2 interlanguage (due to the inability of an instructor to provide NS-like input in an L2 classroom) there is a natural extension of this critique to any context in which an L2 learner is interacting with what could be viewed as a “deficient user” of the L2. Krashen (1982) was not alone in his concern with the ideal. In response to a critique of linguistics by a group of concerned sociologists that idealization removes language from social reality, Chomsky (1977) said:

Opposition to idealization is simply objection to rationality; it amounts to nothing more than an insistence that we shall not have meaningful intellectual work. Therefore you *must* abstract some object of study, you must eliminate those factors which are not pertinent. At least if you want to conduct an investigation which is not trivial. (Chomsky 1977:57)

Of course the problem with idealization, and with proclaimed rational objectification and intentional abstraction of both language and of human beings, is that ultimately this procedure always results in a subjective analysis. Who decides what to abstract, what to trivialize, what to eliminate in the investigation of language? Rejecting

both ideal models and the possibility of objectification in L2 learning and theory, Barker (2003) states, “there is nothing that should always or never be done [in the L2 learning context], and even that is an over-generalization” (Barker 2003: 2). It is certainly possible that idealization and the strict artificial systems of measurement and evaluation are, if not directly, then indirectly, responsible for the high attrition rate in language programs. This measure of language and language ability likely leads to an intensification of the affective filters of at least some learners who are left feeling irreparably inferior before an unattainable ideal. Therefore, and if only for the sake of those attempting to learn an L2 who are the most psychologically vulnerable, an easing on both the L2 learning context restrictions (Nazary 2008:144-145) and a diminished focus on the measures of perfection, both in terms of a prescriptivist ideal of language and speaker, would seem to be the best course of action regarding L2 theory and pedagogy.

The move to dismiss idealized language as a model, and instead to view instances of repairs, pauses and so forth as features of everyday and normal conversation, is a major component of the Sociocultural school of L2 theory. This view that L2 “stumbles” are part of a conversational strategy that permits continuity in dialogue, rather than as instances of L2 failure, is a major change in theory that challenges the previous definitions of both successful communication (linguistic accuracy) and the idea of learning itself (i.e., no longer is learning considered to be exclusively an acquisition of linguistic knowledge). Egbert et al. (2004) conclude that the notion of L2 deficiency should be reconsidered, stating that “deficiency” is co-constructed in interaction by both

Speaker and Hearer. Furthermore, the authors add that motivation and patience are often sufficient to overcome most communication problems because it is contextual participation within relationships that leads to communicative success, and not ideal speech uttered by ideal speakers.

The belief in co-constructed success or failure has helped guide L2 learning theory away from an over-reliance on L2 input and from the computer-processor model of language learning theory, and this philosophical realignment has placed a renewed focus on output and the role that it plays in L2 learning and use (Swain 1995). According to Mai-ling (1996), and this change is an appropriate restructuring of language learning theory. She criticizes previous L2 pedagogy models that rely on the concept of perfect NS input for learners who are not able to benefit from it: “Speaking English in a class with little regard to whether the students understand or not will result only in meaningless exposure” (Mai-ling 1996: 98). Under this new model of L2 theory, it is not perfection that matters most in L2 learning and use; it is empathy, flexibility, patience and imagination that are the heart of L2 learning, teaching and use.

Linked both to the idea of co-constructed deficiency as proposed by Egbert et al. (2004), and to the impact that an L2 “expert” has on an L2 learner, it has been found that interlocutor type seems to have an effect on the modification of learner output in an L2 interaction event. Sato and Lyster (2007) found that learners were more likely to modify their output, and to provide time for other learners to modify output, when they worked in learner-learner dyads as opposed to learner-native speaker dyads, reporting that they felt less pressure with another learner and that they had more time to plan their speech. They

sum up the results of their study by stating: “Therefore, the probability of learners’ modification of their initial incomprehensible and/or inaccurate utterances was determined more by whom they interacted with than by what types of feedback they received” (Sato and Lyster 2007:140). This finding is important since modification of output is one the major tenets of several current L2 learning theories. This finding also demonstrates the intense impact that contextual variables play in SLA, showing that L2 learning is dependent on both psychological and social constructs that go well beyond simple measurements or productions of ideal speech by ideal speakers.

What proof, then, is there that so-called “imperfect speakers” are able to meaningfully engage in L2 participation or that “informal talk” aids acquisition or pushes socialization? Several studies have analyzed the efforts of the not quite perfect L2 speakers and many have found that interaction in NS/NNS pairs can and does have SLA/SLS benefits. For example, Mori (2004) found that forced negotiation for meaning is unnatural in the L2 learning context because it is not common in real conversations, although self-repair by learners is common. More importantly, Mori found that despite lexical problems, participants in the study were able to communicate successfully without explicit corrective feedback. In the same study, Mori supports the conclusion of Nakahama et al (2001) that free, naturally occurring conversation is rich with sources of deep exposure to language and pragmatics, and that learners are able to succeed in L2 participation and communication despite some flawed linguistic structures. Kasper (2004) agrees with Nakahama et al (2001), and in a critique of Long (1996) and the task-based focus of his Interaction Hypothesis, says a close inspection of participants

interacting in different contexts demonstrate that “ordinary conversation can be a particularly productive environment for L2 learning” (Kasper 2004: 552).

Further support comes from Wagner and Gardner (2004), who found that instances of delay, reformulation and repair may be more common in NNS talk, but that despite a slightly higher percentage of these moves, these phenomena are normal because they also occur in NS talk. The authors celebrate this finding, claiming it proves NNS conversations are “normal” (i.e., not failures to communicate). They further found that linguistic errors rarely threaten L2 conversations, and that the pattern in their study tended to be NNS self-repair regarding form and NS other-repair of meaning in an attempt to develop and maintain intersubjectivity in discourse. In other words, mutual understanding and individual expectations of the L2 interaction are crucial to the process, but endless and perfect strings of grammatically correct utterances are not. The authors conclude their article by warning against the “straitjacket of structural analysis” with its focus on individual variables and its deficit model, saying that even lower level learners are competent in L2 discourse (Wagner and Gardner 2004). This result is supported in a separate study by Gardner (2004), who concludes an article on question sequences by stating that it is not the learners’ low competence that affects discourse and instances of repair (self and other); rather it is a constant and immediate drive for intersubjectivity that creates behavior in dynamic co-constructed events. His study found that multiple clarification requests in the discourse were the result of the NS attempting to clarify a question or to elicit agreement by avoiding “dispreferred” responses from the NNS.

To conclude, under more current L2 learning paradigms, correction, communication, teaching, learning and socialization, all can and do occur, both in primary or secondary focus, during an interactional event as the roles, expectations and goals of the participants continue to evolve in context. The focus is no longer on the perfect speaker of the perfect utterance. Now, both “imperfect speakers” and “informal talk” are more prevalently viewed as natural components of L2 interaction, and should therefore be re-examined as potential elements for inclusion in both the study of SLA and the L2 learning context. The design of this present study, in which learner/expert learner/expert pairs met for informal L1/L2 conversation, supports the above conclusions regarding both L2 speakers and L2 talk. The analysis of the data show that both moments of teaching and learning, described here as instances of beneficial NS linguistic and extra-linguistic input as well as NNS modified output, are present in the conversations of the participants, and the pairs communicated effectively despite the presence of incorrect linguistic forms as they created their own communities of practice. Moreover, the data also show that the participants felt more comfortable practicing their L2 when in the company of a sympathetic interlocutor who is at once expert NS and novice L2 learner

3.3 Use of the L1 in the L2 Interaction Context

Another major issue that has been raised during the broad SLA paradigm debates is the assumption that the presence of the L1 is detrimental to L2 learning and use.

Although it could seem counter-intuitive to those outside of the field, the trend for the last

century has been to look upon L1 use as either an obstacle that must be overcome or as a menace that must be kept at bay (Cook 2001). In fact, according to some L2 learning theories, the mere allowance of the L1 into the L2 learning context by an authority figure (i.e., instructor) would render the event informal or possibly even detrimental (Krashen and Terrell 1983). Whether this attitude is due to the belief that the use of the L1 represents a failure or a weakness on the part of the L2 learner, or as a backlash against the Grammar-Translation Method, it remains a solid tenet of many L2 teaching approaches.

Though it is still considered a fairly heretical position, increasing numbers of researchers in the field have begun to claim that there are both acquisition and socialization benefits that can be found through L1 use during L2 interaction events (Cook 1989, 2001; Auerbach 1993; Barker 2003; Nation 2003). While the institutional attitude in SLA theory and L2 pedagogy has been decidedly hostile toward use of the L1, many researchers have begun re-examining the issue based on observations of natural language use, as was seen in Young's (2009) "communities of practice", research on input in L2-only classrooms (Mai-ling 1996), and policy papers such as "Using the First Language in the Classroom" by Cook (2001). In a strong dismissal of the tradition of viewing the L1 as a detriment to L2 learning, Cook (2001) states that there are several beneficial applications of the L1 in the learning of the TL that the field has been neglecting. Despite the stigma of the L1 and the intentional avoidance of the L1 in the foreign language classroom, the author states that the L1 constantly and naturally returns to all interaction events (Cook 2001). He critiques some of the most common reasons

deployed by modern SLA theorists to denounce the use of the L1 in the classroom, such as (1) the argument that children do not have access to an L1 before learning their native language and thus neither should adult learners; and (2) the argument from language compartmentalization that views coordinate bilingualism as the formation of separate linguistic systems for L1 and L2. Cook rejects the attack on the L1, stating that use of the L1 “forms a valuable part of learning as a social enterprise and of the scaffolding support that learners need to build up the L2” (Cook 2001: 407). As can be seen in the wording of the statement, the author views the benefits of the L1 in terms of both acquisition and socialization.

The benefits of L1 use in L2 learning and interaction are supported by Auerbach (1993), who declares that not only does permitting the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom attract previously underserved populations (e.g., those interested in learning the L2 whose lack of fundamentals in the L2 would make them capable of only the most marginal L2 interactions), but it also has the immense benefit of reducing the affective barriers to acquisition that are present in the L2-only classroom environment. Auerbach (1993) concurs with Piasecka (1988), who declares that denying L2 learners access to and use of the L1 also denies them the crucial aspects of self (the thinking, feeling, artistic aspects of a person) that are only available for them in their native language. In essence, both claim that to prohibit learners from using the L1 is to hobble them, both in terms of acquisition and socialization, and each sees the L2-only classroom as a harsh, artificial environment rooted in language ideology and issues of power and control rather than in sound pedagogical theory.

Lantolf and Thorne (2007) provide an excellent explanation of the integrated processes of acquisition and socialization through the L1 in interaction with the L2 by declaring that “Because our first language is used not only for communicative interaction but also to regulate our cognitive processes, it stands to reason that learners must rely on this language in order to mediate their learning of the L2” (Lantolf and Thorne 2007: 215). The authors base this observation on evidence that shows social speech produced in the L1 has an impact on L2 learning. This conclusion is similar to those reached by Auerbach (1993) and Piasecka (1988) that the self is contained within the L1 until the L2 develops into a vehicle capable of true self-expression for the learner. In the same article, Lantolf and Thorne also describe how an individual who is initially capable of producing certain language interactions in the L2 only with the assistance of an interlocutor, will eventually be capable of guiding L2 interactions without any interlocutor assistance—but only after a process of collaborative effort and socialization in the L2. Thus, informal language interactions in which learners are permitted to acquire and socialize with an empathetic interlocutor who enables a natural interplay of L1 and L2, seem to provide a beneficial context for what researchers in both SLA and SLS would consider to be enhanced learner processing in the L2. Based on all of these findings, it seems logical that a close observation of the natural patterns found in these informal L1/L2 language interactions could provide a valuable indication about what may currently be lacking in L2 classrooms.

Another description of the benefit that can be found in the free exchange of the L1 and the L2 is listed by Cook (1989), who finds that the use of the L1 and the alternation

between L1 and L2 in a language learning context form a beneficial partnership of learners that Cook calls Reciprocal Language Teaching (RLT). Cook describes the goal of RLT as allowing learners to access and use the L1 when needed in a process that permits learners to participate more freely and naturally in an L2 learning context. Cook (1989: 53) states, “[reciprocal teaching] uses the technique of interacting with a native speaker in a communicative situation, freeing it from the problems associated with using only the target language”. The RLT method describes both acquisition and socialization benefits for learners who are able to access the L1 in L2 interactions while acting as both teachers and learners (or experts and novices). In this manner, learners can teach contextually relevant or interesting aspects of the TL as the two languages are used in conversational juxtaposition. Furthermore, this model of language learning and teaching builds a pattern among participants in which learners are shown manifest respect for their knowledge expertise in the native language and culture, respect that is likely to boost confidence and possibly lower their affective filters when attempting L2 output.

From a different angle, but offering just as much theoretical substance to the discussion, is the support for L1 use that can be drawn from research done under the psycholinguistic/cognitive paradigm, both as it relates to the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) and in terms of the benefits of explicit metalinguistic analysis, the latter presumably being easier when the learner is permitted to use the L1 to probe more deeply into the TL. DeKeyser (2000) states that although learning easy structures does not show age-related effects, learning the more difficult structures does show a difference with respect to the age of the learner. DeKeyser and Larsen-Hall (2005) attribute this pattern

of acquisition to a distinction that must be drawn between adults and children, addressing both ultimate attainment and the CPH: “Children necessarily learn implicitly; adults necessarily learn largely explicitly”(DeKeyser and Larson-Hall 2005: 103).

How is this finding relevant for L2 learning theory and the interface of the L1 and the L2? DeKeyser states:

...explicit learning processes are a necessary condition for achieving a high level of competence in a nonnative language after childhood. Therefore foreign language teaching policies that deny explicit focus on form to academically oriented adults... deny learners with high analytic ability the use of the only mechanism at their disposal to master certain basic structures in the L2. (DeKeyser 2000:520)

It can therefore be extrapolated that complicated structures in the L2, or explanations of the L2 that require explicit focus or instruction, can be made more explicit and thus easier to learn when the L1 is used to bridge a communication gap. Based on the research by DeKeyser (2000), it would seem that rendering an aspect of the L2 more explicit, either by way of the L1 or any other device, should aid adult L2 learners in their learning.

Additional research has indicated that using the L1 to explain and understand something in the TL is helpful to the learner in terms of acquisition of a particular linguistic feature or element of vocabulary, and that most language teachers eventually employ this device in order to bridge a communication gap in a classroom (Auerbach 1993; Schweers 1999; Cook 2001; Nation 2003). There also seems to be support for the idea that L1 usage can serve as a link between acquisition and socialization in the TL, with evidence again found in work done in the psycholinguistic/cognitive domain. Nick Ellis (2005) states that a fundamental component of L2 theory is the idea that languages are a social tool, based on interaction and corresponding to the world and the culture in

which they are employed. The link between the implicit and the explicit systems in the Ellis model of SLA/SLS occurs when learners become conscious that their implicit knowledge systems cannot resolve an issue or answer a question, which is likely to occur in a conversation. What ultimately leads to acquisition is meaningful social interaction and socialization that allows the second language learner to add and consolidate new data. According to N. Ellis, it is only with the help of the interlocutor that the learner can receive input through linguistic and extra-linguistic context while remaining focused on the setting and the structure of the conversation (N. Ellis 2005: 316). This reliance on the interlocutor, i.e., a learning/practice partner, supports the premise that learning occurs through social interaction, and using the L1 to overcome a conversational obstacle should help achieve the ultimate goal of meaningful L2 interaction.

A corollary to the necessity of interaction is effortful analysis of new or conflicting linguistic data, which in turn activates memory: “The more you understand something, the better you remember it”(N. Ellis 2005: 320). In this sense, becoming aware of something is the priming device for subsequent addition of information to a learner’s L2 competence. The activation of the memory, and thus the priming of metalinguistic analysis by the mind, is strengthened through use and repetition of the structures, a point that again underlines the essential role of social interaction in this model of L2 learning. If learners cannot notice something, it is unlikely that they will be able to learn it, but when they are permitted to use their L1 to probe further than their L2 permits, it seems likely that this effort could potentially benefit both acquisition and socialization. In a separate article on the effects of frequency in language processing, N.

Ellis (2002) adds that both salience and frequency of use by learners in interaction helps them first to notice and then retain new L2 material. Furthermore, he attacks the non-interface stance as proposed in Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, stating that both explicit instruction of particular L2 features and a focus on specific forms or features (initiated by any participant in an interaction) do have a positive effect on L2 acquisition.

Although N. Ellis (2002, 2005), DeKeyser and Larson-Hall (2005) and DeKeyser (2000) examined the interface between the implicit and explicit knowledge systems and made no direct reference to using or not using the L1 in L2 interaction, the conclusions drawn by the authors, both on the necessity for interaction and contextual relevance along with the need for effortful analysis and the processing of new information, can be viewed as an explanation of both the acquisition and socialization processes of learning a second language. Furthermore, the cognitive analysis of these studies does not remove language learning and use from a social context, but rather situates it in dynamic, co-constructed collaborative environments in which learners can notice, analyze and incorporate L2 information (Swain 1995; Nakahama et al. 2001; Mori 2004). By extension, these authors provide growing evidence for a more holistic view of language learning that permits a more natural use of available resources and interaction among participants. This view also espouses a system of language use and learning in which the "informal" aspects of real language interaction including L1 use, informal talk and reciprocal teaching can occur naturally.

3.4 Research Questions and Goals of the Study

This study examines a potentially beneficial combination of elements in the L2 learning context that has not yet been thoroughly studied. First, the data for this study come from the L2 interactions of a unique L2 dyad: learner/expert with learner/expert. The participants are best defined as learners of an L2 who are at the same time NS “experts” of the L1 language being learned by their partners (i.e., bilingual learner/expert pairs). The effects of such pairings, both on potential learning and teaching opportunities, have not received enough attention in the literature. Second, although informal talk has often been dismissed in terms of acquisition (Nakahama et al. 2001), in this study the benefits of informal L2 talk are reconsidered in terms of language socialization and the creation of context and communities of practice in which L2 learning and teaching are likely to occur, either initially or eventually, as part of an ongoing process. Finally, this study looks at the potential for both L2 teaching and learning opportunities when the free, natural use of the L1 as an L2 resource is permitted.

Thus, in light of findings demonstrating the absolute importance of interaction, co-constructed meaning and success in conversation, participant orientation and role-switching, the benefits of informal talk and the role of imperfect speakers, as well as the use of the L1 as a discourse move to permit conversational flow, as a tool for metalinguistic analysis to promote learning, and as a crucial component of psychological and intellectual support during the process of language socialization, this present study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Do informal conversations between a NS of English (NES) learning Spanish and a NS of Spanish (NSS) learning English reveal insight regarding the natural use and interaction of the L1 and the TL?
2. Does informal TL conversation in which the L1 is permitted present opportunities for L2 teaching, learning or socialization?
3. Provided that evidence of opportunities for L2 teaching, learning or socialization is found, does this indicate a need for permitting both informal talk and the use of the L1 in the L2 learning context?

This study assumes that it is both detrimental and unnatural to deny learners the best and most relevant resources that they have available during an L2 interaction event: native language knowledge and ability and the instinctual drive toward socialization and community building and bonding. Furthermore, it is assumed that when learners are permitted to interact as they choose, they model an intuitive use of the L1 and its relationship to role switching, from language expert to novice and back again, which demonstrates a more natural model of language use and learning than is currently assumed by many theorists in the field and employed by many instructors in modern L2 and foreign language classrooms. What is missing from previous studies is an examination of the nexus of all of these contextual factors, and it is hoped that analyzing this combination of elements could potentially lead to the creation and implementation of a more holistic approach to both L2 learning research and pedagogy.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Study Design and Procedures of Data Collection

In order to examine the RQs for this study, undergraduate students studying Spanish (NES) at a large southwestern university in the U.S. were recruited to participate in a language exchange study with native Spanish speakers. Volunteers were solicited through fliers posted in the building on campus that houses the Spanish department, and electronic fliers were mailed out to students in several intermediate to advanced Spanish courses. The Native Spanish Speakers (NSS) were recruited from a nonprofit educational organization that teaches university-level intensive L2 English courses to international students who are preparing to enter undergraduate and graduate programs in the U.S. The L2 English institute is located in the same city as the university attended by the NES, and the NSS participants were also recruited through fliers soliciting volunteers for a language exchange study. Though it was made clear that the students would not receive academic credit or compensation for their voluntary participation, the potential benefits to the language learners in terms of gaining the opportunity to meet with someone learning an L2 (Spanish or English) in a similar circumstance was emphasized. After a period of two weeks, 10 volunteers had contacted the researcher via email and were recruited for the study. The researcher was not the instructor for courses taken by any of the NES or NSS participants and had had no previous contact with any of the participants prior to the study.

After all of the volunteers had contacted the researcher (5 NSS & 5 NES) to express their desire to participate in the study and to confirm their availability, a two-

week series of recording sessions began on the campus of the university attended by the NSS volunteers. Participants were contacted by the researcher, first via email and then by text message, to alert them to the day and time of the event (and for the NES, to provide instructions on how to arrive at the campus). Unfortunately, of the initial 10 volunteers, only 8 were ultimately recorded in interactions (2 of the initial 10 respondents, 1 NSS and 1 NES, were unable to reconcile their schedules with a NS partner during the study; however, both eventually met with a NS partner outside of the study). After having received the confirmation of availability emails, the researcher split the 8 participants into NSS/NES pairs based on their availability and a rough estimate of their L2 proficiency.

Once the NES volunteers had arrived at the NSS campus, they were immediately accompanied by the researcher to a room to meet their partner and to begin their interaction. The two participants were seated facing one another with a larger instructor's desk placed between them that separated the two speakers by a distance of about four feet. On the participants desks' were copies of the Language History Questions (see Appendix A) and on the instructor's desk were two small recording devices. There were no explicit directions from the researcher regarding the content or structure of the conversation other than instructions that they could use the list of questions that had been provided as a tool to help them initiate their conversation if they so chose. Once the participants had verified that they understood what would take place, the researcher turned on both recording devices and left the room. After 30 to 40 minutes had passed, the researcher returned to the room, asked the participants if they would like to continue (all pairs wished to continue), flipped the tapes in the recorders and left the pairs alone

for another 20 to 40 minutes. The researcher returned after the second interval (at this point a total of between 60 and 80 minutes had passed), thanked the participants for their time and participation, and informed them that if they wished to continue meeting with their partners or wished to work with another partner that they should contact the researcher via email. Before leaving, most pairs immediately exchanged phone numbers and made plans to meet again.

After the two-week recording session had ended, the recorded conversations were analyzed by the researcher and several segments of the interactions were transcribed for the study. In addition, and in order to supplement the data from the recordings themselves, a post-participation exit interview survey (see Appendix B) was emailed out to each of the participants in order to receive more explicit feedback on the experience. The email format was chosen both to allow the participants time to reflect on the experience and because it was assumed that they would be more honest when the sociological and psychological pressures created by the study context (i.e., room, interlocutor, researcher) were not present. In terms of both research design and data collection, the intent was for the researcher to interfere as little as possible in order to allow for a more natural interaction between the participants.

4.2 Participants

A brief set of biographical characteristics for each of the participants in the study is presented in Table 1. This information is provided so that when analyzing the data it is possible to consider if L1, age, gender, L2 proficiency or L2 goals seemed to play a role in the interactions. Proficiency levels for participants were derived from pre-judgments

based on the classes in which they were enrolled and the number of years they had been studying the L2. For ease of reference, the participants are grouped in the NES/NSS pairings from the recording sessions.

Table 1. Study Participant Descriptions

	NAME	L1	AGE	SEX	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	L2 CLASS ENROLLED IN / Estimated L2 Proficiency	L2 GOAL
Pair 1	L	NES	50	M	USA	Advanced grammar and composition courses (3 rd year)	Teach H.S. Spanish
	C	NSS	35	M	Venezuela	Low-Advanced/High-Intermediate culture and conversation course (3 rd year)	Expand Business Opportunities
Pair 2	R	NES	21	F	USA	Advanced phonetics and grammar courses (3 rd year)	Improve Spanish for BA Degree
	J	NSS	28	M	Mexico	Low-Advanced/High-Intermediate culture and conversation course (3 rd year)	Improve English & Help NES with Spanish
Pair 3	E	NES	22	F	USA	Low-Intermediate grammar course (2 nd year)	Personal Reasons
	D	NSS	33	F	Mexico	Low-Intermediate speaking and listening course (2 nd year)	Improve English/Immigrating to U.S.
Pair 4	A	NES	23	M	USA	Advanced phonetics course (3 rd year)	Interested in Languages
	V	NSS	23	F	Ecuador	High-Intermediate grammar and composition courses (3 rd year)	Make American Friends and Speak English

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

In this section, transcribed excerpts from the recordings as well as comments made by the participants in their exit interviews are presented. The data are organized and analyzed in six separate categories: (1) Setting and Changing the Language; (2) Explicit Requests for Feedback, Help or Evaluation; (3) Commiseration and Bonding over L2 Struggles; (4) Language Teaching, in three subcategories—a) grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation; b) idioms; c) metalinguistic analysis; (5) Extra-linguistic Teaching; (6) Exit Interview Comments. These subcategories are followed by a summary and discussion of the data results.

5.1 Setting and Changing the Language

As can be witnessed in Excerpt 1, which occurred within the initial minutes of the interaction between L and C, in the absence of explicit instructions on how to conduct their conversation the pair almost immediately establish their own set of rules and patterns based on a structure of reciprocal L1/L2 exchange. After L suggests in his L2 Spanish that they each use their respective L2s in the conversation, C agrees in his L2 English but adds that at times he would also like to speak in Spanish order “to show you the structure, my structure, my accent that is different...”. This explicit mention by C of a desire to help his partner focus on specific forms and dialectical differences lends support to Nakahma et al.’s (2001) finding that even when talk is informal, the opportunity for rich sources of L2 input to process are still present. For the duration of

their 70-minute interaction, the pair alternated in roughly a 1 to 1 ratio of Spanish and English (each primarily in their respective L2s) on a range of cultural, political, historical and linguistic topics.

Excerpt 1—Establishing the Rules of L1 & L2 Use (L: NSS; C: NES)

L: How long have you been here?

C: I am here for three month. I began in January. ... I'm already... know...em, conversation, em... I know a little English but I need some grammar basis that I didn't have.

L: OK, y yo en español y tú en inglés? Yo en español y usted en inglés?

(‘OK, and I in Spanish and you [informal] in English? I in Spanish and you [formal] in English?’)

C: Yes, that's cool, yes.

L: OK, pues yo voy a hablar español y usted en inglés.

(‘OK, then I'm going to speak Spanish and you in English.)

C: OK, but sometimes I want to speak to you in Spanish because I want to show you the structure, my structure, my accent that is different... my first language is Spanish and my accent is different than [the researcher].

L: Sí, y de las personas de México y de Argentina.

(‘Yes, and from the people of Mexico and Argentina.’)

The manner in which the L1/L2 rules are set in Excerpt 2 differs from what is seen in the previous pair. Instead of beginning with a pattern of continuous alternation between Spanish and English, R and J begin and remain in English for the first five minutes, switch to a nearly exclusive use of Spanish for the next 15 minutes and then alternate in roughly a 1 to 1 ratio of Spanish and English (each using their L2) for the duration of the 70-minute session. However, just as was seen in the session with C and

L, in the absence of formal instructions the two participants introduce themselves, and within minutes collaborate to establish mutually beneficial rules of language use for their community of practice. Once again, the way the participants in the study co-develop both the rules of language use and, as will be discussed later, the topics they pursue, permit them to push their L2 output in an authentic L2 context while still being able to rely on their L1 to remain comfortable, or as Schumann (1998) describes as maintaining an individual balance in their L1/L2 identities. As will be seen later in the exit interview comments, the participants were fully aware of the benefit this freedom provided and most believe the ability to use the L1 with a sympathetic interlocutor helped them improve their L2. Interestingly, both R and J make self-deprecating comments (underestimation of L2 ability) in the initial minutes of the interaction and the exchange of humble remarks regarding L2 ability was not unique to this pair.

Excerpt 2—Establishing the Rules of L1&L2 Use (R: NES; J: NSS)

R: How long have you been studying...English?

J: Well, ah, really not in a formal way or something. A little bit in high school, more just watching TV and reading... in an informal way... I'm from the north of Mexico so we use a lot of English.

R: Where in Mexico?

J: Oh, I'm from a... a small city in the northeast, in the state of... in Tamaulipas, close to Monterrey. OK, so if we do use Spanish, if you use Spanish in a formal way... (pause) do you want to go to any Latin American country?

R: In a formal way? Oh... yes, yes, I took classes then I lived in Argentina. I mean, I took classes and then I went to Argentina.

J: Oh?

R: So if we do... when we do speak in Spanish (laughs) I'll sound a little Argentinian... Argentine.

J: Oh, OK, so maybe we can go in half the time we can speak Spanish, and then we can speak English?

R: Oh, OK... so...bueno...

(‘well’)

Due to the lower L2 proficiency levels of both participants, the pattern in Excerpt 3 is different than that seen in the previous examples. Prior to the recording session, both E and D expressed concern that their weak L2 would be a problem for a potential partner, demonstrating the likely role anxiety plays in the process of L2 learning and interaction (Lacorte 2007). However, it was evident in the recording that despite concern about their respective L2 abilities, the two were able to co-construct a meaningful 70-minute conversation using roughly a 2 to 1 ration of Spanish to English. As was seen in the previous excerpt between R and J, these two learners immediately underestimate their L2 ability in reciprocal statements of self-deprecation, possibly in an effort to protect their L2 social identity (Young 2009).

As can be seen in Excerpt 3, the pair demonstrates another unique occurrence among the pairs in this study when D directly requests (or possibly orders) that her partner begin to use her L2 Spanish. Although it cannot be discerned from the recordings if D does this in order to give E the opportunity to practice or rather to relieve pressure on herself as the speaker of L2 English, support for Kasper (2004) can be found in the way in which the two develop a community of practice regarding L1/L2 use and the alternation of expert and novice roles in this informal interaction. Although D does not

expressly say the word “Spanish” after her request that E speak, it seems highly likely that this is what she is implying—and what E infers, as she switches to Spanish in her next turn. Importantly, E does not seem threatened by what could be seen as a rather brusque request/command; rather it seems to break the ice for the pair, causing E both to laugh and to attempt her L2 Spanish. As the session develops, they alternate between English and Spanish, each pushing the limits of their L2. Frequent laughter and episodes of mutual encouragement seem to help both of these learners to “stretch” their L2 muscles, lending credence to the claims of both Sato and Lyster (2007) and N. Ellis (2005) that an empathetic interlocutor can help ease the nerves of learners in interaction and thus make them more likely to push their L2 output.

Excerpt 3—Establishing the Rules of L1&L2 Use (E: NES; D: NSS)

E: Hi I’m E.

D: Hi, eh, do you want to speak Spanish first or English?

E: Uh, my Spanish is uh pretty bad, slow uh, so...

D: Yes, I am the same, me too... (mumbles, then laughs)

(Pause)

E : Uh, (laughs) OK, so...I guess, you, you uh... are you from Mexico? Méjico?

D: Yes, I’m from Monterrey. What about you?

E: Yes, from here from Arlington and when I was little I lived in Taiwan for like 2 years, and then I go back every so often...so why are you here? Are you a student?

D: I am here, eh, because my husband, is in UT... uh, my whole family is living here... I am married and I am, I am, eh, two daughters, eh, and both of them are studying here...

E: What is your husband studying at UT?

D: He is well, he is uh, workin on the (mumbles)

E: Oh yeah?

D: Sí, yes... uh, eh, now you speak...

E: (laughs) OK, bueno...

(‘Ok, well...’)

The fourth pair recorded for the study (A: NES; V: NSS) never discusses nor sets rules regarding L1/L2 use. Save a few vocabulary words that A does not know in Spanish, words he speaks in English that are acknowledged by V without impeding the flow of the conversation, the entire recording is in A’s L2 Spanish. Surprisingly, in the entire 60 minutes of conversation there is not a single mention of switching to English by either participant, nor is there a serious attempt to initiate a switch to English.

Interestingly, this is also the only pair that actively incorporated specific questions from the language learning history sheet that was given to the participants (see Appendix A).

Obviously, the interaction between A and V demonstrates a potential pitfall of informal L1/L2 language practice: if both partners do not accept the responsibility for the role of NS/Expert in this type of interaction, reciprocal L2 teaching may not occur and one of the learners will not receive L2 practice or exposure. On the other hand, it is important to mention that in her original email expressing interest in the study, V was the only participant to mention “making friends” as her primary goal (instead of practicing her L2, as was mentioned by all of the other volunteers). According to Arundale (1999), V’s goals and expectations for the interaction likely played a determining role in the results. Nevertheless, as this was encounter was merely the first between the two, it is

highly possible that in subsequent sessions the two set different rules (either explicitly or implicitly) for L1/L2 use.

5.2 Explicit Requests for Feedback, Help or Evaluation

In Excerpts 4 and 5 (the former occurring in the initial five minutes of the session, the latter in the final 15 minutes), the interaction between R and J is primarily in English and includes explicit requests for a NS opinion regarding L2 use: ‘y para ayudarte y para ayudarte... quiero feedback from you, quiero que tu me ayudes...’ (and in order to help you and to help me... I want feedback from you, I want you to help me). Despite the claim by Long (1996) that informal conversation does not present the structure for beneficial moments of L2 learning, these two participants demonstrate how learners with common goals and a mutual sense of responsibility can set their own rules in informal talk, co-developing a structure for opportunities of corrective feedback and modified output. As is seen in Excerpt 5, the informal talk provides both L2 cultural input and thus potential material for L2 socialization for the NES (the differences in zeitgeist between the Northern states of Mexico and, D.F., the capitol region), as well as corrective feedback regarding the L2 English of the NSS (the pronunciation of the word “federal”).

Also found in Excerpt 5 is evidence of a conscious awareness of the goal of analyzing language use, which is demonstrated by the request of the NSS for an evaluation of his L2 production from the NES (‘Am I, am I doing well?’). This running request for evaluation, confirmation of comprehensibility and communicative success, was seen throughout the interactions with both R and J and D and E, showing that even in

informal talk the participants are both aware of, and working to pursue, their individual L2 learning goals. Their interactions lend support to Cook's (1989) concept of reciprocal language teaching as the partners alternate between L1 and L2 and between the role of teacher and learner and across a variety of topics throughout their conversations.

Excerpt 4—Explicit Request for Feedback in L1/L2 (R: NES; J: NSS)

R: So if we do... when we do speak in Spanish (laughs) I'll sound a little Argentinian... Argentine.

J: Oh, OK, so maybe we can go in half the time we can speak Spanish, and then we can speak English?

R: Oh, OK... so...

J: And ladies first so...

R: (laughs)

J: ...y para ayudarte y para aydarme... quiero 'feedback' from you, quiero que tu me ayudes... y, y... I want real feedback from you so maybe the best... the best is practice?

('...and in order to help you and to help me... I want "feedback" from you, I want you to help me... and, and...')

Excerpt 5—Explicit Request for Evaluation (R: NES; J: NSS)

J: Yeah, so Mexico is like a partner a partner of the United States... so, so we have to learn, we have to know English.

R: Do you think that's true for like, all of Mexico, or closer to the north, Is there a difference like closer in the north, closer to the border and the south?

J: Yes, there's a lot of difference. In the north we more often copy the American style, the model, the economic model... but, but in the capital, the feredal distric...

R: Federal district?

J: Yes, federal, the D.F... it's like one of the biggest cities in the world, and and they don't feel like they need to learn English, so... but the schedules, the punctuality, they, even in Monterrey, they are more like Argentinian (laughs), so...but maybe some people like me get desperate we want some order, we see the United States and we say 'wow, we want to be like that'.

R: There's, there's definitely something...

J: Am I, am I doing well?

R: Yeah, uh-huh.

J: So if I make mistakes you'll, you'll...

R: Yeah, sure.

5.3 Commiseration and Bonding Over L2 Struggles

One of the main issues regarding L2 learning is the affective filter that inhibits learners from being receptive to L2 input or attempting L2 output (Lacorte 2007). Unfortunately, the natural human instinct for empathy and commiseration is often neglected as a potential tool in traditional L2 learning contexts as formal and artificial social constructs are maintained at the expense of learner comfort (Nazary 2008). If recognized for potential L2 learning and use benefits, this desire to bond with another person who is on the same path and encountering the same struggles with L2 learning could serve to reduce anxiety and thus lower the affective filters of the learners as they interact in the L2. Furthermore, it is also possible that L2 practice in a "friendlier" and more collegial context could build a series of positive experiences and create beneficial expectations (Hall et al. 2006), which would provide aid and comfort to learners when they participate in subsequent interactions with other interlocutors in other contexts.

This practice also demonstrates the crucial function of socialization in L2 use and learning, as was noted by Young (2009) and Kasper (2004).

In Excerpt 6, the mutual expression of self-doubt regarding L2 ability occurs within the first moments of the interaction and it seems to relieve some of the anxiety for the two learners who continue their L1/L2 exchange for over an hour. Though it cannot be found in the data from the recordings alone, as will be seen later in the exit interview comments, the learners remark that they were able to speak more freely and with less anxiety due to the fact that they were co-creating the talk with a peer going through the same L2 learning ordeal (a peer who was also able to provide NS input and correction). Furthermore, as tension diminishes, the pair seems to obtain the emotional space in which to push their L2 output, and according to Swain (1995), this should lead to L2 learning.

Excerpt 6—Commiseration over L2 (E: NES; D: NSS)

E: Hi I'm E.

D: Hi, eh, do you want to speak Spanish first or English?

E: Uh, my Spanish is uh pretty bad, slow uh, so...

D: Yes, I am the same, me too...(mumbles then laughs)

(pause)

E: Uh (laughs), OK, so...

In Excerpt 7, a moment which also came within the initial minutes of the interaction, the NES makes a second self-deprecating comment in her L2 regarding her L2 speaking ability (the first instance can be seen in Excerpt 2), which is immediately and

loudly contradicted in a supportive comment by her NSS partner. This pattern of L2 speaker self-deprecation and NS supportive comment occurred on multiple occasions during the session for this pair, happening in and around moments of NS corrective feedback, NSS modified output and L2 teaching (linguistic and extra-linguistic). As will be seen later in the exit interview comments, most participants offer support to the claim by Sato and Lyster (2007) that learner/learner pairs feel more comfortable correcting their partners and modifying their own output, and it seems likely that the moments of self-deprecation and supportive comments, their commiseration and bonding, helped the learners in this study to build beneficial social bonds.

Excerpt 7—Support of NNS L2 ability (R: NES; J: NSS)

J: Y cómo te fue en Argentina?

(‘And how did it go for you in Argentina?’)

R: Oh, uh todo fue muy bien. No hablo perfecto pero trato... trato (laughs)

(‘Oh, uh everything went well. I don’t speak perfect, but I try...I try.’)

J: No! Hablas muy bien!

(‘No! You speak very well!’)

R: Sí, sí pero aprendí el acento de Argentina. En en mi clase de español tengo una profe de España y, y cuando digo “brilla” [b i a] instead of “brija” [b ija] siempre me correcta.

(‘Yes, yes but I learned the accent of Argentina. In my Spanish class I have a prof from Spain, and, and when I say “brilla” [b i a] instead of “brija” [b ija] she always corrects me.’)

5.4 L2 Language Teaching

As was mentioned in the Introduction, the terms “learning” and “teaching” in this study are defined in a broad sense and are based on the conclusions of the Output Hypothesis (Swain 1985, 1995), and on the concept of language emergence (N. Ellis and Larsen-Freeman 2006). The Output Hypothesis assumes that the construction of comprehensible output contributes to language learning in that: (1) it makes opportunities for developing automaticity in the L2; (2) it provides learners a context for hypothesis-testing in the L2; (3) it allows learners the time for metalinguistic analysis of their L2 hypotheses; and (4) it creates a context for noticing (i.e., conscious perception) of both new and conflicting information in or about the L2 (Swain 1995). From this set of functions, and from the theory of language emergence, comes the definition and use of the word “learning” as it is applied in the analysis of the data for this present study.

Just as the use of the terms “learning” or “acquisition” tends to be operationalized differently by individual L2 researchers (R. Ellis 1999), so can the use of the term “teaching”. In Sections 4 and 5 of this study, it is hypothesized that, just as with learning, instances of teaching occur during the production of comprehensible output by a NS in an L2 interactional event. Moreover, just as learning or acquisition can take place without a conscious decision to learn being made by the learner (DeKeyser 2000; N. Ellis 2005), it can also be assumed that teaching can occur without teaching being the explicit or intended goal of the person who is providing the information. In the design of this study in which NS pairs who are each learners of their partner’s L1 is the context, opportunities for reciprocal L2 teaching and learning are found to be quite common

(although it must again be conceded that the explicit goal of the teacher or the learner in these moments is difficult to determine from an outside perspective), and several examples of these occurrences are presented in Sections 4 and 5.

5.4.1 Grammar, Vocabulary and Pronunciation

In Excerpt 8, both participants seem to approach the session as an opportunity to practice their L2, but both also demonstrate the obligation to his partner regarding the teaching of the L1. Examples of L1 teaching can be seen in the recasts made by L (“Come to... I decided to come to the United States”) and the corrections made by C (‘Pensaba que era’... you have to say “tú eras’). In each instance the NS is able to provide beneficial linguistic feedback that enables the interlocutor to repair a linguistic structure while still maintaining the flow of the conversation, a result that supports Wagner and Gardner’s (2004) conclusion that although reformulation and repair do occur in NNS talk, they rarely threaten the success of the conversation. This pattern is repeated by L and C throughout their interaction, demonstrating the remarkably natural and efficient manner in which learners can assume and then relinquish the role of NS expert/teacher. Furthermore, throughout the recording neither participant seems reluctant or embarrassed to offer corrections, and on multiple occasions (and in the exit interviews) the participants express gratitude for the corrections while managing to carry out their L1/L2 talk on a variety of topics.

Of course, it must be noted that the participants were volunteers for the study and, as such, were on the high-end of the motivation continuum. Even so, it seems plausible that many L2 learners would react with similar empathy and fraternity in a collaborative

context in which they are permitted to access their L1 both for the purposes of learning the L2 and for helping each other to learn their L1. This result also shows support for the findings of Cook (1989, 2001), Barker (2003) and Nation (2003), that when the L1 is permitted during L2 practice, it can be beneficial in terms of learning, teaching and participation.

Excerpt 8—Tense Selection, Article Usage (C: NSS; L: NES)

C: If I feel comfortable with my level English, if I know enough, if I'm ready, I have to go back to Venezuela when I'm done.

L: Oh, not because you're discouraged, but, but...

C: No, no, if I think that I know enough...

L: Oh, oh!

C: You understand? So I'm going back to Venezuela...

L: Why Venezuela? Uh, por qué Venezuela?

C: Because I am living in Venezuela... I'm from Venezuela.

L: Oh, yo pienso que está de Ecuador!

(‘Oh, I think that you are from Ecuador!’)

C: “Pensaba”.

(‘thought’)

L: Oh, pensaba que está de Ecuador!

(‘Oh, I thought that you are from Ecuador!’)

C: Pensaba que era... you have to say “tú eras”...

(‘Thought that you were... you have to say “you were”...’)

L: OK, yo pensaba que era de Ecuador...

(‘OK, I thought that you were from Ecuador...’)

C: Oh, it’s OK, it’s OK—I am from Venezuela.

L: El capital?

(‘The [masculine] capitol?’)

C: La, la.. en la capital. I work there in my own company, a PR company. We have ten years working and growing, so I decided last year, come to United States... eh... came to, come to...?

(‘The, the [feminine] en the capitol.’)

L: Come to... I decided to come to the United States.

C: Sí, come, decided to come to the United States... to improve my English because I, I... we want to... to have ... open the company to other countries.

In Excerpt 9, after several minutes of Spanish-only conversation about R’s stay in Argentina, R is corrected by J in her usage of the preterit when describing the behavior of the sometimes ‘demasiado amable’, (‘too friendly’) men of Argentina: ‘Llamaban? Ellos llamaban? Llamaban a las chicas?’ (‘They called? They called? They called the girls?’). Not only does J use this exchange to help R call attention to her usage of the preterit when the imperfect is called for (he repeats the correct form three times), but he also provides the impersonal “a” that must precede the direct object in Spanish. However, despite his recasts and clarification requests, J maintains the casual atmosphere of the informal conversation and teaches in a way that does not cause R to lose track of her anecdote. This episode would seem to provide beneficial L2 input and practice based

on the findings of both Schmidt (1995) and N. Ellis (2002, 2005) that noticing and frequency in interaction will push L2 processing. Furthermore, after R has received the feedback and repaired her L2 production, she asks J to help her with the meaning of a word used by the Argentine Spanish speakers ‘morocha’. J clarifies the word for her by translating it into English as “dark-haired” and, as Nation (2003) would concur, he has offered L2 lexical support in the most efficient and effective method available to him: in his partner’s L1.

Excerpt 9— Tense Correction and Vocabulary (R: NES; J: NSS)

J: Bueno, pues... eh... te gustó Argentina?

(‘OK, well... and did you like Argentina?’)

R: Sí, me gusta la concepción del tiempo, es más tranquilo la vida...

(‘Yes, I like the concept of time, life is more tranquil...’)

J: Ah, OK, pero la puntualidad?

(‘Ah, OK, but punctuality?’)

R: Sí, sí es muy diferente. Estar a tiempo es algo, no es algo as, tan importante, pero, pero no...

(‘Yes, yes it’s very different. To be on time is something, it’s not something “as” as important, but, but no...’)

J: Sí, sí, la vida no es tan organizada como en los Estados Unidos.

(‘Yes, yes, life isn’t as organized as in the United States.’)

R: Sí, sí, pero todos son muy amables allá... muy, muy amable... pero, pero los hombres a veces los hombres es, son demasiado amable...

(‘Yes, yes, but everyone is so nice there... very, very nice... but, but the men at times the men are, are too nice...’)

J: Demasiado amable?

(‘Too nice?’)

R: Sí, como, sí... las siempre, siempre llamaron las chicas... las chicas, las chicas en la calle y en la playa..

(‘Yes, like, if, they always called [preterit] them, the girls... the girls, the girls in the street and on the beach...’)

J: Llamaban? Ellos llamaban? Llamaban a las chicas...

(‘They would call [imperfect]? They would call? They would call the girls...’)

R: Sí, sí, me llamaban “baby” y “morocha”...es, es algo como “morena”... no? Qué significa... significa... es morena?

(‘Yes, yes, the would call [imperfect] me “baby” and “dark-haired girl”... it’s, it’s something like “dark-haired”, right? What does, what does it mean... it’s “dark-haired”?’)

J: Sí, uh, uh, ellos te llamaban “morocha”. Yes, morena, dark hair, ok, ok...

(‘Yes, uh, uh they would call you “dark-haired girl”. Yes, dark-haired girl...’)

The interaction between A (NES) and V (NSS) seems to focus primarily on socialization (i.e., there are few instances of NS corrective feedback or NNS modified output) throughout their interaction. However, as can be seen in Excerpt 10, after around 20 minutes into the conversation a series of NNS requests for clarification occur regarding the correct form of an adjective (‘introvertido or introversa?’), the explanation of a new lexical item (‘capta? entiende?’), and the gender of a word (‘tesis’). This episode enables V (NSS) to briefly assume the role of language expert, but in each instance the recast and repair is immediately absorbed into the flow of the conversation.

Excerpt 10—Vocabulary, Articles and Adjectives (A: NES; V: NSS)

A: Piensas que tu personalidad es diferente cuando hablas inglés? De que cuando hablas español?

(‘Do you think that your personality is different when you speak English? From when you speak Spanish?’)

V: En qué sentido...

(‘In what sense...’)

A: Bueno es, es la pregunta ocho... te comportas diferentemente, o... Eres más introvertido or introversa? Es “introvertido” or “introversa”?

(‘Well, it’s, it’s question number eight... do you act differently, or... are you more “introverted” or “introversa”? Is it “introverted” or “introversa”?’)

V: Introvertida, introvertida...

(‘Introverted [correct adjectival form], introverted’)

A: OK, “introvertida”, sí...

(‘OK, “introverted”, yes...’)

V: Em, no, no... soy igual.

(‘Uh, no, no... I’m the same.’)

A: Sí. Yo, a veces soy un poco más relajado cuando hablo español que en mis clases de inglés... pero no sé por qué... siempre estoy más relajado en mis clases de español que en mis clases de inglés.

(‘Yes. I, at times I’m a little more relaxed when I speak Spanish than in my English classes... but I don’t know why... I’m always more relaxed in my Spanish classes than in my English classes.’)

V: Pero hay una cosa que tiene... la estructura, y, y capta todo?

(‘But there’s a thing that you have to...the structure and, do you catch everything?’)

A: “Capta todo”? Entiendo todo?

(‘Catch everything? Do I understand everything?’)

V: Entiende todo, capta todo.

(‘Understand everything, catch everything.’)

A: Ok, sí, la mayoría, sí, 85% de, de lo que, de lo, de lo todo...

(‘OK, yes, the majority, yes, 85% of what, of the, of everything...’)

[some talk here]

A: Por ejemplo mi hermana... es posible recibir un diploma sin escribir un tesis. Voy a recibir mi diploma sin un tesis.

(‘For example my sister... it’s possible to receive a diploma without writing a thesis. I’m going to receive my diploma without a thesis.’)

V: O sí?

(‘Oh yeah?’)

A: “El tesis” or “la tesis”?

(‘Thesis [masculine article] or thesis [feminine article]?’)

V: La tesis.

(‘Thesis [correct feminine article].’)

A: Sí, la tesis es sólo por las universidades pequeñas o “elite”. Voy a recibir mi diploma sin escribir una tesis.

(‘Yes, the thesis is only for little or “elite” universities. I’m going to receive my diploma without writing a thesis.’)

V: Ah, porque en mi país todos tienen que escribir una tesis para recibir el título.

(‘Ah, because in my country everyone has to write a thesis to receive a degree.’)

Despite the fact that only one language is used throughout their interaction, and as such only the NES is presented with the benefit of receiving L2 learning and socialization opportunities, at times the pair does establish a temporary pattern of teacher/learner role adoption and relinquishment. Unfortunately despite several weeks of attempts to arrange a follow-up session, it was impossible to find a time when the two could meet again. The inability to reconcile their two schedules leaves it to speculation whether or not the two would have continued to speak only in Spanish or if they would have changed the pattern of their interactions.

In Excerpt 11 there is an attempted moment of teaching on the part of the NSS. After listening to D speak for roughly a minute (in Spanish and English) about the beauty of her country Mexico, E initiates a turn that seems to confuse her partner. After the introduction of Cassi into the conversation (a friend of E), D explains to E that ‘España’ (‘Spain’) is different than ‘hispana’ (‘Hispanic’). E listens to the brief explanation by D without a comment, seems to become aware that she has confused her partner, and proceeds to clarify that her friend Cassi is both Mexican and Spanish (“Oh, oh, her grandfather is from Spain but the rest of the family is from Mexico... she’s, she’s both”). D accepts the explanation and E continues with her anecdote. What is interesting about this exchange (and the entire interaction between E and D), is that despite the obvious limitations of their nascent L2s, the two still manage to hold a meaningful conversation. D’s use of corrective feedback and E’s instinct to clarify for her partner follow the findings of Gardner (2004) that learners in interaction will invariably strive for intersubjectivity, and by doing so, they will eventually achieve communicative success.

Excerpt 11—Vocabulary (E: NES; D: NSS)

D: Pero, tú, tú estudias en... em español no es tu carrera?

(‘But, you, you study en... uh, Spanish isn’t your major?’)

E: No, es extra... extra...

(‘No, no it’s extra... extra...’)

D: OK, nuestra cultura en México?

(‘OK, our culture in Mexico?’)

E: Oh, mi otra amiga, Cassi, es española también.

(‘Oh, my other friend, Cassi, es Spanish too.’)

D: Es española o es mexicana? Es de España o es hispana?

(‘She’s Spanish or Mexican? Is she from Spain or is she Hispanic?’)

E: Oh, uh, uh, ...

D: Una es española y la otra es hispana. Porque hay dos, hay dos... es su amiga de España o es hispana?

(‘One is Spanish and the other is Hispanic. Because there are two, there are two... is your friend from Spain or is she Hispanic?’)

E: Oh, oh, her grandfather is from Spain but the rest of the family is from Mexico... she’s, she’s both, her parents, her family.

D: Oh, OK, OK...

Although the conversation between E and D progresses more slowly (there are frequent instances of delay, recasts and repairs in both L1 and L2 by both participants throughout the session), there is evidence that the talk is succeeding. In Excerpt 12, the proof of communicative success is based both on the fact in that E continues to commit to

speaking her L2 Spanish, and D continues to provide NS input and corrections as she assumes the role of teacher. Despite the stumbles, the frequent pauses and the L2 errors on the part of both participants, D and E manage to co-construct meaning in their conversation. Excerpt 12 supports the conclusions of Nakahama et al. (2001), Mori (2004) and Kasper (2004) that informal L2 talk can succeed with patience and effortful co-construction, and it also supports Auerbach's (1993) claim that permitting the L1 in the L2 context allows lower proficiency learners the opportunity to participate in authentic L2 practice.

Excerpt 12—Vocabulary (E: NES; D: NSS)

E: OK, uh...I'll, I'll try it in Spanish...

D: Good, OK, OK...

E: Estoy a [university name] porque uh, no es caro, es muy barato, es más barato que NYU, New York University, it's uh, y, es muy, uh how do you say "close"?

(‘I am from [university] but uh, it's not expensive, it's very cheap, it's cheaper than NYU...’)

D: O, uh “cerca”.

(‘Oh, uh, “close”.’)

E: Sí, cerca, cerca a mi casa a [hometown]

(‘Yes, close, close to my house in [hometown]’)

D: (repeats name of E's hometown)

E: Sí, near, uh mi familia... pero, pero no me gusta [university] porque pienso que es demasiado, demasiado grande...

(‘Yes, near... my family... but, but I don't like [university] because I think that it's too, too big...’)

D: O, uh grande...

(‘Oh, uh big...’)

E: And es difícil aprender, uh closely... uh, like the classes are too big so it’s hard to like, get like, personal help...

(‘And it’s hard to learn...uh closely...’)

D: O, OK, so... es que, es auto... auto aprender... o, o... pues el maestro te da el tema y tienes que, que...

(‘Oh, OK, so, so... it’s that, it’s autodidacticism... or, or, so the teacher gives you the topic and you have to, to...’)

E: Uhhh...

D: El maestro te da el tema y tienes que desarrollar, extiendes el tema... o tienes que estudiar mucho para, para escribir...

(‘The teacher gives you the topic and you have to develop, extend the topic... or you have to study a lot in order to, to write...’)

E: Uh, depende de la clase. Por ejemplo, en mi senior seminar, el professor assigns a paper, like anything, uh, después eligio, uh, el tema...pero en otros clases nos da un tema y tenemos que escribir papers. Pero, pero I think, es que, es difícil tener, like, personal time with the professor. Does that make sense?

(‘Uh, it depends on the class. For example, in my senior seminar, the professor assigns a paper, like anything, uh, then I select, uh, the topic... but in other classes he gives us a topic and we have to write papers. But, but I think, it’s that, it’s difficult to have, like, personal time with the professor. Does that make sense?’)

D: Personal time...

E: Sí, en un grupo grande, encontrar mi profesor es difícil.

(‘Yes, in a big group, finding my professor is hard.’)

D: Ah! Sí, sí!

(‘Ah! yes, yes!’)

In the above exchange that begins with the proclamation by E that she will switch to Spanish and the supportive reply by D, there is evidence for Nation's (2003) claim of the beneficial use of the L1 to overcome topic confusion and to fill in L2 lexical gaps. Of course, due to the lower proficiency levels of these two participants, their conversation has many more instances of repair, reformulation, confirmation checks and pauses, but as can be seen in the preceding excerpts, they do seem to reach a point of comprehension as they co-create the topic in the L1 and L2. It takes several turns before E is able to explain to D that her dissatisfaction with her university is the inability to have "personal time" with her professors, but by the end of the exchange it appears that D has understood her point. This episode lends support to Wagner and Gardner's (2004) claim that NNS conversations are "normal" despite the presence of stumbles, to the belief of Firth and Wagner (1997) that NS/NNS conversations are not a priori doomed to fail, and to Atkinson et al. (2007) finding that humans are creative, clever and adaptive in L2 interactions. To what extent the L2s of the two participants will directly improve based on the help of their partners during this one interaction is not measured for this study. However, seen from the point of view that language is primarily used for communication and that language socialization in the L2 is a crucial component of advancing in the use and ability of the L2 (Young 2009; Lantolf and Thorne 2007), it seems likely that the partnership developed between the two will continue to prove advantageous for both.

5.4.2 Idioms

The usage of idiomatic expressions is quite common in the interactions analyzed for this study and they often lead to opportunities for NS teaching. Two of the best examples of the use and teaching of idioms can be seen below in excerpts 13 (J and R) and 14 (L and C). In Excerpt 13 the topic of figurative language is explicitly introduced by the NSS in his L2 English as he describes what he is currently studying in class. After a NS recast of the name “Jarvis” and the vocabulary word “slang”, the NSS repairs his L2 English and states a recently learned idiomatic expression (“dog eat dog world”). The NES uses this topic as an opportunity to teach two new idiomatic expressions to her partner.

Excerpt 13— Explicit Discussion of Idiomatic Expressions (R: NES; J: NSS)

J: So, so, all the good books are in English. I only read in English. ... like right now I am reading a book... very interesting, “What Wood Google Do?” by Jeff Harvis.

R: Oh, “What would Google Do?, right? Jeff Jarvis... with a “J”.

J: Yes, “j”. OK, good. I don’t like reading translations because, because I want to learn the complex phrases. And like that way I can learn your phrases. Yes, and in class we are studying some slangs, some slangs...

R: Some slang?

J: Yes, slang, like “Dog eat dog world” –there is no meaning in Spanish for that so, so...

R: (laughs)

J: Yes, we don’t, we don’t have it...(laughs)

R: Have you heard the saying “Once in a blue moon”? Do you know what that means?

J: No, no.. what?

R: It means like “not very often” or like... “almost never”, she comes around once in a blue moon.

J: Oh, OK, exactly. That’s a good one.

[some talk here]

R: Basically all of my friends in Argentina were kids who were studying English, so... It’s really interesting to see what my friends in Argentina are learning, in English, like the idioms or, or... like “shoot the breeze”.

J: What?

R: It means to talk, to chat...

J: Oh, OK...to talk (mumbles in Spanish)

In Excerpt 14 the introduction of an idiomatic expression comes more indirectly than in the interaction with the preceding pair. In this case, L (NES) and C (NSS) are having a mixed L1/L2 discussion of Venezuelan topography and geography that creates a teaching opportunity regarding the two disparate systems of measurement used by the participants (miles and kilometers). This topic leads the NES to introduce and teach an idiomatic expression related to the discussion, which the NSS seems to process as he uses the definition of the idiom in his response.

Excerpt 14—Idiomatic Expression and Measurements (L: NES; C: NSS)

L: OK so, one meter is pretty much three feet, so, so...

C: How far then is a mile?

L: Uh, a mile is about 5,280 feet.

C: OK, OK...

L: Cuántos kilómetros hay entre Caracas y la mar? Y, en inglés... How far is that... as the crow flies? Have you heard that, “as the crow flies”?

(‘How many kilometers between Caracas and the sea? And in English...’)

C: Eh, eh...OK... so...

L: Yes, we say, we say, as the crow flies, as the crow flies means “on a straight line”, so so...

C: AH! OK, so, OK...I understand you!

L: So, C as the crow flies, how far, as the crow flies, is the sea from Caracas?

C: In a straight line, uh, uh it’s about 50 kilometers.

The preceding examples demonstrate how unstructured interactions between two learners (each of the other’s L1) contain multiple opportunities for the learning and teaching of advanced aspects of the L2 such as figurative language, lending support to the claim of Kasper (2004) that informal NS/NNS talk can contain profound L2 input. The excerpts also show that in the context of a natural and informal conversation, there are also opportunities for the teaching and learning of L2 extra-linguistic information, such as facts about culture or geography. The teaching and learning of idioms in this study, through both role switching and the use of the L1 and the L2, supports the finding of Atkinson et al. (2007) that learners are dynamic and adaptive in L2 interaction and the claim of Cook (1989) that reciprocal teaching can concurrently benefit L2 processing for both learners.

5.4.3 Metalinguistic Analysis

Although certainly less frequent in the interactions, there were several instances of explicit metalinguistic analysis by the learners. The best examples are seen in Excerpts 15 and 16, both of which come from the conversation between R (NES) and J (NSS). Just as had occurred earlier in the conversation during the ‘llamaron/llamaban’ (‘used to call/called’) repair (see Excerpt 9), the issue of proper tense selection becomes the focus of J’s L2 production, although in this case an explicit metalinguistic discussion of the issue of tenses takes place. At this point in the interaction, both J and R seem to have become comfortable with their roles as teacher for and student of the interlocutor. Each commits to providing beneficial linguistic feedback to their partner throughout the interaction, and in Excerpts 15 and 16 this feedback is metalinguistic.

Why does this category of teaching and interaction merit special attention? According to Sheen’s (2007) findings that the effectiveness of metalinguistic correction regarding L2 acquisition is derived from the dual purpose it serves of promoting both noticing and understanding, in accordance with Schmidt’s 1995 theory on the two levels of awareness:

It is not unreasonable to assume that understanding entails noticing while the reverse is not always true. It is, therefore, perhaps not so surprising that provision of the correct form together with metalinguistic feedback proved more effective than recasts alone because it led to noticing and understanding of the underlying rule. (Sheen 2007: 318)

Sheen’s conclusion regarding the benefit of metalinguistic analysis is the same as that reached by N. Ellis (2005), who supports VanPatten’s (1996) claim that focusing the attention of a learner on a specific aspect of language will push L2 processing:

The remedy is to bring the issue into the light of consciousness...explicit instruction or consciousness raising or form-focus can help the learner to notice the cue in the first place, consolidating an explicit construction linking the cue and its interpretation. Explicit instruction can also encourage subsequent use of this cue in processing. (Ellis 2005: 324)

As will be seen in the following excerpt, the NES (R) provides both a focus on form and explicit metalinguistic feedback in juxtaposition. Furthermore, she does this by taking advantage of both her L1 English and her L2 Spanish as the two partners work together to create meaning and find benefit in the exchange.

Excerpt 15— Explicit Metalinguistic Discussion of Tenses (R: NES; J: NSS)

J: So, otros quince minutos en español?

(‘So, another 15 minutes in Spanish?’)

R: Sí, oh, quizás, qué tal si yo hablo español y you speak English?

(‘If, oh, maybe, how about if I speak Spanish and you speak English?’)

J: Ah, perfect... what is more difficult for me is the times, the English times...“you have”, “I had”, “I have had”...

R: Oh, tenses!

J. Yes, tenses, for me it’s the same “have had”, “had had”, like tenses, like... it’s all the same for me, so...

R: Pero, pero ustedes tienen lo mismo en español... el presente perfecto y el pasado perfecto... Had, have...

(‘But, but you guys have the same thing in Spanish... the present perfect and the past perfect...’)

J: Like past participle?

R: Yeah, uh-huh... he ido, he ido a la escuela... fui, he ido... es como, "I went, I have gone to..."

(‘Yeah, uh-huh...I have gone. I have gone to the school. I have gone... it’s like...’)

J: What is the difference between "I have gone" than "I had gone"?

R: Have gone, sí. Cuando estás hablando en el pasado ya, y quieres decir algo que es, es más en el pasado... decir "had"...

(‘Have gone, yes... when you’re talking in the past already, and you want to say something that is, is more in the past... to say "had"...’)

J: Oh, oh, had...

R: Sí, I can say "I have gone to Argentina", but If I’m telling a story, say, if I’m telling someone about me and you having a conversation, and I said to them "yeah, me and this guy were having a conversation and I told him I had gone to Argentina" it’s, it’s in a story... something farther in the past before another thing.

J: Oh, OK, OK, "had gone"...

(pause)

R: Lo mejor de explicar la diferencia entre "had gone" and "have gone" es... si

(‘The best about explaining the difference between is if...’)

J: It’s if maybe before something has happened?

R: Yeah, like, so if you’re telling a story. Yeah if you say "he walked in and I had been..." ...it’s like, I... I don’t wanna confuse you...

J: No, it’s...

R: So, if you say "had" it means you were already talking in the past tense and you want to say something more about something earlier...

J: Oh, OK!

R: Es más claro?

(‘Is it more clear?’)

J: Yes, it's more clear for me. It seems, seems it's very similar to Spanish... thank you.

Not only does this exchange between R and J demonstrate the value of L1/L2 language exchanges both in terms of L2 practice and (hopefully) eventual acquisition of new L2 knowledge, but it also demonstrates how natural and fluid the incorporation of moments of profound L2 analysis can be when the event is based on reciprocal language teaching and learning. Despite R's concern that she may be confusing her NSS partner, she provides both a reasonable metalinguistic explanation and an example in order to make a distinction in usage between the present perfect and the past perfect tenses, which according N. Ellis (2002) and Schmidt (1995) should help enable J's L2 processing.

In Excerpt 16 it is once again the NES who is providing metalinguistic information and examples for her partner. This time she does not use the L1 of her partner in the explanation or discussion, but she does remark upon the difference between their two languages regarding the use of phrasal verbs.

Excerpt 16—Metalinguistic Discussion of Phrasal Verbs (R: NES; J: NSS)

R: They also are learning something called “phrasal verbs”... do you know...do...

J: I don't know what is.

R: It's like uh, so we have a verb and like a preposition that accents it... put together... and the two separately don't really make sense... mean anything, but put together they do.

J: Oh, yeah, OK.

R: Right, like “came up with” an idea, like “I came up with an idea”.

J: Oh, OK, OK, yes, I know.

R: Yeah, so they have like a big book of these and, and ...I thought that, that all languages had these so I was surprised when, when Spanish...

J: Yes, this kind of things is desperate me because every day I find a new thing or a new thing like this that is hard for me.

R: (laughs) Yeah, I know.

In Excerpt 17, L (NES) and C (NSS) incorporate a brief metalinguistic discussion about plurality in English as they carry out an L1/L2 conversation about business in Caracas. The combination of L1 and L2 use, metalinguistic analysis, as well as grammatical and idiomatic input supports Kasper's (2004) claim that so-called "ordinary conversation" such as is taking place here can be a highly productive environment for L2 learning and processing.

Excerpt 17—Metalinguistic Discussion of Plurality (L: NES; C: NSS)

L: Uh, the last part again, uh, would you say the last part of what you were saying again?

C: Sí, uh, they have a "compañía de eventos", de, de "events".

(‘Yes, uh they have an “events company”, of, of events.’)

L: Oh, yes, OK...

C: So, I had met them through my cousin and I had experience in public relations so they asked me why you don't, uh, help us with the public relations of the company that we managed. So, I said OK, and I worked for them for one concert, to, uh, to prove....

L: Sí...

(‘yes...’)

C: So I work, to prove to them my skills, so I uh, in this concert, with the public relations advertising so the results was very good... were very good... Do I say "was" or "were"?

L: The results were, were... it's plural. The result was, the results were...

C: OK, OK, the results were... very good.

L: Y cómo es el ambiente de negocios? “El clima” o “el ambiente”? En Caracas?

(‘And what’s the business environment like? “Climate” or “environment”? In Caracas?’)

C: Uh...

L: Sí, cuál es... la clima o la ambiente...uh, the environment for business.

(‘Yes, which is the climate or environment...uh...’)

C: Oh, uh, uh, “ambiente”?

(‘Oh, uh “environment”?’)

L: What is the right term, uh... for...

C: Oh, OK, se puede usar “clima” for mood, like what is the mood in a room or...

(‘Oh, OK, “climate” can be used for mood, like...’)

C: Sí, uh, we say in English “what’s the business environment” or the “business climate”. A person will say, “Oh the climate is really bad”, or “it’s lousy”.

C: Oh, oh, that’s, that’s good to know. Eh, en este momento, el ambiente no es, no es... ahora hay muchos problemas políticos que se mezclan con los económicos.. y, y, do you understand?

(‘Oh, oh... Eh, right now the climate isn’t, isn’t... now there are a lot of political problems that are mixing with the economic ones... and, and...’)

Just as in the two previous examples with R and J, this excerpt shows how focused and explicit linguistic analysis can be provided by learners in informal L2 conversation in which the L1 can be accessed by the participants. Furthermore, the metalinguistic talk seems to have no negative impact on the flow of discourse as it is seamlessly integrated into the interaction. Of course metalinguistic feedback is not a

panacea with respect to L2 learning, but many have concluded (DeKeyser 2000; N. Ellis 2005; Sheen 2007) that it aids in the acquisition process for the L2. The fact that in informal conversation instances of such detailed language analysis can occur adds further support to the argument that unstructured conversation can provide opportunities for L2 learning. Moreover, the data here also show how the use of the L1 (Excerpt 15 in particular) seems a natural and beneficial tool for profound L2 processing, just as Cook (1989, 2001) has suggested.

5.5 Extra-linguistic Teaching

No L2 language-learning event is exclusively focused on the L2 (i.e., the language itself). This study is grounded in SCT and the work of those who believe that language is primarily a tool of communication (Lantolf and Thorne 2007; Young 2009), and that through language, history, politics, current events, sociology, psychology, religion, satire, parody, literature—the whole of human thought and possibility is taught and learned. Therefore, in order to measure the benefit of any language interaction properly, the extra-linguistic material that is discussed, taught or learned should also be taken into account. The data collected for this present study do show a remarkable number of opportunities for extra-linguistic teaching and learning. Ultimately, the decision to place the examples found in this section into a separate category for analysis could be seen as arbitrary (especially when taking into account the extra-linguistic episodes found within previous excerpts analyzed in this study). However, in the philosophical context of this present study it is hypothesized that L2 socialization comes

from learning and practice that go beyond the language itself, and the following excerpts provide evidence of the profound intercultural and interpersonal information being discussed, taught and learned in this context.

Although some might argue that the exchanges analyzed in this section are simply instances of “empty” or “normal” conversation, it has already been shown how ordinary conversation can have a profound impact on the L2 of the learners (Wagner and Gardner 2004). Once again, it must be stated that teaching does not require intent on the part of the teacher nor does learning require intent on the part of the learner—subconscious processing is a component of many explanations of the manner in which humans learn (DeKeyser 2000; Ellis 2005; N. Ellis and Larsen-Freeman 2006). So the belief that a moment of so-called “simple talk” without an explicitly stated goal of teaching could not contain opportunities for beneficial L2 learning seems to be based more on the prejudices of supporters of experimental design than it does on facts.

In Excerpt 18 there is evidence of fairly intense teaching and learning, both linguistic and extra-linguistic, taking place within the period of just a few minutes of informal L1/L2 talk. In addition to the idioms and vocabulary (‘café con leche’, ‘light-skinned’; ‘un cariño’, ‘term of affection’) discussed, and the NS vocabulary correction and NNS reception and modification of output (‘mito’/‘mita’), there is a discussion of the history of Venezuelan ethnography focusing on the era of the two World Wars as well as a discussion of the issues of race and class.

Excerpt 18—Venezuelan History and Culture (L: NES; C: NSS)

L: Um, he oído que, que las mujeres en Venezuela son muy, muy bonitas, “guapas”...

(‘I’ve heard that, that the women in Venezuela are very very beautiful, “lovely”.’)

C: Sí, sí...

(‘Yes, yes...’)

L: OK... más de muchos otros lugares... porque es es una mita, o..

(‘Ok... more than in many other places... because it’s a myth, or...’)

C: Mito... –ito (spells out last three letters in English)

(‘myth [correct masculine form]... –ito’)

L: OK, es un mito, o...

(‘OK, is it a myth, or...’)

C: No, no es un mito es la verdad, la verdad... es debido a la mezcla de las razas allá... de de... una mezcla muy especial...

(‘No, it’s not a myth it’s the truth, the truth... it’s due to the mixture of races there... from... a very special mixture...’)

L: Una mezcla especial? De, de... oh, OK, las razas de... europeo, y la gente indígena oh, oh solamente de europea

(‘A special mixture? Of, of... oh, OK, the races from... European, and the indigeneous people, or, or only of european?’)

C: Uh, em, tenemos dos. Por ejemplo, yo soy de origen europeo, mi papá, la familia paterna de mi padre es de Italia y la familia de mi madre es de Francia...

(‘Um, we have two. For example, I am of European origin, my dad, my dad’s family is from Italy and my mom’s family is from France...’)

L: French and Italian? Una mezcla de French and Italian.

(‘French and Italian? A mixture of French and Italian?’)

C: Sí, sí...

(‘Yes, yes...’)

L: Uh...

C: Um, y... Pero también, una inmigración muy importante de portugueses a Venezuela. Cuando hubo la guerra en Europa, en la primera guerra y en la segunda guerra mundial, eh, eh, hubo mucha inmigración de europeos, principalmente portugueses, españoles e italianos.

(‘Um, and, but also, a very important immigration of Portuguese to Venezuela. When the war in Europe took place, in the First World War and in the Second World War, uh, uh, there was a lot of immigration of Europeans, principally Portuguese, Spaniards and Italians.’)

L: Después de la guerra?

(‘After the war?’)

C: No, no durante, durante..

(‘No, no during, during...’)

L: Durante, durante... OK.

(‘During, during...OK’)

C: Sí, huyendo, huyendo de Europa. Pero por otra parte hay indígenas... lo que tenemos allá son indígenas, no son negros son, marrones, marrones...

(‘Yes, fleeing, fleeing from Europe. But on the other hand there are the indigeneous people... what we have there are indigeneous, they aren’t black people, they are brown, brown...’)

L: Yes, in English it’s brown, brown-skinned.

C: Sí, son marrones pero marron claro. We say in Spanish, “café con leche”.

(‘Yes, they are brown but light brown. We say in Spanish “coffee with milk”.’)

L: (Laughs) “Café con leche”... (laughs again) OK, OK, we say “light-skinned”.

(‘Coffe with milk...’)

C: Ah, OK. Sí, sí, hay muchos mestizos en Venezuela. Pero, pero no hay racismo. Todos, todos son mezclados.

(‘Ah, OK. Yes, yes there are mixed-race people in Venezuela. But, but there is no racism. Everyone is mixed.’)

L: Sí, oh, sí?

(‘Yeah, oh yeah?’)

C: Sí, tenemos otros problemas tenemos... clasismo, clasismo...

(‘Yes, we have other problems, we have... classicism, classicism...’)

L: Cómo se dice, uh “negros”? Muchas personas en los Estados Unidos son... En los Estados no es, no es “politically correct”, es más, uh, en años pasados “blacks”, pero, pero en el pasado... y ahora es “afro-americano”... usado mucho más... es...

(‘How do you say uh, “black people”? Many people in the United States are... in the States it’s not, “politically correct”, it’s more, uh, in the past “blacks”, but, but today...in the past... and today it’s “afro-american”... used much more... it’s...’)

C: Em, pero, sí (laughs). Nosotros, nosotros no tenemos este problema, no tenemos. Si podemos... si hay una persona que es morena, uh “dark brown”, nosotros decimos “hola mi negro, hola mi negro”.

(‘Um, but, yes ... we, we don’t have this problem, we don’t have. If... we can... if there is a person who is dark-skinned, uh, “dark brown”, we say “hello my black one, hello my black one”.’)

L: Oh! Hola mi negro? Ah... es diferente!

(‘Oh! “Hello my black one?” Ah, it’s different!’)

C: Sí, pero... es un, es, es uh, cariño, cariñoso.

(‘Yes, but... it’s a, it’s it’s uh, a term of affection, affectionate.’)

L: Oh, a term of affection.

C: Yes, term of affection.

When Excerpt 18 is examined without the assumption that a teacher must intend to teach to be teaching, this interaction provides ample evidence of the rich and varied topics and structures of L2 input that are available for learners in informal L1/L2 conversations. Furthermore, and as witnessed in other excerpts in this study, the participants tend to use the L1 of their partners when discussing particularly sensitive cross-cultural issues, a result that supports the findings of Nazary (2008). In Excerpt 19 the pair is also discussing issues of culture and history. In the example there are also instances of L2 teaching and learning (NS corrective feedback and NNS modified output) but the primary focus of the interaction seems to be on the exchange of extra-linguistic information.

Excerpt 19—Family and National History (D: NSS; E: NES)

D: Cuando llegaron aquí, tus padres o tus abuelitos... uh, de China?

(‘When did they arrive here, your parents or your grandparents... uh from China?’)

E: Uh, when do I go to China? To... Taiwan?

D: No, uh... when did your family come here to the United States o uh...

E: Oh, mis padres están aquí pero mis abuelos, still, uh, are in Taiwan. Es solamente mis padres, y mi tía, mi tía es en California, y mi padre I think uh, mi padre, I uh, I can never do the past, uh... llega... how do you say...

(‘Oh, my parents are here but my grandparents, still, uh are in Taiwan. It’s only my parents, and my aunt, my aunt is in California, and my dad I think uh, my dad, I uh, I can never do the past... uh... “arrive”... how do you say...’)

D: “Llegó”.

(‘Arrived.’)

E: OK, llegó. Mi padre llegó aquí en los 1980s para escuela... I think it was in the 80's.

(OK, arrived. My father arrived here in the 1980's for school...)

D: OK, en los años ochenta...en los años treinta empezó la construcción de los ferrocarriles, uh, uh...

(‘OK, in the 80’s...in the 30’s construction of the railroads began, uh, uh...’)

E: Huh? Ferro...?

(‘Huh? “Rai...”?’)

D: Sí, ferrocarriles, rail, uh...

(‘Yes, railroads, uh... “rail, uh...”’)

E: Oh, “railroads”?

D: Sí, “railroads”. In America in one thousand and uh...

E: Oh, the 1900’s...

D: Sí, yes many people from China came to the United States, and uh,..

E: Yeah, uh mostly to California.

In Excerpt 19, E and D are discussing both the personal family history of E and the history of Chinese migration to North America. Although their goal seems to be focusing on extra-linguistic information, D helps E with a Spanish verb construction (“*llegó*”), which was later recalled by E in her exit interview (see Table 2) as being an extremely explicit and beneficial moment. E and D also co-develop the vocabulary words “railroad” and “*ferrocarril*” for one another in the context of the conversation.

Although the interaction could be viewed as cumbersome through the lens of some L2 paradigms, according to Egbert et al. (2004), any deficiency in L2 interaction

can be overcome with patience and motivation, both of which are demonstrated by this pair throughout their interaction as they co-construct meaning on a variety of topics and in two languages. As noted above, many of the excerpts examined in this study contain moments of extra-linguistic material that are co-created by the participants as they also work on L2 linguistic teaching and learning. Of course, this result is not surprising from the SCT point of view of language learning and use, but in order to demonstrate the potential acquisition benefits available in this context, it is important to show that in informal L1 and L2 talk there are many opportunities for both linguistic and extra-linguistic L2 teaching and learning.

5.6 Exit Interview Responses

In a study attempting to challenge some of the myths about L2 learning and use, the input of learners regarding their impressions of the L2 learning process is invaluable. After all of the participants had completed their recording sessions they were mailed out a brief 5-question survey in order to solicit their feedback on the event and their insights and opinions regarding L2 learning in general, thus going beyond only an examination of L1 use in the conversations. For the benefit of cross-sectional comparison, the five questions have been separated into five tables, each question followed by a selection of the responses from the study participants, and a brief discussion of the responses. In order to avoid redundancy, not all of the survey responses have been included in the tables. Responses that were identical or extremely similar to those represented in the tables are not shown.

Table 2. Exit Interview Question #1

#1	What did you learn from your partner? Please explain in detail.
E (NES)	I hate the preterite tense, and I can never remember the endings. However, I don't know if I will ever forget "llegó" again (she corrected me).
D (NSS)	I think these kind of interaction are very important if I like practice with a person with English native I can listen his or her pronunciation and the structure of sentences and they can correct me or I can correct them.
L (NES)	I learned about his educational background and his professional background. We spoke about his Italian and French heritage. Also discussed was his hometown of Caracas, Venezuela, and details concerning it and the political and economic climate there, and his increasing need to learn English. His English is very good and still improving.
C (NSS)	The conversation was very interesting because show me different points of view and allow me to know perspectives of the way of living here in United States. The most important for me is the possibility to talk in a everyday conversation, because I think is the quickly way to obtain fluency and vocabulary. Think in English rather than Spanish.
A (NES)	I learned about her life and family and what she wants to do with marketing. While I wouldn't say I "learned" anything per se, I feel the practice improved my conversational skills and was a good use of time.

Nearly all of the participants in the study reported having learned something from the partners during their conversations and what was learned ranged from grammar and pronunciation to extra-linguistic material and personal histories. There are also references to specific events within the interactions (e.g., E's comment about the preterite tense correction) that demonstrate how the learners felt that within these informal conversations there are opportunities for explicit L2 processing based on both frequency and saliency effects, a finding that supports Schmidt (1995), N. Ellis (2002), and Cook (1989, 2001).

However, one of the participants in the study (A) did not report learning anything about the L2 from his interaction. This comment was surprising both when recalling the fact that the A and V pair spent the duration of their conversation in A’s L2 Spanish and when looking at Excerpt 10, which is only one of several instances during their conversation when V (NSS) corrected A’s output or explained a vocabulary term. It is possible that A’s survey responses (and those of all of the participants) were affected by the delay of time as most participants took between 5 and 10 days to complete and return the survey. It is also possible that A’s comments reflect his own personal motivations and expectations for the event, as he was the only participant in the study who did not provide NS input for his partner.

Table 3. Exit Interview Question #2

#2	What did you teach your partner? Please explain in detail.
C (NSS)	I teach to my partner, everyday talking, words and pronunciation. For example in Spanish to refer at one person you have two ways to say “you”: “usted” and “tu”. My partner doesn’t realize that in everyday he has to use “TU” because nobody say “USTED” that is a formal manner that people used in very specific cases. This one I think that is a good example of the teaching between us. My partner doesn’t like to sound with a very American accent when he speak in Spanish. I taught a few techniques to understand how minimize the stress in specific vowels that sounds very “americanize” when he speaks in Spanish. One of the most important things is think in Spanish, when we begin to talk I felt that my partner did a lot of effort to speak fluid, at the end of our conversation he was very confident and fluid.
R (NES)	I attempted to teach him the difference between the “have” and “had” in the perfect tenses. I also helped him with a few pronunciation issues.
A (NES)	We ended up speaking almost exclusively in Spanish, so I’m not sure what she would have learned aside from about me.

What was most surprising about the responses to question #2 (with the exception of C's comments) is how little most of the participants comment on their contribution to their partners' L2 learning, with most mentioning only one or two specific L2 features. However, a look back at the excerpts, or at the responses to question #1, shows how much value the participants were able to find in the contributions of their NS partners. Of further interest is the manner in which some of the participants spoke about their contributions, for example R's comment above that she "attempted" to teach her partner an aspect of English grammar. The occurrences of self-deprecation and under-estimation, both of their own native speaker knowledge and their L2 ability, was common among the participants. It seems likely that the anxiety and self-doubt expressed by several of the participants in this study is not only common among the general population of L2 learners, but also, according to Lacorte (2007) and Pavlenko (2001a), potentially having a detrimental impact on L2 learning and use. The only participant in the study who never expressed doubts or anxiety about his own knowledge or ability was A, but as can be seen in his response to Question #2 he was also the only participant who explicitly stated doubt about contributing to his partner's L2 learning.

Table 4. Exit Interview Question #3

#3	What are the advantages of this type of language practice? Please explain in detail.
E (NES)	I feel like I rarely get an opportunity to hear or speak Spanish in a relaxed way. In class, I understand maybe 60% of what my professor says, and it is very frustrating. Also, the videos in Spanish class drive me crazy because I can never, never understand what they are saying and I never can get more than half of the questions correct. I don't understand how I'm supposed to get better. I try very hard in class... but have no idea how I'm supposed to get that skill.
D (NSS)	I think this practice have a lot of advantages, if couples communicate daily, they discuss their ideas about any topic and give their point of view.
L (NES)	It gave me an excellent opportunity to practice speaking Spanish, which I desperately need to do. It was also an excellent opportunity to meet someone I would not have usually had opportunity to meet. Also, it allowed me instant feedback. [My partner] would correct me when I made a mistake. It was a very positive experience, and I see no downside to it.
C (NSS)	The advantage is the possibility to exchange knowledge and explain the easy way to learn and share details of our respective languages. To have the possibility of talk without restriction, share with another student and be corrected by one person with same interests and desires of learn. Another advantage is talk and meet new people, different points of view, multiple experiences, how has been the learning process in each of the students.
R (NES)	The advantages are that you are able to receive feedback instantly on your fluency. If your partner doesn't understand you, you know that you said something wrong. Also the environment is much more friendlier. Having a "teacher" that understands you struggles to express yourself and find words is very comforting and helpful. Whenever I have a question about whether I am using the correct word, I can easily ask the partner and they'll let me know, no problem.
J (NSS)	Well that in the class you are learning, but not precisely practicing, maybe for me easier if I have some friends, but if you don't know people you start to get together with people of your same country and even with conversation clubs is not the same to practice with an English native speaker.
A (NES)	You actually get to use the language and it helps you become more fluid and natural in your speech, using the language also shows that languages can be useful, speaking is probably the most important aspect of learning a language so using it in a conversation is on point.

As can be seen in the above responses, all participants found multiple reasons for finding these interactions advantageous. From the chance to speak in a “relaxed way” (E), to receiving “instant feedback”(L and R) , to using “natural” speech (A), to making friends and connections in the L2 community, these learners all had something positive to say about the interactional context. One of the most interesting remarks comes from R, who describes having had a “teacher that understands your struggles to express yourself”. This sentiment was found in many of the responses by the participants in the study and it demonstrates support for Kasper (2004) and Sato and Lyster (2007) regarding role-switching in interaction and interlocutor effect, respectively.

Also noteworthy are the comments made by the participants regarding the failings of traditional L2 contexts, such as E’s displeasure with in-class videos, and J’s comment that students may learn in class but do not have the chance to practice and that conversation clubs do not allow for enough L2 practice. The fact that all of the learners comment on the interaction as a unique chance to engage in authentic L2 practice is also encouraging and, when cross-referencing this result with the responses from questions #1 and #2, there would seem to be evidence of beneficial pushed output occurring in the interactions. Furthermore, in their responses the learners themselves are providing support for the communicative view of language learning and use that upholds the claims of Firth and Wagner (1997), N. Ellis (2005), Koike (2010) and many others that language learning and use is a social, dynamic and multi-faceted series of co-constructed events, and not just internal processing of an isolated mind struggling to reconcile an interlanguage and a theoretical idealized L2 grammar.

Table 5. Exit Interview Question #4

#4	What are the disadvantages of this type of language practice? Please explain in detail.
E (NES)	I wouldn't be able to catch all the mistakes I've made, and I may not practice grammar or vocabulary that I don't know well out of dislike/unfamiliarity. Also, there was a lot that I did not understand that my partner said, but I could not ask her because I could not catch the exact words she said and also because there was too much.
C (NSS)	This are a conversations and practice for fluency. Maybe one of the disadvantages could be the limitations in techniques and formal structures in languages. I mean, in my conversation I didn't speak, even mentioned, anything about grammar in Spanish, and if my partner had asked to me I don't know if I had had the knowledge to answer him.
R (NES)	I think the only disadvantages are that when you are trying to have a conversation you tend to ignore the minor mistakes. I sometimes caught myself making a mistake but my partner never told me, but I understand it was for the sake of facilitating the conversation. Also, while the partner can tell me if something is wrong or right, but he can't always tell me why it is that way. The same goes for me when I'm trying to explain grammar rules, for instance.

Based on the effusively positive responses to question #3 it was not surprising that 5 of the 8 participants could find no disadvantages in the type of interaction analyzed in this study. However, E mentions not being able to “catch all the mistakes” she makes or “catch the exact words” of her partner, but as the participant with the lowest L2 proficiency level her comments are not surprising. Both C and R make the interesting comment that they were worried about their ability to teach grammatical aspects of their L1 to their partners but, as was seen in the excerpts, each was able to do so in a natural and expert manner. As was mentioned in the discussion of question #2, this under-estimation of their own NS knowledge and ability is likely to be grounded in the anxiety-

producing context of formal L2 language learning and does not seem to be based on their actual abilities.

Table 6. Exit Interview Question #5

#5	Do you believe that making this type of language practice a required component of language courses is a good idea or a bad idea? Please explain in detail.
E (NES)	I think it's a good idea, but I think it's hard to implement. Right now we have the required language labs but I don't know if they helped me at all. Also, right now it's kinda like the blind leading the blind - your partner is a beginning student as well, so who knows if either of you are speaking correctly. Also, where would we find the native Spanish speakers willing to do this?
D (NSS)	I think is very good idea because I will know the current slangs or idioms using in the English language that I never will learn in the school.
L (NES)	I see it as a very good idea and support it. It offers an excellent opportunity to apply what is being studied and to receive instant feedback from a native speaker.
C (NSS)	I think that this type of language practice has to be accompanied with a languages courses, or grammar classes for people who are in basics levels. Otherwise, in my case, the most important routine to obtain new vocabulary and structure in the language that I'm learning is reading and listening. Reading to learn new words and reaffirm the grammar structure, visually; and listening to learn how the language has its own dynamic and transform the original sounds in different sounds.
R (NES)	Oh I think it is an excellent idea. In classes we don't have that much actual practice speaking the language. The emphasis is mainly on writing and reading. Not only would this practice help improve fluency, but it would also help raise the confidence levels of the students.
J (NSS)	Is a very good idea, but as I said is complementary.
A (NES)	I would say it's a good idea because students actually get to apply what they've learned, it also gives them an opportunity to practice which will make their speech more natural and fluid. A practical application of the language might motivate or inspire students to learn the language better as opposed to merely wanting to pass with a decent grade.

As would be expected based on the previous responses to the earlier questions, all of the participants remark that adding this variety of L2 interaction and practice would be beneficial. However, there were a few concerns among the learners regarding how to implement a program of informal interactions (both J and C remark that it is a good idea but as a “complementary” component to traditional classes). The most interesting comment came from E, stating that though this type of interaction is a good idea “it’s kinda like the blind leading the blind – your partner is a beginning student as well, so who knows if either of you are speaking correctly”.

E’s concern, likely the same as what might be expressed by some L2 researchers and instructors, is that informal interaction between learners does not provide quality input or corrective feedback from the NS partner. However, as was seen in the excerpts in this study, from the highest to the lowest proficiency level, irrespective of age, gender, nationality or L2 goals, all but one participant in the study (A, who never spoke his L1) provided multiple instances of beneficial NS feedback and input, and all but one participant (V, who neither heard nor spoke her L2) processed the feedback and modified their L2 output. Although E may have felt that neither she nor her partner was learning or teaching during the interaction, the recordings tell a different story, one supporting the conclusions of previous studies (Cook 1989, 2001; Firth and Wagner 1997; Wagner and Gardner 2004) that have found beneficial L2 processing opportunities in informal NS/NNS interactions.

5.7 Summary of the Findings

The methodological approach to this study was intended to mimic the conditions of natural language use so that the instinctive patterns and resources from informal conversations could aid participants who are each learners of the other's language. In the interactions analyzed for the study, most of the pairs were able to immediately establish reciprocal language learning and teaching partnerships based on mutual benefit and mutual interest. All of the participants expressed gratitude to the researcher for initiating the project and for permitting them to take part, and all participants (save one who returned to Mexico two days after his session) pursued a continuing relationship with a NS partner after the study had concluded. This fact alone is encouraging, both for the initial enthusiasm with which the participants approached the opportunity to participate in the study, and for the self-perpetuating motivation that they expressed in their requests to continue to meet with a language partner. The satisfaction of the participants with the experience is also seen in the excerpts and in their exit interview comments, as all describe finding L2 learning or participation benefits in their interactions, and all felt the context was more natural and comfortable than the traditional L2 classroom.

Surprisingly, the overall results of the study show that the tendency to use the L1 did not seem to align with a particular proficiency level: 7 of the 8 participants spoke their L1 on multiple occasions throughout their conversations, creating unique context-specific exchanges of L1 and L2 for each pair during the interactions. From the most advanced speakers (L, A, R, C, J) to the high, mid and low-intermediate speakers (V, D, and E, respectively), all but one of the participants liberally used the L1 in their

interactions, and they did so without any apparent detriment to the success of their NS/NNS conversations. Interestingly, the data showed that none of the pairs had a dominant speaker: each partner spoke about half of the time during the interactions, though the ratio of L1 to L2 for each individual and for each pair did vary. However, the effectiveness with which the L1 was employed did seem to vary based on the proficiency level. For example, although 7 out of 8 participants did use the L1 in order to teach an aspect of grammar that their partners either discussed or later used in modified output, the lower proficiency pairs struggled to relate extra-linguistic information to their partners.

When looking at the overall results, there is evidence of multiple opportunities for profound L2 processing in the NS teaching moments (often occurring in a mixed L1/L2 discussion) throughout the interactions. As was seen in Excerpts 15-17, there were instances of explicit and extended metalinguistic analysis (although only among the advanced pairs), and attempts to teach aspects of grammar such as tenses or distinguishing plural from singular nouns occurred in all proficiency levels. Interestingly, some seemingly rudimentary aspects of the language were discussed among advanced speakers (e.g., formal versus informal pronoun use in Spanish), suggesting the possibility that L2 practice in this format may present beneficial opportunities for learners to return to earlier L2 issues that they may not have managed to process at the same pace as their L2 classmates.

It must not be overlooked that one pair (A: NES, V: NSS) in the study interacted in only one language. However, this result was also interesting in that it was not produced by the pair for which it would have been expected, the lower proficiency pair

(E: NES and D: NSS), but rather by a high-intermediate NSS and an advanced NES.

This result was surprising due to the fact that all participants solicited for the study had been briefed that the context would be an L1/L2 exchange in which each partner would be permitted the chance to practice their respective L2s. Of course, since the study was designed in such a way that the role of the researcher was simply to initiate interaction, and not to control the talk or provide the participants with a specific task to complete, there was always a possibility that a one-language-only pattern such as that found in the A&V pair could occur. The specific cause (or causes) for this result cannot be determined from the data collected for the study. However, it is important to recall that in their exit interviews, both A and V claimed to have found either L2 learning or practice benefit in their interaction.

Chapter 6: Conclusions, Limitations and Implications of the Study

6.1 Discussion of the RQs

Regarding RQ 1 (“Do informal conversations between a NS of English learning Spanish and a NS of Spanish learning English reveal insight regarding the natural use and interaction of the L1 and the TL?”), the results of the study demonstrate that when left to instinct learners will demonstrate a beneficial use of the L1, for various social and linguistic purposes, and that pairs will work together to naturally establish the rules and patterns of L1/L2 use in context. Both the recorded data and the exit interview comments show that by easing some of the artificial restrictions on the learners they are able to find both linguistic and extra-linguistic value in interactions that permit them to use the L1 as a resource, thus supporting the claims of Sociocultural theory. The context was considered “friendlier” (participant R), providing the chance to “talk without restriction” (participant C), and it was positively viewed by all of the participants as a chance to use the L2 in a more authentic conversation.

The promotion of L2 practice, the lowering of affective barriers, the construction of a community of practice in which NS quality input and corrective feedback as well as NNS-modified output and processing can coincide with social and personal bonding—all of these components were found to be present in the natural, informal L1/L2 conversations examined for this study. This result supports the claims of Cook (2001) that the L1 will constantly and naturally be present in L2 interaction events. The results of the study also support the claims of Cook (1989) and his belief that reciprocal L2

teaching through the use of the L1 can aid learners. The data demonstrate that learners feel they are able to participate more freely in these informal L1/L2 conversations. By both teaching and learning in an L1/L2 exchange, many state that the context creates a greater desire to practice the L2 and a more positive environment in which to receive feedback about their L2 use.

Regarding RQ 2 (“Does informal conversation in which the L1 is permitted present opportunities for L2 teaching, learning or socialization?”), the data analyzed in this study provide a definitive “yes”. The overall results of the study show that both informal talk and the use of the L1 in the L2 learning context have value, and they also demonstrate that the construct of learner/expert learner/expert pairs engaging in reciprocal L2 teaching and learning is likely an untapped resource in L2 learning theory and pedagogy. The data show multiple instances of L2 teaching in L1/L2 informal talk (linguistic, metalinguistic and extra-linguistic) as well as NS corrective feedback and NNS self-repair and modified output. The data also show that the pairs naturally and effectively managed to set rules for practice and talk (whether explicitly stated or not) in a context that allows them to participate in an authentic L2 social setting. Most participants accepted their dual roles of teacher and learner, bonded over L2 struggles, and were able to communicate and socialize successfully with a NS despite being imperfect speakers of their respective L2s.

The overall findings, both from the recordings and from the exit interviews, show that, save one NSS, all of the participants frequently spoke their TL during the interactions. In fact, even the beginner-level participant (E, NES) with only limited L2

Spanish skills still attempted, and was consistently encouraged to attempt by her NSS partner, to use as much Spanish as she could. Furthermore, the recordings also demonstrate that in moments of potential conversational breakdown, participants were often able to mutually construct meaning through the use of their L1 and L2 in dynamic and adaptive ways. Not only were the learners able to communicate and socialize successfully with a NS, but also they were also able to engage in reciprocal construction of linguistic (and extra-linguistic) knowledge, often in their respective TL. This finding supports claims by Firth and Wagner (1997) and Wagner and Gardner (2004) that learners are deft, creative and capable users of the L2, able to achieve communicative success despite the presence of linguistic errors or gaps.

Regarding RQ 3 (“Provided that evidence of opportunities for L2 teaching, learning or socialization is found, does this indicate a need for permitting both informal talk and the use of the L1 in the L2 learning context?”), the data do lend support to the belief that informal practice that is free from the restrictions of L2-only classrooms as guided by a TL expert/teacher interlocutor would benefit L2 learners in a variety of ways, showing that natural L2 learning, teaching and socialization can and do occur without formal structure and without traditional authority/teacher intervention. This fact demonstrates that it is highly likely that learning an L2 is as much about social processes as is it is about learning the language itself, offering support to the claims by Pavlenko (2001a), Hall et al (2006), Lantolf and Thorne (2007), Atkinson et al. (2007) and many other researchers referenced in this study who feel that language learning and use must be viewed in social context. These processes are entirely dependent upon social context,

personal interaction, motivation and effortful co-construction by the learners.

Unfortunately, and as was stated by several participants in the study, traditional L2 classrooms may restrain this natural development of language learning and use as well as the instinctual drive toward socialization and commiseration. All of the participants in this study report having learned, having taught or having gained the benefit of “real-life” practice, a finding that insists upon pursuing the implementation of similar contexts in L2 learning.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

The most contentious issue in this study is likely to be the operationalization of the terms “teaching” and “learning”. Although justified through the lens of SCT and through the conclusions of the Output Hypothesis, the results of this study rely heavily on the use of more liberal definitions of these terms. As such, the results of this study are likely to be rejected by some in the field of L2 learning theory who would claim that these initial findings cannot show that learning (or acquisition) has occurred. However, when language is looked at through an evolutionary lens, there is no “ideal” or “stable” language—no perfect English or Spanish—and learners, teachers and experts, like the languages themselves, reflect dynamism and perpetual change. If learners in this study, or if L2 learners in any context are working to achieve intersubjectivity with a language partner, despite the presence of marked linguistic forms, the fact remains that they are learning to communicate—they are managing to use the language to participate in society, which is quite likely the reason languages exist. As N. Ellis (2002) declares,

language learning and use, both at the micro and macro level, take place over extended periods of time, and as such, are subject to the Darwinian principles of evolution and of the survival of the fittest (N. Ellis 2002: 333). The manner in which an L2 eventually emerges or changes is not entirely clear, but what seems certain is that it is a dynamic process that takes time, effortful co-construction and community participation in order to occur.

Nevertheless, both the definitions of the terms “teach” and “learn”, as well as the inability to analyze data from subsequent interactions or post-session acquisition testing, can be seen to qualify the results of the study. Kasper (2004) concludes with a caveat regarding his finding that ordinary conversation has L2 learning benefits, saying that his analysis does not provide a clear answer to the question of whether or not L2 learning took place in his study, “such evidence requires examining extended interactions and especially longitudinal and cross-sectional data” (Kasper 2004: 564). The same comment can be made about this present study.

An additional issue with the study is the size of the group analyzed. Although the participants represented a fairly heterogeneous group (based on age, gender, nationality and L2 goals), it was nevertheless a small number that participated in the interactions. Follow-up studies would do well to increase the size of the study group in order to determine if the patterns observed in this study will carry over to a larger population. A corollary concern is the factor of high motivation that was a common characteristic among the participants. Based on the fact that they all volunteered for the study and took great pains to participate, (remarkably, not a single participant missed or was even late

for a recording session!), these learners may not be representative of the general L2 student population as a whole. A broader range of L2 learners that includes those on the opposite end of the L2 learning motivational spectrum would be necessary in order to determine if the results found in this study would have a global application. However, as has been mentioned multiple times in the discussion of the results, data suggests that these informal L1/L2 peer interactions lower the affective barriers of most learners, make the L2 more authentic and thus make learners more receptive to L2 learning and practice.

Finally, the conversational pattern demonstrated by A and V in this study does show a potential problem for the implementation of similar language exchanges and language partnership practice both in and out of the L2 classroom. The likelihood that an interaction would be carried out in just one language could be seen as, if not detrimental, then certainly less helpful, in the development of one participant's L2. However, as was mentioned in the discussion of the results, it is possible (if not likely) that this Spanish-only pattern was not maintained in the subsequent interactions between the pair. Furthermore, each participant claimed to have gained something from the Spanish-only interaction, indicating that even if a reciprocal language exchange does not occur in one particular conversation there is still benefit in the interaction.

6.3 Implications for Further Research

This study shows that in the appropriate contexts, both learner motivation and comfort push practice and socialization in the L2, in turn providing multiple and rich opportunities for acquisition, reciprocal teaching and learning (NS quality input and

corrective feedback as well as NNS modified output). The study also shows that the will to engage with a NS is likely crucial to both L2 learning and socialization. Ultimately, it may be more important that learners believe there is value in their efforts than it is that researchers can quantify the progress or acquisition of the L2. The motivation to continue, the will to keep going, is essential in a task as gargantuan as learning another language. In this view of L2 learning and use, whether or not the participants demonstrate quantifiable post-session gains in their L2s is not as important as how they feel about the interaction, and if the experience has boosted their confidence with and interest in their TL, then it has immeasurable value. Sharing steps on the path of learning likely provides not only relief but also hope, and the sense of isolation or despair that is felt by learners who are struggling with a nascent L2, is likely to be alleviated when they are permitted to interact in more natural contexts, with less formal rules and artificial restrictions, and in the company of empathetic peers who are at once teacher for and student of the learner.

All of the participants all volunteered for this study hoping to improve their L2, either through building their linguistic “muscles” or through socializing with a NS. Motivation and a common goal brought these pairs together, and their efforts both to seek out this opportunity and to take advantage of it once it arrived shows that there is an enormous difference between loosely-structured, informal L2 talk and L2 talk that has no goal. The results of this study contradict the claim by Long (1996) that “free conversation” has little L2 learning value and they support the conclusions of Kasper (2004) and Mori (2004) by showing that informal L2 language interaction in this context

has a variety of benefits. The creation of similar programs as a supplement to traditional L2 classes would likely help motivate learners to practice the language and to make connections in the NS community, pushing the L2 output of the learners while at the same time allowing them to interact in a context that makes them feel more comfortable and more competent. Relinquishing control to the learners will not be easy for some L2 researchers and instructors, but the results of this study show that not only are the learners calling for this change but that they are ready and able to take on more responsibility for the progress of their own L2 learning and socialization.

Furthermore, the results of this study support the conclusions of Piasecka (1988), Cook (1989, 2001), and Auerbach (1993) that the issue of banning the L1 in the L2 learning environment seems to be based more on ideological prejudice rather than sound scientific fact regarding L2 learning. The results also support Young's (2009) conclusion that there is no set path for L2 learning, and Lacorte's (2007) claim that the progress of L2 learning is based on multiple variables that interact in a variety of contexts. Finally, the claim by SCT that novice/expert pairs will first organize and prepare their talk before they begin their talk, the concept of context regulation, is supported throughout the data analyzed for this study. The interaction construct used in this study is certainly not intended to replace traditional L2 teaching, but the results of the study require that it be considered as a supplement. In addition to the benefit to the individuals who participate in similar interaction events, bringing together NS/NNS pairs of any language combination will ultimately serve to bridge gaps between communities. This scenario in itself, creating contexts in which "languages can be useful" in real life

(as A says in his exit interview), is a strong sociopolitical reason to consider the adoption of similar language exchange practice and programs in general.

How can theory account for the ability of some learners to push past problems in conversation in order to arrive at mutual understanding through co-construction of meaning and intersubjectivity? How can pedagogy address the development of confidence and persistence through linguistics or language education? It is quite possible that those on the other side of the wall, the researchers and the teachers, are ultimately incapable of altering these variables, at least in positive way. The success that is often seen in learners who are managing to interact and to communicate with others is likely dependent on the psychological well-being that they have managed to develop in their L2 self, and although this development can occur with the help of the traditional authority/expert, too often it has to be developed in spite of them. Aiding learners to develop and to proceed in their L2 by focusing on their success, and by growing their interest in the L2 and their confidence in L2 participation, should be the path for L2 research and pedagogy.

Finally, the results of this study also demonstrate the importance of valuing the insights and efforts of L2 learners regarding their learning experiences. Despite the fact that some (or most) learners might not be capable of defining or describing what they need or would like to change about the L2 learning process, they can show it through enthusiasm and confidence, through contentment and the desire to continue on with the L2 learning process. To assume that learners are a priori flawed, imperfect and hobbled users of the L2, and that they will remain so until the day when they somehow transform

into L2 experts, does not benefit the learners. Just as Firth and Wagner (1997) questioned the definitions of some of the principal assumptions employed by L2 research and pedagogy, the definitions of the terms “learner”, “teacher” and even “expert” also should be reconsidered in order to account for the accomplishments realized by the learners in this study. Challenging these fundamental concepts also challenges the very idea of learning and teaching, placing them in terms of social integration and participation, and relying upon the belief that the ultimate goal of L2 learning is for the individual to become part of something bigger. After all, when discussing L2 learning we are really discussing the development of bilingualism, and as Edwards (2004) states in his paper “Foundations of Bilingualism”:

The importance of being bilingual is, above all, social and psychological rather than linguistic. Beyond types, categories, methods, and processes is the essential animating tension of identity. Beyond utilitarian and unemotional instrumentality, the heart of bilingualism is belonging. (Edwards 2004: 30)

Appendix A

Student Participant Interaction Language-Learning Histories Sheet

Please read and answer with your partner the following list of questions about yourself and your language learning history. The list of questions should help you to get your conversation started.

- 1) Please discuss with your partner your age, nationality and the languages that you speak.
- 2) Please discuss the amount of time that you have been studying your foreign language.
- 3) Please discuss your experiences studying or living abroad, or your desire to live or study abroad.
- 4) If you have studied abroad, please discuss how language teachers in your home country approach teaching differently than in the country where you have studied abroad.
- 5) Please discuss your motivation/reasons for studying your foreign language. That is, how much do you want to learn the language that you are studying? Explain.
- 6) Please discuss your ability in your foreign language. Do you think your language teachers would say that you speak your language well? If not, please describe the areas of your foreign language knowledge that you or your teacher feels need improvement.
- 7) Do you feel embarrassed or nervous when you speak your foreign language? If so, when you are corrected by a teacher does it motivate you to correct your error, or does it make you not want to speak your foreign language in front of others?
- 8) Do you believe that your personality is different when you speak your foreign language?
- 9) Do you enjoy helping others learn and practice your foreign language or native language?
- 10) Do you have many friends who speak your foreign language as their native language? If so, how often do you meet with them and how much of your conversations are in your native language?
- 11) Please describe your best or worst language learning memory. This can be either an event that you experienced personally, or something that you observed happening to another person. How do you think this event has guided or influenced your interest in learning and using your foreign language?

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