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The Dissertation Committee for Alfonso Abad Mancheño Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

A study of the effect of study abroad and the homestay on the development of linguistic and interactional practices by Spanish L2 learners

Committee:

Dale A. Koike, Supervisor

Keith Walters

Orlando Kelm

Thomas Garza

Frederick Hensey

**A study of the effect of study abroad and the homestay on the
development of linguistic and interactional practices by Spanish L2
learners**

by

Alfonso Abad Mancheño, B.A.; M.A.

Dissertation

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Dedication

A Chelo, Marina, y José Luis

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Supervisor: Dale A. Koike

Studies showing the importance of interaction in second language (L2) acquisition have led researchers to believe that the learning process is enhanced by interactional practices. Interaction provides comprehensible input that is modified to serve the learner's communicative needs. This input is especially apparent when learners are paired with speakers more proficient than themselves. Not only can interactions provide the learner with input, but they also create opportunities for learners to repair communicative breakdowns and gain feedback about these repairs. Learners can develop an ability to interact in the L2, also referred to as "interactional competence" (IC).

The present study describes interactional practices between learners and native Spanish speakers (NSs), and the effect they have on the process of language acquisition and development of IC during a one-semester study abroad experience. The development of 16 learners' IC and proficiency is documented through both quantitative and

qualitative methods of analysis in order to elicit triangulated conclusions. This study includes information about the learners and their interactions with NSs, and looks at contextual factors that may impact acquisition, such as amount of contact with NSs (type of housing, and time spent with native speakers per day). Their results were also compared with Spanish learners in the U.S.

Results support the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1983) and show that learners with a lower level of proficiency rely more on the interactional resources of the NS as they develop a second language. As they advance in their mastery of the language, they tend to rely more on their own resources. The four factors used for this study—correction, negotiation, conversation management, and production—are good indicators of the improvements in conversational abilities of the learners who went abroad. Results also show that the family setting is more beneficial than the apartment setting because it creates more opportunities to negotiate for meaning.

This research helps characterize and develop the importance of viewing language as a socially constituted, interactive phenomenon. The study calls for new research taking into consideration the housing factor, as well as the confidence of the learner as a facilitator in the development of IC, and likewise of linguistic proficiency.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The present study examines the interactive practices that Spanish learners develop during their study abroad (SA). This investigation is motivated by the growing research interest regarding the impact of SA on second language acquisition (SLA). There is a large number of studies conducted on oral proficiency gains in this context (Freed, 1990, 2004; DeKeyser, 1991; Guntermann, 1992; Lafford, 1995, 2004; Segalowitz, Collentine, Lafford, Lazar, and Díaz-Campos, 2004; Collentine, 2004). Despite the number of studies on SA, there is a need for more specific studies dealing with the development of conversational ability while also considering the effect such factors as type of housing and the quality of interaction outside the classroom. The previously cited studies have found that there is an improvement of at least half a level of proficiency based on the ACTFL¹ Oral Proficiency Interview² (OPI) during a semester abroad. Many of the comparative studies have found that learners who spend time abroad experience improvement in their proficiency level as compared to those who stay in the classroom at home (AH). These SA studies also focus on specific aspects, such as grammatical accuracy and communicative strategies. Lafford (1995, 2004) showed that groups studying abroad demonstrate more resourcefulness with communicative strategies than their peers at home. This finding emphasizes the importance of interaction as a key factor

¹ A full description of the ACTFL (American Council for Teachers of Foreign Languages) Guidelines can be found at <http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=4236> and in Appendix 3.

² The OPI has been administered as the standard measure of proficiency in most research studies dealing with the SA impact on oral proficiency.

in the acquisition of not only linguistic elements but also of communicative competence. Consequently, there is a lack of research that expands Lafford's findings beyond communicative strategies. This dissertation goes beyond Lafford's (1995, 2004) focus to a more holistic view of the factors that can lead to a better understanding of the second language (L2) acquisition through interaction. Like past investigations, this study uses the OPI as the basic measure of proficiency of learners in SA and AH programs.

Several researchers have already examined the importance of housing during SA. Wilkinson (2000) highlighted issues such as the importance of the type of housing during, the type of cultural understanding achieved, the role of out-of-class interaction with native speakers, and the actual linguistic improvement achieved while abroad. Isabelli (2000) also found that learners who had a broader or more complex social network with native speakers achieved a higher level of proficiency and improvement in accuracy. Research in the SLA field calls for more research to examine not only variables such as housing but also the time learners spend with native speakers, as well as what type of activities they engage in outside of the classroom. These variables help determine the amount and quality of interaction that the learners experience with native speakers. In addition, there are some assumptions about SA that need to be addressed. Wilkinson (1998) (cited in Mendelson, 2004b, p.3) made a list of the popular beliefs and assumptions regarding SA:

- Study abroad ensures miraculous linguistic gains.
- Increased non-classroom interaction in the target language is inevitable during SA.
- A host family is preferable to other possible living arrangements.
- Deep cultural understanding will result from residence in a foreign country.

- Participants whose experiences contradict the above expectations are themselves deficient.

The issues related to the impact of SA on language acquisition, and particularly the impact of family housing, are addressed in this dissertation. Prior to this dissertation, a pilot study was conducted by the investigator with three undergraduate Spanish students who participated in a SA program. Surprisingly to the students, they discovered it was difficult to interact with native speakers while abroad. Two of the students reported that they spent very little time with native speakers out of the classroom or with their host families at lunch or dinner. The remaining student did not follow this pattern because he spent time with a Spanish girlfriend. The issue of out-of-class interaction is very important, and needs to be addressed in order to account for the linguistic gains of learners in the sojourn abroad.

Isabelli (2000) discovered that a wider social network of native speakers is associated with the higher L2 proficiency of the learners. Isabelli correlated these findings with the degree of motivation of the learners and discovered that the more motivation learners had, the wider the social network. While this finding is helpful, it needs to be studied in more detail. Participants in Mendelson's (2004b) research reported that they regretted not having spent more time with Spaniards. In fact, for most of them, the only opportunity to interact with native speakers was in the classroom or with their host family during meal times. This quality of interaction is another variable that needs more study because it can provide a new perspective not only as a factor for linguistic gains but also as an explanation for some of the frustrations of the learners. The issue of housing implies that if learners have opportunities to interact only with their host families, this context should then be the preferred type of housing in order to achieve greater linguistic improvement (Wilkinson 2000).

Another issue is the amount of previous formal instruction the learner has in the L2, as well as the level of proficiency at which the student arrives in the host country. In this study, the extent to which certain levels of proficiency favor a higher improvement is examined. The language proficiency combined with the factors that lead learners to have more contact with native speakers can be determinants to achieve the goals of the SA programs. In addition, because there seems to be a tendency to idealize SA programs as catalysts for learners to become native-like speakers of a second language, it is also important to look at the perceptions of learners concerning their SA experience after they have finished the program.

Thus, this dissertation is intended to investigate in more depth than in prior studies the questions of how learners improve their proficiency while abroad, how they actually interact with native speakers over time, and how the learning context affects their language acquisition.

In sum, this dissertation is aimed at the following goals:

- to provide more information comparing the SA and AH contexts and their effect on SLA;
- to expand previous studies dealing with L2 communicative strategies;
- to investigate the improvement of learners' interactional competence abroad; and
- to examine the variables of housing and the quality of interaction with native speakers.

A primary factor leading to the study of this topic is the growing number of students who go abroad to study. According to the Institute of International Education,³ SA in European countries increased by 9% in 2004, with the UK as the leading destination, followed by Italy and Spain. Longcope (2003) and Mendelson (2004a) show

³ Information available at <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org> and in Mendelson (2004a).

increasing numbers of students going to Spain. Spain increased in numbers by 10% from the academic year 2001-2002 (17,176) to 2002-2003 (18,865) and by 3.4% in the year 2006. This number represents 10.1% of the total number of students who go abroad. In 2006, students who went abroad to study a foreign language also increased by 7.7%.

The present study collected both quantitative and qualitative data during the fall of 2003 in Spain and in the spring of 2004 at The University of Texas at Austin. Two major components are examined in this study: (1) the interactional and communicative strategies that learners use when they are abroad in a Spanish-speaking country learning Spanish; and (2) the impact of the family setting on the learners' acquisition of Spanish. The data were collected from a group of Spanish learners studying for a five-month semester in Spain and compared to data from a control group of learners who were taking Spanish classes in their home universities in the U.S.

1.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND ITS FOCUS: INTERACTION

The main goal of this study is to observe how language acquisition may be achieved during SA, as revealed in interactional practices that may develop in the SA setting. This study is based on the Interaction Hypothesis (IH) (Long, 1983), which states three premises: (1) comprehensible input is necessary for acquisition; (2) conversational interactions with negotiation make the input comprehensible; and (3) comprehensible output aids learners in moving from semantic to syntactic processing. According to Pica (1998), interaction is the process by which a verbal communication task involving a two-way exchange of information leads to the opportunity for less competent speakers to provide feedback on their lack of comprehension. As a result, there is a negotiated modification of the conversation (negotiation for meaning), which makes the input comprehensible and promotes acquisition. As Long (1983) explains:

the main goal of research on NS-NNS [Native speaker/Non-Native Speaker] conversations, as input to non-native speakers is to determine how input is made comprehensible to the acquirer, and thereby (presumably), usable for SLA...Native speakers appear to modify their interaction to two main ends: (1) to avoid conversational trouble; and (2) to repair the discourse when trouble occurs. Modifications designed to achieve the first purpose reflect prior, long-range planning by the native speaker. They tend to govern the way s/he conducts entire conversations, and primarily concern what is talked about (conversational topic), but affect how topics are treated too (p.133).

The linguistic conversational adjustments that the participants make during interaction help comprehension, and comprehension is part of acquisition. Therefore, those adjustments promote acquisition according to the IH. The difference between the IH and other theories of SLA is that IH takes into account the interlocutor and conversational strategies that were not explicitly or systematically considered in other SLA theories, such as the theory of communicative competence by Savignon (1983) and Hymes (1972).

The IH states that discourse modifications in interaction facilitate acquisition. The IH was formulated as follows:

While NSs can react to comprehensibility alone, ... they generally react to a combination of factors...if it could be shown that linguistic conversational adjustments promote comprehension of input, and also that comprehensible input promotes acquisition, then it could safely be deduced that the adjustments promote acquisition. If A signifies adjustments, B comprehension, and C acquisition, then the argument would simply be:

A → B

B → C

A → C

where '→' indicates a causal relationship (Long, 1983, p. 187).

On the part of the learner, Long (1983) addresses how the conversational abilities affect how the discourse is co-constructed by both participants. Long distinguished between modified input in *foreigner talk* —the type of modifications made by NSs to

serve the learner's communicative needs— and *modified interaction* —which occurred when the NSs modified the structure of the conversation. In adding this aspect to interaction (modified interaction), the focus of the IH also includes topic shifts, conversational management, and comprehension checks. Long (1983) also categorized input in *negative* and *positive evidence*.

Positive evidence in input from a NS can be authentic and modified. For example, a NS may make topics simpler or more familiar to the learner, or teachers can select specific vocabulary or grammar in their discourse. Negative evidence may be pre-emptive; or given before an error may be made by the learner. Negative evidence usually happens in teacher talk, although it may also occur in a conversation with a NS. Negative evidence can also be reactive; that is, it can be a correction by the interlocutor while explicitly pointing out a mistake during a communication breakdown, or implicitly correcting the learner.

The analysis of interaction or modified interaction considers the discursive organization of the conversation, examining such occurrences as self-repetition, confirmation checks, and the organization of turns and topics. For instance, Long found that new topics were encoded in the form of questions in a NS-NNS interaction. The strategies used by the NS to modify the interactive structure of conversation in order to avoid communication breakdowns include relinquishing topic control, selecting salient topics, treating topics briefly, making new topics salient, and checking the NNS's comprehension. The tactics used by the NS in order to repair discourse include accepting unintentional topic switches, requesting clarification, confirming one's own comprehension, and tolerating ambiguity. The combination of strategies and tactics used by the NS include speaking slowly, stressing key words, pausing before key words, decoding topic-comment constructions, repeating one's own utterances, and repeating

other's utterances. Long claimed that these strategies and tactics were responsible for making input comprehensible to the second language learner.

In researching the issue of interaction and conversational modifications, Gass and Varonis (1986) noticed that the latter helps learners notice the gap between their interlanguage and the target language; thus, they become aware of this mismatch. According to Ellis (1985) and Krashen (2003), comprehensible input is necessary but not sufficient in acquisition. In other words, interaction brings attention to the form-meaning relationship. Interaction is beneficial because it provides learners with comprehensible input and output, which will ultimately serve the learner's communicative needs, and it provides opportunities for the learner to negotiate meaning, take more control of the conversation, and develop communicative strategies.

Therefore, the basic premise of this study is that interaction is beneficial for language acquisition because it provides learners with both comprehensible input and comprehensible output. More importantly, it provides the learner with the opportunity to negotiate meaning, which ultimately triggers the process of acquisition because it connects form and meaning. As Lee and Van Patten (2003) have noted, interaction between speakers of different levels of proficiency is more effective than other methods for learning a language because of the increased opportunities for self-expression of the less proficient learner. Porter (1986) also noticed that NNS interactions are more effective with a NS because true sociolinguistic competence can be achieved only by interacting with a NS.

The key factor that makes learning during SA different from learning a second language AH is the quantity and quality of interaction with NSs. As stated earlier, studies in general have shown an improvement of the participants' level of proficiency by at least half a level according to the ACTFL Guidelines when learners go abroad.

Another goal of the present study is to corroborate these findings and to show why the SA setting, in particular the family homestay, is more effective than the classroom setting for the development of both linguistic growth and interactional strategies. The implications would be that a learner who is studying abroad is expected to develop more interactional resources and overall communicative proficiency. The development of these resources entails the measurement of interactional features such as topic nomination, negotiation for meaning, language production, and the need for corrective feedback.

One of the main difficulties of this research study is that it focuses on a concept that is difficult to operationalize: Interactional competence (IC). IC refers to the ability of the speaker to co-construct discourse with an interlocutor. According to Dings (2007, p.8) “IC comprises the interactional resources that speakers have in their repertoire and can use competently in interaction”. According to Dings (2007, p. 8) and Jacoby and Ochs (1995), these resources include topic management, the knowledge of rhetorical scripts and the knowledge of the pragmatic rules of the target language. “IC takes the point of view that all interaction is jointly constructed by participants who draw on interactional resources in order to achieve communication” (Dings, 2007, p. 8). This perspective involves language as a social construction in a social context and all the *indexicality* it implies. From a linguistic point of view, indexicality, as defined by Hymes (1972), refers to the social context indexed by language either referentially (through referential content of a word; e.g., *Mr./Mrs.*) or non-referentially (e.g., through pitch, syntactic devices). Therefore, IC reflects learners’ understanding of how indexicality is constructed in the target speech community.

The complexity of the concept makes it difficult to define more specifically because there are no individual aspects of IC that can operationalize the whole concept.

For this reason, interactional practices in the present study are examined in terms of negotiation for meaning, topic nomination, and language production by the learners as indicators of the learners' interactional tendencies. These facets of IC are only partial components of the concept, but they are representative of the practices that take place in interaction. They are indicators of how a NS and a NNS construct a discourse, negotiate for meaning, and manage the sequential organization of discourse.

It is important to note that this study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods. Despite the relatively low number of participants (16 in the SA setting and 18 in the AH setting), there are several reasons for using both. Through quantitative results, a factual and measurable indication can be obtained regarding the linguistic advantages that a learner abroad has over a learner at home studying a language at a university. The quantitative aspect of the dissertation does not attempt to prove or statistically validate the IH, but it is used as an indicator of the tendencies and practices that are developed during a SA program. Furthermore, the qualitative analysis of the data gives insight as to what actually occurs during conversations and the possible reasons why these phenomena take place. The data were collected from interactions between NSs and learners. The qualitative analysis of the data describes some types of interactions that occur between NSs and NNSs. The IH claims that acquisition is enhanced by interaction. This proposal can be shown by the improvement in proficiency but, as explained earlier, IC is a broad term encompassing many components. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods can lend insight both to new aspects of interaction and how interlanguage develops in an interactional context.

A group of 16 learners who traveled to Alicante, Spain and a control group studying Spanish at The University of Texas at Austin were monitored for a semester. These two groups were studied to compare results and observe differences and

similarities with other research studies that have compared both groups at home and abroad. In addition, conversations between the researcher and the learners were videotaped to document the personal opinions and perceptions of the subjects on their SA learning experiences.

In sum, this dissertation:

- explores the IH (Long 1983) in the SA and AH contexts;
- offers an account for improvements in proficiency;
- details the development of interactional practices over time; and
- examines the impact of the living arrangement for the SA learners.

1.2 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE DISSERTATION

In Chapter 2, a detailed explanation of the concepts pertinent to this study is provided, as well as a review of the literature regarding both interaction and SA. Chapter 2 focuses on the importance of interaction and its components in SLA, such as *negotiation, collaboration, turn taking, and corrective feedback*. In addition, the literature written on linguistic gains in the SA context is reviewed. Chapter 3 offers an explanation of the research methodology and describes the subjects and interview protocols utilized in the study. In Chapter 4, the qualitative and quantitative results are presented according to the learners' level of proficiency. Chapter 5 examines the impact of the learning context (SA versus. AH) and the importance of housing type on the development of the interactional practices addressed. Chapter 6 offers a recapitulation of the interviews that the researcher conducted with some of the SA participants, in which they expressed their opinion of their experience in their SA programs, as well as a brief description of their language improvement, interactional practices, and their particular learning context (e.g., housing). Chapter 7 integrates findings, explains limitations, and give recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the literature

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the theoretical framework of the dissertation and the literature that has been written about the issue of interaction and SA. First, a review of the research on interaction and negotiation as well as the different concepts that are key to this study are presented. The second part of this chapter discusses the literature written on SA, focusing on studies that have examined proficiency gains, and the relationship between the type of housing and level of proficiency, as well as those that have compared groups abroad and at home. This review will lead into the next chapter, where the methodology of this study is explained. Both parts will help the reader to understand better the processes and concepts researched in this dissertation.

2.1 RESEARCH ON INTERACTION

For interactionists, SLA is a process that emerges from the symbiotic relationship between cognitive mental processes and the environment. The importance of interaction is that it makes salient the meaning-form relationship and requires the learner's active cognitive processing, which are involved in acquisition. Since the seminal work of Hatch (1978), the social aspect of language interaction has been the main focus for many researchers (Long, 1981; Wells, 1981, 1983; Ellis, 1985; Gass and Varonis, 1994; Pica, 1998). Hatch (1978) showed that interaction was a key element in acquisition because learners had the opportunity to produce output in ways that could not be achieved in a classroom. She suggested that L2 grammar was developed as a consequence of conversing in the L2. Thus, in the 1980s, a number of studies argued for this relationship

between interaction and acquisition. Wells (1981) defined interaction as a collaborative activity involving the establishment of a triangular relationship between the sender, the receiver, and the context of situation. Successful interaction presupposes not only a shared knowledge of the world, but also a shared context of communication and the co-construction of a shared internal perspective. This context is co-constructed collaboratively by the participants of conversation. It is important to consider the co-construction of discourse and the effect that it has on acquisition. Because NS-NNS interaction in the SLA context is co-created by participants in talk, the IC of learners does not depend only on learners, but also on the NSs. For this reason, this dissertation also looks at some of the interactional practices of the NSs when interacting with learners such as feedback and correction by both participants. Young and Miller (2004) have defined IC in terms of

- the ways in which participants construct the boundaries of discourse practice;
 - selection of acts in a practice and their sequential organization;
 - the turn-taking system that speakers use to manage transitions from one speaker to the next;
 - how participants construct roles for themselves and others and, in so doing, construct a participation framework for the practice;
 - the register of the interaction, to be understood as the lexis and syntactic structures that characterize it; and
 - the ways in which participants construct meaning in a specific discourse practice.
- (p. 520)

Long (1981) was among the first to consider the effect that the NSs' speech had on the acquisition of language and how interaction and collaboration induced NSs to produce comprehensible input for learners. As stated in Chapter 1, Long proposed that

interaction is the context for the necessary discourse modifications that facilitate acquisition. The IH was confirmed in later studies (Long, 1985; Gass and Varonis, 1985; Pica, Young and Doughty, 1987). In a concept that was almost a precursor to the IH, Krashen (1985) proposed that comprehensible input was the key factor for acquisition. Krashen's theory about input was formulated as follows:

The Input Hypothesis claims that humans acquire language in only one way—by understanding messages, or by receiving 'comprehensible input.' We progress along the natural order by understanding input that contains structures at our next 'stage'—structures that are a bit beyond our current level of competence (we move from i , our current level, to $i + 1$). (p. 2)

Swain (1985) and Long (1985) expanded on Krashen's Input Hypothesis by saying that comprehensible input is necessary but not sufficient. Learners also need production to make the connection between meaning and form and also need to become aware of how their interlanguage differs from the L2. The difference between Krashen's and Long's hypotheses is that Long's model offers an explanation as to *how* input is made comprehensible to the learner through interaction. Both Long's and Krashen's theories are related in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning. Vygotsky's theory states that learning occurs in the zone of proximal development (ZPD). He maintained that learning occurs through the guidance of a more expert person and through socialization. Thus, for Vygotsky, guidance and peer collaboration are the core of development and learning. The ZPD is similar to the $i + 1$ theory of input by Krashen and Long's appeal for interaction in learning, all of which highlight the importance of feedback and negotiation in SLA. Therefore, the study of the effect of interaction and negotiation on SLA is informed by Vygotsky's premises.

2.1.1 Negotiation and modified input

From a discursive perspective, negotiation for meaning, which occurs in interaction, helps second language learning, just as interaction serves learning by children in first language acquisition. These collaborative interactions involve both interactants. For a child learning a language, collaborative dialogue is both a means and a condition for the development of a language (Wells, 1981).

Negotiation for meaning has been addressed in many studies (Pica, Young, and Doughty, 1987; Gass and Varonis, 1989, 1994; Pica, 1992a, 1992b, 1994, 1998; Sato, 1986, 1990; Long, 1996; Polio and Gass, 1998; Loschky, 1994; and Ellis, Tanaka, and Tamazaki, 1994). One important aspect of negotiation for meaning has been the study of the effect of modified input on acquisition, which concentrates on interaction in the classroom since researchers want to control for the effect of modified and unmodified input on SLA. Pica, Young, and Doughty (1987) define modified input as

input that has been modified or simplified in some way before the learner sees or hears it, for example, through the repetition and paraphrasing of words, phrases, or sentences; restriction of vocabulary to common or familiar items; addition of boundary markers and sentence connectors; and reduction in sentence length and complexity through removal of subordinate clauses. (p.738)

Pica, Young, and Doughty (1987) noticed that premodified input in a classroom and unmodified input with negotiation and interaction had a different effect on comprehension. They found that input was better understood by learners when they had an opportunity to interact with the expert interlocutor, despite the fact that the input was more complex but not premodified than the control variable of premodified input with less complex grammar. Thus, they claimed the positive role of modified interaction as a facilitator of language learning.

The use of modified input in interaction was also implemented in Gass and Varonis's study (1989), which showed that modified input yields better NNS

comprehension than unmodified input. Ellis, Tanaka, and Tamazaki (1994) also found that negotiation increases comprehension as a means of comprehensible input. They likewise found that modified interaction yields better results than premodified input, and reported that modified interaction resulted in more lexical items acquired by learners. These research studies have shown the positive effects of negotiation and support the benefits of negotiated interaction for L2 acquisition. However, as Sato (1986) and Ellis, Tanaka, and Tamazaki (1994) pointed out, conversation is selectively facilitative of L2 development depending on the structures involved. Ellis, Tanaka, and Tamazaki (1994, p. 482) supported the causative relationship between modifications and acquisition but they acknowledged “the complexity of the acquisition process and the fact that different aspects of language (phonology, vocabulary, morphology, and syntax) may not be acquired in the same way”. The study found that modified input, which occurs through interaction and negotiation, yielded positive results for the acquisition of lexical items and comprehension. Gass and Varonis (1994) showed that input modifications by the NSs yielded better results in comprehension. Mackey (1999) studied the development of a particular grammatical aspect—question-forming in English—and found a link between active interaction and negotiation and grammatical development. Her results indicate that negotiation facilitates modified input and leads to acquisition. However, not all studies have yielded similar results. Loschky (1994), for instance, did not find that correlation.

Another important aspect of negotiation is the correction learners receive from teachers or NSs. For this reason, many studies have examined the role of correction during negotiation. Chun, Day, Chenoweth, and Lupescu (1982) found that NSs correct learners’ errors only 9% of the time, implying that the NSs would ignore most errors, but they also noticed that negotiation took place when there was a communication breakdown, and that learners had a preference for correcting their own factual and lexical

errors. By factual errors they meant errors that dealt with factual knowledge of truth. Their findings imply that correction is used for the most part only when needed for the sake of meaning, and not for form.

Gass and Varonis (1989) also found that interaction and corrective feedback have a positive effect on acquisition. However, they were cautious to note that different parts of the learner's grammar might be susceptible to internalization and intake. They further observed that Advanced learners took more advantage of recasts in interaction. Gass (2003) sustains that corrective feedback (negative evidence) can be beneficial but there is a need to look at the type of corrective feedback (lexical, morphosyntactic, or phonological). According to Gass, corrective feedback is perceived differently in various areas of language. It seems that lexical feedback is more easily recognized by learners.

Gass (2004), continuing her research of the role of interaction and negotiation for meaning, states that

...negotiation for meaning, and specifically negotiation work triggers interactional adjustments by the NS or more competent interlocutor, facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways...It is proposed that environmental contributions to acquisition are mediated by selective attention and the learner's developing L2 processing capacity, and that these resources are brought together most usefully, although not exclusively, during negotiation for meaning. Negative feedback obtained during negotiation work or elsewhere may be facilitative of L2 development at least for vocabulary, morphology, and language-specific syntax, and essential for learning certain specifiable L1-L2 contrasts. (p. 414)

The literature dealing with corrective feedback or negative evidence is not conclusive. For instance, Lyster and Ranta (1997) did not find corrective recasts to be particularly effective and reported that it is difficult to establish the effectiveness of corrections. If one considers uptake, or internalization, and delayed correct use of a form as a measurement of effectiveness of a correction, then it is not clear that correction is

effective because there is not always a reaction from the learner following a correction. Nonetheless studies have shown the effectiveness of modified input in interaction as a good predictor of language gain. Another important type of input modification is scaffolding.

Directly related to the concept of interaction modification is Donato's (1994) idea of collective scaffolding. Donato (1994) based his ideas for scaffolding on Vygotsky's ZPD, previously defined as the zone in which learning occurs through the guidance of a more expert person and through socialization. According to Donato, and following Vygotsky, social interaction with a more advanced learner or a NS is an opportunity for the learners to achieve the conditions necessary for them to participate in conversation and to expand their knowledge. The more advanced learner or the NS will adjust to the communicative needs of the learner (scaffolding). Donato provided evidence of the positive correlation between negotiation and SLA and, more particularly, between negotiation and linguistic accuracy. Although this correlation is generally accepted, there are also variables that might affect the outcomes of negotiation. In a more recent work, Ko, Schallert, and Walters (2003, p. 304) examined the quality of feedback in storytelling tasks. They suggested that learners play a key role in the interactional practice of scaffolding, which they defined as "the inter-psychological support coming from the more knowledgeable other that leads learners to internalize what is being learned". Ko *et al.* (2003) see scaffolding as an adjustment on the part of the more expert speaker because the less knowledgeable subject must be in a position to benefit from negotiation. Scaffolding implies six functions:

- recruiting the learner's interest;
- simplifying the task;
- highlighting relevant features;

- maintaining motivation;
- controlling the learner's frustration; and
- modeling.

These functions imply that it is the responsibility of the more skilled speakers to adjust to the learner's needs. Ko *et al.* (2003) found that the quality of interactions, or the level of the interactions, must be suitable to the learner in order to trigger acquisition. They place great importance on the role of the learners, who must be in a position to take advantage of negotiation and interaction.

2.1.2 Recasts

An important aspect of negotiation is the effect of recasts on acquisition. A recast is a reformulation of an utterance in order to make it comprehensible to the learner. Long (1983) noticed four characteristics of negotiation and the recasts that NSs give to learners as a result of negotiation: (a) they are a reformulation of the ill-formed utterance; (b) they expand the utterance in some way; (c) the central meaning of the utterance is retained; and (d) the recast follows the ill-formed utterance. Oliver (1995) pointed out that recasts may be given in response to one or more errors and may be a full or partial recast of the learner's utterance.

Mackey and Philp (1998) examined the effects of negotiation on the production and development of questions in English. They were interested in the effect of recasts on acquisition. They compared one group of Spanish learners who received interactionally modified input, and another that received the same input with intensive recasts. They found that recasts were beneficial for short-term interlanguage development of Advanced learners, but they did not find evidence for the long term effects of recasts.

Long, Inagaki, and Ortega (1998) also focused on recasts in interaction to examine their effects on L2 development. They found evidence that recasts were more

effective than models in the development of a previously unknown L2 structure. They also concluded that implicit negative feedback plays an important role in the process of acquisition. Many recent works have focused on the role of recasts in negotiation (Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam, 2006; McDonough, 2006; Carpenter, Jeon, MacGregor, and Mackey, 2006; Polio, Gass, and Chapin, 2006; Lyster and Mori, 2006; Pica, Kang, and Sauro, 2006). Ellis *et al.* (2006) examined a group of ESL learners and found that explicit negative feedback yields better results in terms of oral imitation and grammaticality judgments, implying that implicit feedback during negotiation should be combined with explicit and even metalinguistic feedback.

McDonough (2006) studied the effect that interaction had on syntactic priming. She defined priming as the speaker's tendency to repeat a previously heard utterance. However, she did not find a connection between interaction and priming as a means to achieve syntactic development. Carpenter, Jeon, MacGregor, and Mackey (2006) focused on the ambiguity of recasts. Their study showed that explicit recasts were more effective in interaction in order to make the learners aware of problematic utterances. They also showed that morphosyntactic recasts were noticed less by learners than lexical or phonological recasts. Polio, Gass, and Chapin (2006) examined the relationship between the quantity of recasts given to the learner and the NS's previous experience interacting with NNSs. The results showed that less experienced NSs gave fewer opportunities for the learners to produce output, while more experienced NSs used more strategies to make the learners produce output. These NSs were more aware of the NNSs' learning and comprehension processing.

Lyster and Mori (2006) also researched the effect of recasts in interaction. They examined the effects of explicit corrections, recasts, and prompts on acquisition and repair. They introduced the Counterbalance Hypothesis, stating that instructional

activities and interactional feedback act as a counterbalance in a communicatively-oriented classroom. The Counterbalance Hypothesis is described as follows:

Instructional activities and interactional feedback that act as a counterbalance to the predominant communicative orientation of a given classroom setting will be more facilitative of interlanguage restructuring than instructional activities and interactional feedback that are more congruent with the predominant communicative orientation. (p. 294)

They claim that these instructional activities will be more effective for restructuring than activities that match the communicative teaching environment. The activities that they refer to are the interventions that differ from the instructional activities that are normally carried out in a classroom. In other words, they advocate more focus-on-form instruction in communicative classrooms.

2.1.3 Noticing

Another important facet of interaction and negotiation is noticing, or bringing attention to form. Schmidt (1990) differentiates between noticing and understanding. Noticing is achieved by attention. Schmidt defines noticing as:

...registering the simple occurrence of some event, whereas understanding implies recognition of a general principle, rule, or pattern. For example, a second language learner might simply notice that a NS used a particular form of address on a particular occasion, or at a deeper level the learner might understand the significance of such a form, realizing that the form used was appropriate because of status differences between speaker and hearer. Noticing is crucially related to the question of what linguistic material is stored in memory...understanding relates to questions concerning how that material is organized into a linguistic system. (p.118)

Gass (1990, p. 135) also points out that “nothing in the target language is available for intake into a language learner’s existing system unless it is consciously noticed”. All these studies lead to the idea that noticing or attention may be attained from negotiated interaction. This process of noticing facilitates the internalization of structures.

Pica (1996) showed that SLA through interaction has three different positive effects: (1) it fulfills the learner's need for comprehensible input; and (2) it aids the cognitive and sociolinguistic processes that take place during acquisition; and (3) it fulfills the learner's need for comprehensible output.

The positive effect of interaction according to Gass (2003) is that it helps routinize processes. Thus, the following processes are consecutive:

- Lexis level → The learner makes a hypothesis about a grammatical rule.
- Production → The learner tests the hypothesis.
- More production → The learner routinizes the rule. (p. 245)

Once the processes of negotiation and interaction have been described, the role of research is to determine what the connection is between interaction and learning. By testing the hypotheses, the learner is 'noticing the gap' between L1 and L2. For Long (1996), interaction facilitates noticing because it provides a model, and at the same time it can make a grammatical point salient to the learner. Philp (1999) sustains that interaction is directly related to learning. All the studies that place importance on interaction as a means of processing (Schmidt, 1990; Long, 1996; Gass and Varonis, 1998; Philp, 1999; and Gass, 2003) have one feature in common: they propose the role of attention in SLA. From a cognitive point of view, attention is crucial for learning more complex structures because it makes learners notice gaps and test hypotheses. Doughty (2001) shows how this process works:

- Representations of the input and output utterances are placed in short-term memory and held there;
- Only a deeper (semantic) representation of the already processed utterance is held in long-term memory but it leaves usable traces in the short-term memory against which new utterances may be compared; and

- The memory of the utterances passes to long-term memory but can readily be reactivated if there is any suspicion by the language processor that there is a mismatch between stored knowledge and incoming linguistic evidence. (p. 210)

Pica (1994) noticed that 25% of NSs' responses to NNSs are modified in order to accommodate to the learners' communicative needs. Not only does negotiation enhance comprehension on the learner's part, but it also provides a rich context for the learner to produce new messages. Pica (1998) showed that

...when engaged in communication tasks, NSs responded to learner signals about utterances that were difficult to understand by modifying those initial utterances 73% of the time. Learners on the other hand, responded to NS signals with only 54% of modification. However, learners modify prior utterances mainly in response to signals that are open questions or clarification requests. (p.22)

Pica supported the hypothesis that this kind of modeling aids noticing the gap between the first and the second languages.

In relation to noticing, Linnell (1995) studied the importance of feedback in interaction. He showed that the amount of feedback used during conversations has a direct effect on the communicative needs of the learner. Feedback raises the focus on form in cases where there are communicative breakdowns and, therefore, it raises attention. As mentioned before, Gass and Varonis (1994) argued that this awareness is a prerequisite for the restructuring of a learner's linguistic knowledge, which indicates that the effect of feedback on language performance and focus on form increases the attention of learners and has a positive effect on language acquisition:

Interactional input provides a forum for learners to readily detect a discrepancy between their learner language and the target language and that the awareness of triggering a modification of existing second language knowledge... destabilization, then is crucial if learning is to progress to higher levels. (p. 272)

Swain and Lapkin (1995) investigated the role of conversation within a sociocultural framework. They studied conversation as both a communicative act and a

cognitive activity. They argued that in producing L2, learners notice a gap or a mismatch between their interlanguage and the L2, which pushes them to modify their output. They found that interaction forced learners to think about their output and modify it. Based on the previous research, Gass, Mackey, and Pica (1998) proposed that future studies should focus on (a) the nature of the conversational interaction, (b) whether or not opportunities are present for the conditions and processes that are claimed to facilitate language learning, and (c) the nature of the development that takes place.

Pica, Kang, and Sauro (2006) studied how information gap tasks can be used in interaction research. They designed closed, precise tasks that involve an interchange of information with the purpose of promoting modified interaction among interlocutors. They found a close relationship between attention processes, recall of form, function, and meaning, and the interactional processes in which learners negotiated the meaning and function of linguistic forms.

Although studies have shown positive effects of attention on acquisition, like investigations on recasts, results are associated with specific areas of language and there is no evidence of a causal relationship between attention and acquisition in all areas of language. As Pica (1994) proposed, it seems feasible that only lexical and phonological feedback may actually be noticed by learners in a conversation with a NS because conversation focuses on meaning and not on form and, therefore, morphosyntactic mismatches might be more easily overlooked by both learners and NSs.

2.1.4 The role of output

The issue of interaction with L2 learners and the role of output have been discussed in the literature (Swain, 1985; Pica, 1988; Pica, Holliday, Lewis, and Morgenthaler, 1989; Pica, 1996; Ellis, 1994; Gass and Selinker, 1994; Swain, 1995; Gass, 1997). These studies sustain that output can serve a learning purpose. The idea that

output, or language use, could be part of the learning mechanism itself was not seriously contemplated until Swain (1985, p. 249) coined the term “comprehensible output,” which refers to learners being “pushed towards the delivery of a message that is not only conveyed, but that is conveyed precisely, coherently, and appropriately”.

According to Swain (1985, p.249), output helps learners move from lexicon to syntax. That is, learners move from using isolated words to making the necessary connections to use those words in a syntactic unit. Pica (1988) explored the concept of *pushed output* (Swain, 1985), and found that learners modified their morphosyntax, phonology, and lexicon when prompted by NSs’ clarification requests. Nonetheless, they found those instances rather infrequent. Pica *et al.* (1989), based on previous findings by Swain (1985), saw that comprehensible input is not sufficient for SLA. Conversely, output is necessary for acquisition.

The findings are compatible with an explanation of grammatical acquisition resulting in part through conversational exchanges in which meaning is negotiated. It was suggested, however, that these sorts of exchanges, although a prerequisite for acquisition, are not themselves the source of acquisition derived from comprehensible input. Rather they are the source of acquisition derived from comprehensible output: output that extends the linguistic repertoire of the learner as he or she attempts to create precisely and appropriately the meaning desired. Comprehensible output, it was argued, is a necessary mechanism of acquisition, independent of the role of comprehensible input. Its role is, at minimum, to provide opportunities for contextualized, meaningful use, to test out hypotheses about the target language, and to move the learner from a purely semantic analysis of the language to a syntactic analysis of it. Comprehensible output is, unfortunately, generally missing in typical classroom settings, language classrooms and immersion classrooms being no exception. (Pica *et al.*, 1989, p. 252)

Pica *et al.* (1989) observed how learners reacted to different negotiation triggers by the NSs. They found that the production of output by learners differed according to different linguistic demands of NS signals of comprehension difficulties. For instance,

they found that open questions and open communication demands generated more NS negotiation triggers and more NNS output modification.

Foster (1990) investigated the quantity of language produced by dyads, the degree to which students negotiated for comprehensible input, and the extent to which they modified their language to make it comprehensible to others. He found output to have a beneficial effect on SLA. Gass, Mackey, and Pica (1998) also favored the idea that interaction triggers acquisition, but they also remarked that it is not a direct cause of acquisition, but rather a facilitator to it and, like Swain (1985), they also saw interaction and output as a condition for SLA. Swain and Lapkin (1998) examined the dialogue that occurs between two learners as they attempt to solve the linguistic problems they encounter while writing a short narrative. They posited the idea that interlanguage develops through episodes of problem-solving and that negotiation with a peer or a more advanced learner pushes learners to generate the necessary output. Thus, the students' use of language is what mediates their learning. Swain and Lapkin (1998, p.166) noted that "the talk spontaneously generated by individuals in collaborative problem-solving situations offers a window into intramental processing." They also suggested that language mediated students' judgments as shown by their use of translation and metaknowledge. The data provided in this article support the idea that dialogues are not only a means of communication but also a cognitive tool in SLA because they facilitate output. The subjects' performance showed that they continually generated alternatives, assessed alternatives, and applied the resulting knowledge to solve a linguistic problem.

According to Mackey (1995) there is a period between the time of initial input and the final stage of restructuring and output. Truscott (1998) and Ellis (1994) maintain that competence is not affected by only noticing the gap between L1 and L2 as a consequence of interaction. They both maintain that learner production is what really

triggers acquisition. Swain (1995) also argued that production helps learners think about syntax.

The role of output appears to yield positive results because of two reasons: (1) it serves learners to test hypotheses about language in conversation; and (2) it helps to establish routines and automates learning structures.

2.1.5 Topic and turn-taking

There are other aspects of input and interaction that are important for acquisition and that are not directly related to syntax or morphology but may have a great impact on acquisition and learning. One important feature is the nature of topics. Gass and Varonis (1984) found that the type of conversation topic had an effect on the NSs' understanding of NNSs. Other variables, such as familiarity with non-native accents and familiarity with particular NSs, had a positive effect on comprehension, but they concluded that familiarity with a topic yielded better results in comprehension of NNSs. They found this result important for interaction because the understanding of NNSs helps the NSs' speech modification, thus facilitating comprehensible input for the learner. Polio and Gass (1998) provided evidence that interaction contributes to a NS's comprehension of NNS speech. They also noted two NSs' strategies in interaction: (a) assuming discourse leadership; and (b) determining task-appropriate information to convey.

Long (1983) claimed that NSs make topics salient and simple, which may imply that the NSs tend to be in control of the conversation. They normally manage and nominate topics and turns. As Young (1996) points out, the nature of topic nomination tends to be simple and brief, accommodating to the learner's needs.

Unless the task dictates otherwise, NSs attempt to relinquish topic control in various ways: or-choice questions ... acceptance of unintentional NNS topic-switches also facilitates NNS participation. If the task allows, skillful NSs may

treat an inappropriate response as a topic nomination ...simultaneously repairing the discourse and allowing the NNS to determine topic. (p. 420)

How and by whom the topics of a conversation in a NS-NNS dyad are negotiated is an operational variable that is correlated to the level of proficiency and the development of IC. In lower levels of proficiency, learners tend to rely on the native interlocutor to take control and responsibility of the conversation, thus allowing them to dominate the shifts of topics. The way in which these changes are made is also a factor to take into consideration. Young (1996) considers intonation as another preferred way of topic nomination because it maintains the word order and it is frequent in topic-initiations. Moreover, to increase topic saliency, the NS may also use a slower rate. Long (1983) explains that when a new topic is proposed by the NS and there is a communication breakdown, the repair takes the form of decomposition. First, the NS repeats the topic in isolation in the form of a yes-no question. Then, when the learner signals that the new topic is understood, the NS goes on to the next question about that topic.

One factor to consider is the Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle by which speakers

make conversational contributions as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk. That is to say, if participants observe this tacitly agreed principle, even when 'talking topically', hearers can expect that a speaker's contribution will somehow be relevant, and can search for appropriate implicatures that will enable them to discover that relevance by bridging the gap between the topic of one turn and that of the following turn. (p. 30, cited in Wells, 1981)

The NS might relinquish control of the topics of conversation, but they are the ones who control and manage discourse. Research is needed to learn the relationship between topic control and level of proficiency. Long (1983) remarked that NSs tend to nominate topics by asking questions. Another finding made by Long (1983) is that these

topics usually refer to the here-and-now. In other words, they mostly use present tense and everyday topics that are familiar to the learner.

The organization of turns is just as important as the nature of topics. There is a general implicit assumption that interaction takes place in turns. Wells (1981) declares that:

Ensuring a smooth transition from one speaking turn to the next is thus fundamental to the sequential structuring of conversation, and it depends upon several forms of behavior...it is important to realize that the listener, as well as the speaker, contributes to the successful management of turn-taking in discourse. (p.26)

In other words, the sequential structure of discourse can also be negotiated by the interactants. They usually know when it is appropriate in a given context to hold the responsibility of the conversation. The sequence of discourse is also developed by a continuous shift in topics. In an informal conversation, interlocutors tend to jump from one topic to another, many times by association of ideas, extensions of meaning or, rarely, changing the topic abruptly. These shifts create a sense of flow that gives some structure and cohesion to the conversation. He (1998, p. 112) focused on the interactional nature of language use and analyzed conversational features such as the length of pauses, the ways in which turn-taking is organized, and the way in which communication breakdowns are treated. In her study of language proficiency interviews, she rethought the concept of communicative competence, claiming that “to be a competent participant in language proficiency interviews means in part to exhibit understanding of questions, repairs, and turn-constructive units; to elaborate responses; to strategically position pauses in between speech; and to specify trouble source in the case of difficulty in communication”. More generally, He’s study suggests that discourse competence depends on speech activities because different activities have different goals. Speech roles may have different discourse/interactional pressures on the participants. The

sequence of turns in conversation is just as important as the nomination of topics in conversation. For this reason, the number of turns is also analyzed in the present study.

Since research has been integrating mostly on the classroom and on processes and outcomes, such as focus on form, the effect of interaction on acquisition of lexical items, grammatical accuracy, etc., there is a need to examine new variables that may influence the outcomes of interaction, such as type of activities that may enhance interactional abilities and, as a possible consequence, acquisition. Research has shown that the type of task and the focus of conversation have an effect on interaction and acquisition. It has been widely accepted that interaction is a facilitator of acquisition, but there are other factors in the complex process of interlanguage (IL) development that may affect the outcomes such as motivation, or confidence, type of housing, and the roles that participants take.

2.2 STUDY ABROAD RESEARCH

Noted research among the studies that deal with the issue of study abroad and language proficiency development is the seminal work of Carroll (1967). Carroll, who completed a study involving 2,782 learners of French, German, Italian, and Russian, measured gains in proficiency and showed that the time spent abroad was the strongest variable as a predictor of language gain. Since the publication of that article, many studies have addressed the issue of proficiency gained abroad. Several topics have been addressed in this field, but the most researched has been the issue of language gain based on Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) scores. Most of the studies measure proficiency gains obtained by learners based on the ACTFL scale and interview.

During the 1980s, the proficiency movement was developed from the need to assess language progress not only in grammatical abilities and development of habit formation (more common during the 1960s), but also to measure the communicative

competence of learners to communicate and expand communication strategies in real life situations or communicative-oriented language functions such as apologizing, hypothesizing, or talking about a future event. Savignon (1985) and Freed (1984) found that learners who participate in functional communication attain a higher level of proficiency. This need to establish a theoretical framework to assess language gain was also reflected in studies dealing with SA. All of these studies were based on the OPI, following the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. The purpose of the OPI was to measure the speaking ability of the learners and was seen as the most reliable and standardized instrument of assessment. The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines are shown in Appendix 2.

2.2.1 Study abroad studies and proficiency gains

During the 1980s and 1990s, studies documented the positive effect of the sojourn abroad on L2 proficiency gains (Veguez, 1984; Liskin-Gasparro, 1984; Magnan, 1986; Milleret, 1991; Freed, 1990; DeKeyser, 1991; Guntermann, 1992; Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg, 1993; Lafford and Ryan, 1995; Freed, 1995). All the studies showed a language gain based on OPI scores.

Veguez (1984) showed that students returning from Spain had increased their levels of proficiency. However, he also pointed out that learners were especially creative in avoiding certain grammatical structures of Spanish such as the subjunctive, which is a linguistic feature of Advanced learners' speech. Liskin-Gasparro (1984) and Magnan (1986) also showed that Spanish students who had an experience abroad scored higher on the OPI. Freed (1990) showed that learners returning from France after a one-month SA program did not show significant changes in proficiency. She noticed that the SA experience was correlated to a significantly higher level of proficiency. She looked at the effect of out-of-class contact during SA on proficiency gains and found that motivation does not necessarily correlate with more out-of-class contact with NSs, nor did out-of-

class contact correlate with higher levels of proficiency. For Freed, the fact that students as a group did not attain a higher OPI score may be attributed to the fact that the OPI did not reflect the changes that learners go through during a one-month program. Milleret (1991) conducted a similar experiment with Portuguese students and found the same results, which then implied a need for an improvement of the Portuguese OPI at the Advanced levels for learners of Portuguese in order to account for language transfer from Spanish to Portuguese. Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg (1993) gave an extensive description of gains from a large database that included 658 learners of Russian in a SA program. They reported that men are more likely to gain in listening comprehension as compared with women. They also reported that learners who were at the Advanced level were more likely to show a gain in listening skills. They implied that investment in grammar instruction in the early years of instruction may result in advances in speaking and listening skills at the upper intermediate and advanced levels when studying abroad.

DeKeyser (1991) also gave reasons for a gain in proficiency during SA. According to DeKeyser, learners attained a higher level of proficiency because the hours interacting in a foreign language provide more comprehensible input for the learners, thereby providing a motivational boost. Thus, learners can acquire communicative competence in managing interaction with multiple NSs, which does not happen in the classroom.

Freed (1995) edited a volume dedicated solely to the issue of SLA and SA. She reported that, although most studies lead to the conclusion that students learning a language abroad are at an advantage to those who remain at home, there are issues that still need to be raised, such as individual differences. As she pointed out:

Many questions still remain unanswered and revisions to initial conclusions are anticipated. We have, for example, more to learn about how students actually spend their time while abroad, which language they speak with friends and host

families, the purposes for which and the amount of time they actually spend using the target language-data which will contribute to the evolving story of language learning and study abroad. (p. 28)

In the same volume, Lapkin, Hart, and Swain (1995) evaluated the linguistic impact of a three-month stay in Quebec by Canadian English-speaking learners of French. Contrary to Brecht, Davidson, and Gingsberg's (1993) study, they concluded that learners with initially lower French language proficiency make greater gains as a result of submersion in a French environment.

Liskin-Gasparro and Urdaneta (1995) administered the OPI to American learners who were studying Spanish in Venezuela. They found that learners' improvement during the semester ranged from Novice Mid to Intermediate Mid at the beginning of the program, and Novice High to Intermediate High at the end of the program. They also mentioned the importance of the use of diaries in which the learners reflect on their own learning experiences.

Freed (1995, p. 144) likewise reported that students at a lower level of proficiency show a greater gain in fluency. She was cautious in confirming this hypothesis and added, "the results of this study might be seen as a confirmation of the fact that the popular notion of fluency is surely far broader than the narrow construct associated with a small cluster of hesitation and repair phenomena". Freed (1995) tested whether learners in a SA program became more fluent. She studied two groups of French learners, one abroad and one at home, and looked at their fluency as perceived by NSs based on amount of speech, rate of speech, unfilled pauses, frequency of filled pauses, length of fluent speech runs, repairs (including repetitions of exact words, reformulations, false starts, corrections, partial repetitions), and clusters of dysfluencies. Her results showed that their OPI scores were consistent with those of other studies, in that learners gained in proficiency

according to the ACTFL Guidelines. However, Freed insists that the concept of fluency is too vague and that more research is needed to assess this concept.

Since Freed (1990) did not find a correlation between out-of-class contact and OPI scores, other studies researched this variable (Yager, 1998; and Archangeli, 1999) and looked at the effect of out-of-class contact on OPI scores. Yager (1998) found that more interaction out of the classroom correlated with better proficiency results, but he also noted that NSs perceived the general Spanish of learners who had more informal interaction to be more native-like, with better pronunciation. However, Yager did not find any significant differences in the language gain of Intermediate learners after the program. Because the whole group showed a correlation between out-of-class contact and language improvement, he suggested that learners should be encouraged to pursue that type of contact, and language programs should strive to facilitate those opportunities.

Archangeli (1999) conducted a study based on Yager's (1998) results that would facilitate learners' interaction out of the classroom during SA programs. Learners were required to interview two NSs. In addition, they had to prepare a writing protocol, give a presentation in class of their experience, and fill out a questionnaire in which they measured the value of the experience. Her results showed that this activity enhanced learners' confidence and they felt satisfied with the accomplishment of being able to interact with NSs on a one-on-one basis. She also discovered significant improvements in proficiency.

Segalowitz and Freed (2004) examined the role of context on learning, and found that SA learners improved more in both proficiency and fluency, as measured by the OPI. They also found that there are a number of interactions among oral, cognitive, and contextual variables that need to be studied and how they affect individual variation.

The literature reviewed illustrates that, although learners experience improvement in proficiency as shown by their OPI scores, it is important to restate the fact that it is not a guarantee that learners will improve in every aspect of language. For instance, Lafford (1995) found that learners appear to be better communicators at the end of a semester abroad; however, this ability is sometimes apparent because they develop communication strategies that allow them to maintain an uninterrupted conversation with NSs.

2.2.2 Qualitative studies on SLA in SA

Wilkinson (1995) conducted a study that used ethnographic and qualitative methods of analysis. In her study, learners had to fill out questionnaires and diaries regarding their perceptions and activities during their stay abroad. The results showed that learners are very concerned about the opportunities they are given to interact with NSs in informal settings. She also found that learners tend to rely on classroom roles when interacting with NSs, which she found disadvantageous for acquisition.

Liskin-Gasparro (1998) also carried out a qualitative study that focused on the learners' perceptions about their linguistic gain as correlated with the types of activities and relationships that they established while in a summer immersion program. In their diaries learners reported issues of confidence and a love/hate relationship with the formal study of grammar. She proposed the study of three issues: (1) when the SA experience occurs because the learners who had previously gone abroad in early stages did not have as many confidence issues as those who had not; (2) how learners establish social networks and how it affects language development; and (3) how learners' beliefs about language learning are permeable to instructional intervention.

Other qualitative studies have researched and questioned certain assumptions about the SA experience for language learning raised by Wilkinson (2000). For instance, Mendelson (2004b) challenged the idea that SA ensures cultural understanding and that

the host family is an advantage for the learner. She researched these assumptions and found that learners in SA programs often place themselves at the wrong level of proficiency, and have disappointing experiences when trying to interact with NSs. She found that their interactions were often limited to the host family environment. Many of her subjects were surprised at not achieving the miraculous language and cultural gains that they had anticipated before the program.

2.2.3 Communication strategies

Lafford (1995) carried out a study comparing the conversational abilities of three groups studying Spanish. One group studied in Spain, another one in Mexico, and the third one remained in the US. She concluded that learners abroad attain a higher oral proficiency as defined by ACTFL. Beyond proficiency concerns, she determined that learners who go abroad develop a wider repertoire of communicative strategies because they were able to open and close conversations, and they were more aware of their conversation responsibilities. They showed signs of cohesion and fluency as shown by their higher numbers of words per turn, and their uses of fillers, pauses, and backchanneling signals.

Segalowitz *et al.* (2004) found that learners who spent more time interacting with NSs had to rely less on communication strategies and that they also scored better in aspects of fluency. They discovered that learners abroad tend to engage less frequently in negotiation routines because they become more interactionally and linguistically competent. These learners did not need to negotiate meaning as much as the control group at home. Other research comparing groups abroad and at home includes Collentine and Freed (2004), who compiled a volume dedicated solely to comparing SA and AH groups. Collentine (2004) found that the SA learners scored higher in narrative abilities and fluency, but the AH learners showed greater gains in the acquisition of

morphosyntactic control. While comparing a SA group with a group of learners who enrolled in an immersion domestic program, Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey (2004) found that Intermediate Mid learners scored better in fluency than SA learners. These findings have led researchers to question the quality and quantity of time spent speaking Spanish in the SA context. Presuming that production is the basis for acquisition (Swain, 1985), it could be predicted that SA learners who spent more time interacting with NSs would score better in fluency. Surprisingly however, Freed *et al.* (2004) did not find that correlation, but that time spent writing out of the classroom was a predictor that yielded better results in fluency. Lafford (1995, 2004) has revealed that learners who go abroad develop more communicative strategies.

Smartt and Scudder (2004) studied negotiation and repair during SA, and they suggested that there is a hierarchy in the use of clarification requests during SA. They proposed that the very first mechanism of triggering a negotiation routine is the use of the native language, followed by an appeal for assistance (implied clarification request) and a word form search (direct clarification request). They noted a difference between correction and repair. In the present study, correction is classified as “corrective feedback”, while repair is classified as a “trigger for negotiation for meaning” because its goal is to negotiate a repair for a communication breakdown. As Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) noted, speakers prefer self-correction over other correction from the interlocutor. Thus, according to Smartt and Scudder (2004), repair behaviors range from indirect forms (appeals for assistance) to explicit ones (word form searches), and from single language units (lexical) to more global meaning repairs. Smartt and Scudder (2004) also found a negative correlation between the SA group and the AH group, in that AH learners needed more repair.

2.2.4 Other variables

Research has shown the advantage of SA but it has also raised questions about the complexity and the variables of which learners take advantage during SA and their perceptions of their experiences. For instance, Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg (1995) studied which factors might be predictors of language gain in the SA context. They showed that preprogram reading and grammar skills are accurate predictors of success in gain. Milton and Meara (1995) showed an advantage of SA learners for the acquisition of lexical items; while Regan (1995) found an advantage for SA learners regarding the acquisition of certain sociocultural rules, such as the deletion of *ne* in French. Isabelli (2000) claims SA learners benefit from their stay in certain aspects of grammatical accuracy. Through analysis of the learners' network logs, she discovered that the learners with a dense social network during the study abroad experience tended to score significantly higher in tense, aspect, and agreement for greater grammatical accuracy.

2.2.5 The host family environment

There is scant literature on the effect of housing type on L2 acquisition during the SA experience. Laubscher (1994) conducted an ethnographic research study in which he observed variables that might provide learners with more opportunities for interaction and learning. He noted through ethnographic notes and interviews that learners reported interacting with NSs mainly in their host family context, but he also found that learners cited traveling as their main opportunity for independence and problem-solving. Based on his observations, he emphasized the importance of providing participants in SA programs with those opportunities and stressed the need for self-reflection about language learning, change, and adaptation to a new culture and unexpected situations. Laubscher's informants perceived those opportunities as a source of personal development, changes in perspective, and awareness of what it is like to be different.

Wilkinson (1998) found that an individual's cultural sensitivity may have an effect on the quality of interactions with the host families. She claims that cultural assumptions may lead to misunderstandings that have a negative effect on how learners may identify themselves with the target culture. Wilkinson (2000, p. 38), challenged beliefs about SA, such as whether or not the homestay situation is optimal. According to Wilkinson, "contrary to popular belief, the host family situation does not always constitute the most beneficial living arrangement for all study-abroad participants". She raised the important question of what role housing plays in learners' choices and experiences concerning target language use. Like Liskin-Gasparro and Urdaneta (1995), she noted that the role of their own perspective in language learning needed more research.

Wilkinson (2002) conducted an ethnographic study in which she videotaped the interaction between learners and their host family members. She learned that not only do learners rely on classroom roles but also on NSs, and that discourse is constructed around those roles. Rivers (1998) also challenged the assumption that the homestay environment is the most advantageous living arrangement for SA learners. He compared learners who stayed with families to those who stayed in dormitories and found that, contrary to common assumptions, homestay participants scored lower in speaking and listening proficiency but higher in reading.

In an ethnographic investigation, Schmidt-Rinehart *et al.* (2004) showed that the homestay with a family enhanced the study abroad experience because learners reportedly did not make many NSs friends out of the classroom and they confessed not attempting to integrate fully into the culture. McMeekin (2006) showed that learners who stayed with families abroad, unlike AH students, tended to engage in more negotiation routines with the host family due mainly to the wide variety of topics that arise in natural

conversations and also due to fewer opportunities to use English and interaction in which the participants are in symmetrical roles of fluency and linguistic dominance. She also pointed out that learners abroad are more motivated to learn and to contribute to conversations actively than learners in other living situations. Thus, as McMeekin (2006) suggests, it is important to study not only the amount of negotiation, which is very important, but also the effect that negotiation has on language acquisition.

In sum, the review of literature has discussed the positive effects of SA on language acquisition. It has also shown that the process of learning a second language and the aspects of language that are favored by interaction in the SA context are not simple issues. The body of literature has generally shown positive effects of interaction on acquisition of different aspects of language and, by extension, positive effects of negotiation, modification of input, learner output, and attention. The main difficulty of the study of interaction is the lack of research of the long-term effects of interaction. The SA context provides a rich context in which learners can develop their ability to negotiate and receive modified input, negotiate the most appropriate topics, take discourse leadership, and assume greater conversation roles. The quantitative literature reviewed has shown the positive effects of SA on proficiency development, while more recent works have followed a more qualitative approach, as proposed by Wilkinson (2000). Recent work has researched the perceptions of the learners who go abroad by means of interviews and diaries.

New variables and methodologies need to be continuously revised. One particular issue that needs more research is the type of housing, and how learners develop their communicative and interactional competence through their experiences abroad. If the IH does prove to be valid in its claims for negotiation creating a positive effect on acquisition, SA could provide one context to facilitate opportunities for learners to

receive modified input by NSs, produce more output, learn how to nominate topics, and match their expectations with positive outcomes. The goal of the present study is to connect the enhancing effects of interaction with the learners' linguistic and interactional abilities as they develop in the context of natural conversations with NSs. At the same time, as in recent studies dealing with SA, personal questionnaires and interviews were carried out in order to have a triangulation of the methodologies used in the past and resulting data from various sources.

2.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In view of the literature reviewed here, it is clear that certain aspects of IC development have not yet been explained. Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions:

2.3.1 Research question #1

What are the interactional practices (such as corrective feedback, topic nomination, language production, and negotiation for meaning) observed in the interactions between NSs and NNSs?

2.3.2 Research question #2

Do the learners show development of interactional practices in a SA context in the family environment as opposed to a context at home in the U.S.?

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.0 INTRODUCTION

The data in this study were collected during the fall 2003 in Alicante, Spain, and during the spring of 2004 in Austin, Texas. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis were used in order to elicit a more complete set of data. At the same time exhaustive information about the learners and their interactions was elicited. A total of 136 interviews between non-native Spanish learners and native Spanish speakers were videotaped. In addition, 102 video-recordings were made, including pre-tests, post-tests, and interviews with the researcher inquiring about individual's background, amount of contact with NSs, host families or lodging, and any other variables that could affect their acquisition of Spanish.

3.1 PARTICIPANTS

Data were collected from two groups of learners. The first group included 16 American NSs of English studying Spanish in two different one-semester SA programs in Alicante, Spain. The second group included 18 American NSs of English studying Spanish at the University of Texas at Austin. The two groups of NSs who interacted with the learners during the interviews included of: (a) 12 NSs from Alicante ranging in age between 26 and 56, primarily young professionals who worked and lived in the city of Alicante, and who were willing to participate in the project; and (b) a group of 33 NSs from Austin, Texas, ranging in age between 25 and 45.

3.2 RECRUITING

The recruiting of the learners from Alicante, Spain was planned with the goal of finding equal numbers of students of different levels of proficiency. Learners of three different proficiency levels were selected from Spanish classes. The level of proficiency was determined by the researcher and another person who had been trained in the use of the TOPT (Texas Oral Proficiency Test). The procedures and validity of the TOPT exam are explained below. The researcher visited Spanish classes and asked for volunteers from two established SA programs in Alicante. The two programs were CIEE (Council for International Exchange and Education) and USAC (University Study Abroad Consortium). The willingness of these two organizations to cooperate in the study was crucial for the data collection. Once the learners agreed to participate in the study, they were asked to read and sign a consent form (Appendix 1) that explained all the procedures that they would follow during the semester.

Learners from The University of Texas at Austin were selected according to different levels of Spanish L2 proficiency. This control group helped account for the differences in progress made by the other group. In previous work, the control group was utilized in other studies (Lafford, 1995, 2004; Freed, 2004; Collentine and Freed, 2004) in order to provide a baseline and to observe the differences that exist between staying at home and going abroad, if any. The recruiting procedure was the same as that followed in Alicante. Learners were selected from among Spanish classes ranging between Novice and Advanced levels. They all met four times with the researcher and followed exactly the same steps as their counterparts in Spain. It is important to note that learners were studying Spanish as a second language, thus avoiding interference of another second language that might have been learned before Spanish. Two of the SA learners spoke Hindi, a language which they spoke at home.

Table 3.1: Background information about NNSs' level of proficiency

	Novice	Intermediate	Advanced	Total
Univ. Alicante	7	5	4	16
UT-Austin	9	6	3	18
Total	16	11	7	

A pre-test and a post-test based on the TOPT (Texas Oral Proficiency Test) were administered to the learners. The assessment of the tests was carried out by the researcher and a colleague who had been trained to evaluate proficiency under the ACTFL standards. The TOPT is based on these standards, which are described in Appendix 2.

First, the researcher administered the pre-program proficiency test upon arrival and a post-program test at the end of the experience. The same procedure was followed with the learners in Texas; they were given the pre-test before their first meeting with the NSs and the post-test at the end of the semester. The tests were recorded and designed to categorize the learners ranging from Novice to Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior.

Table 3.2: Background information about learners, years of Spanish and average age

	Univ. Alicante	UT-Austin
Average Age	21.5	20.3
Average Years of Spanish	1.5	1.3

Table 3.3: Interviews of each learner with NSs and Researcher

Month 1	Pre-test/Interview with Researcher	Interview 1 with NS	
Month 2		Interview 2 with NS	
Month 3		Interview 3 with NS	
Month 4		Interview 4 with NS	
Month 5			Post-test/Interview with Researcher

3.3 PROCEDURES

Most of the data were derived from videotapes of conversational interactions between the individual learners and NSs of Spanish. The learners conversed with at least two different speakers in different situations in order to avoid repetition of topics or difficulty in interaction with particular participants.

Conversations between NNS and NSs were videotaped four times per learner at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. Each interview was set about one month apart, accommodating to the subject's schedule. The interlocutors were selected randomly so that they were not matched with the same NSs more than twice. The conversations were primarily unstructured, although general topics of conversation were proposed to the pairs for each interview. For each encounter, the learners were matched with a NS in an attempt to avoid pre-established routines. Hence, none of the learners spoke to the same NS more than twice in the time period. The first 10 minutes of each interview were isolated for the data samples. Each interview took place at different places for the convenience of the participants, and all tapings were done indoors for the better acoustic environment and privacy of the interactions. The researcher was present but did not interfere with the conversations in order to gather the most natural conversation data as possible. In order to be able to elicit cross-sectional results, all participants in the SA group were matched at least one with the same informant, Carmen. Table 3.4 shows the distribution of the interviews. The TOPT provides the researcher with a baseline for the learner's level of proficiency. The TOPT is a task-oriented test that was developed following the ACTFL guidelines; thus the results were largely consistent with the ACTFL Guidelines. The researcher, who had received training in assessing the TOPT, administered the test. The tapes and ratings were reviewed by another trained rater. The test examines communicative functions that the learners have to fulfill. The level of

proficiency is based both on the quality of fulfillment of functions as well as the accuracy of the language. The general assumption of the test is that learners will show their level of competence in all the communicative aspects of language as defined by Canale and Swain (1980), including linguistic, pragmatic, discourse and strategic competencies. The TOPT is a test of speaking ability. The TOPT consists of three parts: a warm-up section; a narrative section; and a section using advanced features in order to take the learners to their maximum level of proficiency. These sections are designed to demonstrate a variety of speaking functions in a variety of topics and tasks. The examinees are provided pictures, topics, and situations that serve to measure if the speaker is able to perform adequately at the Advanced level. Thus, there is a warm up section in which the speakers are given Novice-level tasks that they have to complete. Then they go on to do Novice-level and Intermediate-level tasks, and so forth, until they reach the Advanced level. An overview of the TOPT measurement is shown in Appendix 3.

A Novice speaker, for instance, would not be able to fulfill tasks such as *giving advantages and disadvantages* or *narrating in the past*, and would have difficulty communicating with the NS except for very predictable contexts where they would use formulaic language and standard expressions of courtesy, such as *gracias* [thank you], or *por favor* [please]. They would have to rely on the NS's ability to lead the conversation with numerous repetitions, recasts, and clarification requests.

An Intermediate speaker would be able to fulfill all the Intermediate-level tasks given in the TOPT, with all the pictures, some of the topics, and none or very few of the Advanced-level situations. When interacting with the NS, the Intermediate speaker would be able to handle the conversations on simple topics and, with some difficulty, still use a considerable number of repetitions, clarifications requests, and recasts. The learners would rely on the judgment of the NS to carry the conversation, choose the topics, and

lead the learner's discourse, but without as much negotiation, silences and recasts as in the Novice level.

An Advanced speaker would have to be able to perform the task of giving explanations, instructions, and descriptions, narrating and describing in the past, present, and future time frames, participating successfully in conversations at the casual and formal levels, initiating, sustaining, and bringing to closure communications tasks such as making requests and explanations. Advanced learners would be understood by any NS without problems, and they would be able to communicate coherently using appropriate connectors, applying knowledge of verb tenses in the past, present, and future time, as well as in the subjunctive mood. Silences and hesitations are almost nonexistent. The grammar and vocabulary is assessed by the control they have over the tenses or the common, general vocabulary. Finally, the sociolinguistic competence of advanced speakers is measured by their ability to differentiate sociolinguistic features; for instance, the appropriate use of *tú* and *usted* and other cultural aspects of the language.

In order to verify validity of the TOPT, Stansfield (2004) carried out a study testing the performance of the TOPT. For this purpose, a process of trialing, a qualitative approach to test development, was followed:

It produces feedback from examinees, observers, and raters which allows the study of important characteristics of a performance-based test, such as the ability of each item to allow examinees to demonstrate their skill, the adequacy of the time allotted for the performances, the clarity of the instructions for each item, the perceived appropriateness and fairness of each item, the interpretability of drawings or pictures used, and the usefulness of the performance (the speech elicited) in determining a rating. Feedback from examinees, observers, and raters further helps ensure that the forms are comparable in difficulty.(p. 44)

3.4 INTERVIEWS WITH THE RESEARCHER

A third set of videotaped interviews between the researcher and all the SA learners was scheduled to gather information about the experiences of the learners abroad, previous experiences abroad, language background, amount of Spanish they spoke everyday, and type of lodging in which they were staying. One interview was carried out at the beginning of the experience at the same meeting when participants took the pre-test. A second interview was carried out by the researcher with each participant at the end of the semester. The questions asked were aimed at researching the factors that made the learners interact better with NSs. Therefore, they were asked some questions from the *Language Contact Profile* (LCP) used by Freed (1990) and others designed by the researcher, in which learners reported their previous experience with Spanish, and the amount of contact they had with NSs during SA. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix 4.

Apart from general questions about language contact, the researcher was more interested in the perceptions the learners had about their language learning experiences and the quality of those interactions. Therefore, the questions asked how the learners managed to interact with NSs, what they wished they had done differently, and how the program in which they were participating could improve their opportunities to interact with NSs. Mendelson (2004b) had done an ethnographic study in which she found that learners return home from SA programs not having met the expectations they had before their departure. Her participants reported not gaining the cultural understanding and integration they had hoped before they left and not improving linguistically as much as they expected. Because these two factors are so important to improve interactions between learners and NSs, the researcher considered it important to examine the

perceptions of the learners on the success of their SA program. In this way, some assumptions and implications for future research and improvement of SA programs can be implemented.

3.5 QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE PROCEDURES

The analysis followed in this study represents a combination of quantitative and qualitative procedures. In this way, a more comprehensive understanding of the learner's development when studying abroad can be obtained in view of the processes and factors that occur while studying abroad.

3.5.1 Quantitative data

The quantitative data were gathered via some analysis of the communicative strategies used by Lafford (1995, 2004). Because IC is a social construct, it is important to examine the strategies used by the learners to overcome communication breakdowns, and the way they interact with NSs in terms of asking for clarification or self-correcting when they receive feedback. For this reason, and with the purpose of researching the richness of interactional resources of the learners, the following variables were used to show the ability of the learners and their tendencies to (a) improve their level of proficiency, (b) improve their level of language production in terms of length of utterances, (c) rely on the NS to overcome breakdowns by means of corrective feedback, (d) overcome a communication breakdown by means of negotiation, (e) ability to nominate topics, and (f) rely on the NS to nominate the topics of the conversation. Thus, the present research can provide a rich report of the interactional practices and development of learners in SA programs. All these tendencies and resources are grouped into dependent variables shown in Table 3.4, and measured in terms of group (SA vs. AH) and housing (Family versus Apartment). The term SA is generally understood as a

program in which students spend a month, a semester, or longer studying in another country (Wilkinson, 2000, p. 36). The term is used in the present study as a SA setting in which the learners spent a semester abroad through an organization or a university, taking formal language and other economics or culture classes and staying with a family or a host mother or independently in an apartment. Some of the subjects who participated in this study stayed with families and in apartments which they shared either with other American students or with other European students who spent a semester in Spain through an Erasmus program⁴. Learners who stayed with families or a host mother were included under the category of *family*, and those who stayed in an apartment with other students were placed under the category of *apartment*.

Table 3.4: Variables

Independent Variables
Group: SA or At home
SA Housing: Host family or Apartment
Dependent Variables
Level of proficiency at the beginning of semester
Amount of corrective feedback
Amount of negotiation
Number of Topic Nominations
Language production as measured by words per turn, silences, and number of turns

Despite the small number of participants, One-Way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were used to the equality of three or more means at one time by using variances. The analysis examines the deviation of the mean of each group from the grand mean to understand effects of the variable studied. For instance, it is useful to compare the relationship that the group (SA versus AH) had to the differences in mean of

⁴ “The Erasmus program is a program funded by the UE which addresses the teaching and learning needs of all those in formal higher education, including transnational student placements in enterprise, and the institutions and organizations providing or facilitating such education and training”. More information can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/programmes_en.html

corrective feedback received during the semester. The analysis will give the results of the means of each group and a p -value significant at a given level of confidence. If the p -value is smaller than 0.05, the mean difference of the two groups is considered significant for the given population. These analyses were conducted in order to account for the significance of results within the population studied. Nevertheless, the results should not be extrapolated for a general population. The ANOVA regressions were performed using the program SPSS, version 6.1.

As an example of the statistical calculations shown in the next chapters, Table 3.5 shows information on the need for corrective feedback by each level of proficiency. The p -value represents the significance of the mean difference of the three groups. Since the p -value is smaller than 0.05, the differences among the three samples are considered significant for the present population. A One-Way ANOVA revealed that there is a significant difference in the quantity of corrective feedback that learners received among levels of proficiency, $F(2,61) = 1.23$, $p = .01$. A Scheffé post-hoc analysis revealed that there is a statistical difference between the Novice and Intermediate levels, and between the Novice and Advanced levels, but no statistical differences were found between the Intermediate and Advanced levels. In addition, the means of corrective feedback at each particular month are given in order to show the progression of the learners. The differences for each month are used to calculate a Pearson correlation which allows the researcher to understand the progression of each group throughout the semester. The Pearson correlation reflects a degree of linear relationship, which will give a result between -1 and 1. If the result of the Pearson correlation were 0, that would mean that there is not a linear correlation between two or more points in time. If the result of the correlation is -1, there is a perfect negative correlation. It is also important to look at the significance of the correlation. In Table 3.5 none of the correlations given are significant

because they are higher than 0.05; therefore, they do not yield a significant correlation between the amount of corrective feedback and the differences in months. For instance, the correlation at the Novice level is very strong (-.957), and it implies that there is almost a perfect negative correlation. Nevertheless, this pattern is only a tendency because the Pearson's r coefficient is not significant ($p = .065 > .05$), so a linear correlation cannot be established between corrective feedback and the number of months for the given sample of Novice learners because it may have been due to chance or individual factors. It does not explain variation within the group.

Table 3.5: Corrective feedback given by NSs by level of proficiency

	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's r
Novice	8.00	5.42	4.42	5.14	5.75	-.957 $p=.065$
Intermediate	3.00	3.40	3.00	3.00	3.10	-.029 $p=.904$
Advanced	2.00	2.50	2.00	1.75	2.06	-.125 $p=.667$

In order to study each individual variable, the researcher counted each token of corrective feedback, negotiation, topic nomination, and language production and entered the data in SPSS. For instance, if a given learner nominated three topics in the conversation, a 3 would be entered for the given learner at that particular month, and so forth. The results are shown in the next two chapters. In Chapter 4, a detailed explanation of each particular variable is given with illustrative excerpts of the results for levels of proficiency in order to give a clear idea of how corrective feedback, negotiation, and topic nomination actually work in a conversation. Chapter 5 examines the dependent variables according to two factors. First, results are given according to the group of the participants—SA versus AH—and second, according to the type of housing (family versus apartment environment).

As stated earlier, these variables are not intended to reveal IC in its broad sense, which would be very difficult to measure, but rather for three particular interactional practices that learners develop during the sojourn abroad. Because linguistic level of proficiency is so closely correlated with IC and interactional practices, the variable of level of proficiency has been studied and correlated to the interactional practices studied here. Because IC involves knowing and using communicative tools to repair discourse, negotiate for meaning, and manage conversation in the target community, the variables of corrective feedback, negotiation for meaning, topic nomination, and language production have been included in the present study.

(a) The *level of proficiency* of the learners at the beginning and the end of the semester serves as a baseline to measure their linguistic progress. Chapter 4 provides a detailed explanation of each variable with examples and the relationship between level of proficiency and interactional practices. The tendencies in negotiation, for example, by learners in each level of proficiency are given.

(b) The amount of *corrective feedback* received by the learner is also indicative of the interactional progress of the NNS. The amount of feedback was calculated by counting tokens of corrections given by the NSs. These corrections are given in the form of recasts, and are aimed solely at correcting the learners when some utterance is perceived as incorrect or inaccurate by the NS, but not as a means of discourse repair, because there is no communication breakdown.

(c) The variable of *negotiation for meaning* was examined as one way to determine how learners were able to repair discourse, and to see if they acquired the interactional tools and communicative strategies necessary to make conversation go smoothly. Negotiation was measured by counting each routine in which there was a communication breakdown, a negotiation trigger, and repair. First, the number of

negotiation routines initiated by the learners and the NSs were counted. The clarification requests were divided as explicit or implicit to see which was more common among NSs and NNSs. In order to see how much modified feedback the learners received, when the learners made a clarification request, the percentage of modifications of the original NSs' utterances by the NSs was counted. In this way, the percentage of modified feedback in negotiation, or comprehensible input, received by learners could be seen. At the same time, when the NSs triggered the negotiation, the number of the learners' modifications of their own utterances was counted in order to observe the quantity of modified output or comprehensible output produced by the learners during negotiation. The use of this technique is based on McMeekin (2006), who demonstrated that learners who live with families receive more comprehensible input and produce more comprehensible output in natural conversations than learners in other living situations. At the same time, as evidenced by Lafford (1995), a larger amount of negotiation is expected for learners of lower levels of proficiency.

(d) Number of *topic nominations* by both the NS and the NNS. This interactional variable is important to show how learners learn to interact with NSs and take control of the flow of the conversation. For each interview, the number of topic nominations was calculated. The nomination of topics was based on what the researcher considered a shift in the course of the conversation. Based on Wells (1981), conversation topic shifts provide a sequential structure to discourse. A topic shift can be created by an abrupt change of topic, a question, or even a follow-up idea. The number of topics nominated by the NSs was also calculated in order to see how much control the NSs had as opposed to the learners, and how the control over the flow of the conversation changed over the course of the semester. Topics were divided in *abstract* and *here-and-now*. Abstract topics refer to some personal opinion and abstraction or more detailed explanation, while

here-and-now topics, as defined by Long (1983) refer to simple topics related to every day situations.

(e) Amount of *speech production*. The quantity of speech was also measured for the learners. Three aspects of speech production were calculated. First, the number of words per turn (WPT) gives an idea of how elaborate the learners' answers are. Also, the number of silences is recorded, because they indicate how much difficulty the learners are experiencing in producing their utterances. Lastly, the number of turns is also considered to see how the conversations are distributed between the participants. All the conversations observed here are between two speakers, so turns are easily isolated. By observing the number of turns, the amount of speech can also be recorded. If the turns are detailed and extensive, fewer turns are expected at the Advanced level of proficiency. At the lower levels of proficiency, however, if the turns are short and the NSs is continuously asking new questions in order to keep the flow of the conversation going, it is expected that a higher number of turns will be produced. The amount of speech is not intended to account for the learners' fluency, but to see how they interact with NSs. Because interactional competence entails the management of conversation, lower speech production is assumed to imply the lack of the necessary tools to maintain the flow of the conversation.

3.5.2 Qualitative procedures

Chapter 6 is dedicated to a discussion of the results and personal observations of all the participants in the SA group. This section stems from the desire not only to see the interactional practices of the participants, but also from the need to observe the participants' perspectives on the SA experience. The advantage of doing these ethnographic observations is that it facilitates the connection between the quantitative results and how the learners perceive their own progress. Although these observations

may not lead to generalizations, they can provide an insight into the nature of interaction in ways that cannot be achieved by quantitative analysis.

Exhaustive notes were taken on all the circumstances surrounding the learners, ranging from experiences abroad to interactions with the host family members, types of activities that the learners did during the program, type of housing, interactions with NSs out of the classroom, language difficulties, perceptions, etc.

As Wilkinson (2002) pointed out, the use of ethnographic research using detailed transcriptions of mechanically recorded speech for qualitative study is important to gather insights into the act of conversing in another language, both at the micro- and macro-level. Wilkinson used ethnographic techniques to investigate speaker perceptions through tape-recorded conversations between summer SA learners and their French hosts. As noted, she concluded that both NSs and NNSs relied heavily on classroom roles. Negotiation for meaning, repair, and other discourse structures were managed in ways very similar to how they are used in the classroom. The interviews with the researcher at the end of the semester also gave insight into the roles the participants assume (type of discourse that is co-constructed).

The advantage of using quantitative data is that it can provide proof of the cross-tabulation results for a particular variable, but it is important to consider the reasons underlying the tendencies seen in the interactional practices observed.

3.6 LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY OF LEARNERS

Tables 3.6 and 3.7 show the gains in proficiency achieved by every learner involved in this dissertation. In Tables 3.6 and 3.7 levels of proficiency were counted in units of level of proficiency. A grade of 1 was given to a learner at the Novice Low level, a 2 at the Novice Mid level, and so forth, with 10 as the Superior level, which was achieved by only one learner abroad at the end of the semester.

Table 3.6: Group: Study Abroad (Alicante, Spain) (N=Novice; I=Intermediate; A=Advanced; L=Low; M=Medium; H=High)

	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Alexandra	NH	IH
Brendan	NM	IL
Danielle	NL	NH
Erica	NM	IL
Farah	AM	AM
Jeff	IL	AM
John	IM	IH
Julian	IM	IH
Luke	AM	Superior
Megan	IM	AL
Michael	NH	IL
Mollie	IL	IM
Suparna	NH	IM
Ryan	AL	AH
Theresa	AL	AH
Thomas	NL	IL

Table 3.7: Group, At Home

	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Barbara	NH	IM
Caitlin	AL	AH
Drea	NM	IL
Jennifer	AL	IH
Jeremy	NH	IL
Jill	NH	NH
Jonathan	NM	NH
Kelly	IM	IH
Lauren	NM	NH
Lori	IL	IL
Marielle	NM	IL
Matt	NH	NM
Meghan T	NM	NH
Meredith	AL	IH
Nick	AM	AH
Patrick	IL	IL
Pete	IL	IH
Roxana	AL	AH

In conclusion, the present study represents a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods that should provide insight into the interactional practices and learners of this study. Chapter 4 deals with the differences in each level of proficiency of learners abroad, while Chapter 5 looks at the effect that the variables of SA and housing have on the development of those practices.

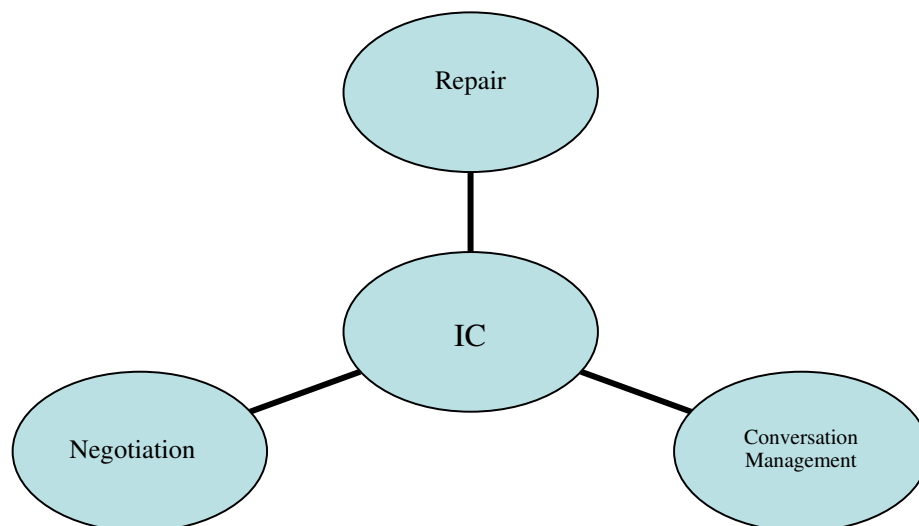
CHAPTER FOUR

Quantitative results: Comparison of IC development by levels of proficiency

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of the data collection, and analysis of learners' IC are presented. Due to the complexity of the concept of IC, this study focuses on three particular IC aspects: repair; negotiation; and conversation management. The first part of this chapter introduces these key factors in the development of IC. Based on these IC components, a model that considers both interlocutors' participation in their dialogue is presented in Figure 4.1. This schema represents how learners (1) manage conversation in terms of transitions, turns, topics, and silences, (2) construct meaning by means of negotiation and collaboration, and (3) receive correction from NSs.

Figure 4.1: Components of interactional competence researched in this study:



4.1 LEARNER STRATEGIES FOR IC

4.1.1 Topic nomination

Topic nomination, turn taking, silences (pauses), and mean length of utterance (MLU) are integral components in the construction of discourse and IC. A topic is a theme of a conversation, or what the interlocutors are talking about (Maynard, 1981). The way in which topics are organized in the conversation is not random. They occur in relatively frequent occurrences through certain patterns and routines, even though occasionally abrupt topic shifts may occur. The way in which a topic is proposed or nominated in the conversation also varies from speaker to speaker in all interactions. Nonetheless, there are general trends in which topics shift. The data from the current investigation show that topics are mainly nominated through questions asked either by the learner or by the NS. The format most commonly found for the nomination of topics was:

Question → answer → conversational continuant/new question

Excerpt 4.1 shows how this routine evolves. When a participant opens a new topic with a question, it is generally followed by an answer. In the next turn the other interlocutor will either use a follow-up question or a conversational continuant such as *sí* [yes] or *muy bien* [very good] until a new question is asked or another statement is offered. Normally, this new question will be semantically related to the previous topic through what Sacks *et al.* (1974) called *co-class membership*. A co-class membership is a semantic relationship in which one topic shares a semantic feature with the next one. For instance, if the topic is food, and in the next question it shifts to wine, that is considered a case of co-membership, which is a natural way in which topical conversation evolves. This pattern follows Grice's (1975) Principle of Cooperation in conversation, which sustains that interchange of information in a conversation must be relevant. According to

Schegloff and Sacks (1973), interactants accommodate their utterances to those of the other speaker. In Excerpt 4.1 from Erica, who started the SA program at the Novice Mid level of proficiency, the NS had control of the floor by nominating topics in turns 1, 3, and 5. In turn 6 Erica took control over the selection of the topics and asked questions in turns 6, 8, and 20. She also showed interactional competence in using appropriate conversational continuants after the NS's answers.

Excerpt 4.1: Erica, Novice Mid (first month with Pablo)

1. NS: ¿Dónde vives? [Where do you live?]
2. NNS: En Alicante, en calle Jijona, cerca de plaza de toros [In Alicante, at Jijona St. near bull ring]
3. NS: ¿Qué estás estudiando? [What are you studying?]
4. NNS: Sí, en la Universidad de Alicante. Estoy estudiando español y lengua y cultura [Yes, at the University of Alicante, I am studying Spanish, and language and culture]
5. NS: ¿Cuántos años tienes? [How old are you?]
6. →NNS: Tengo 26 años ¿cuántos años tienes? [I am 26, how old are you?]
7. NS: Yo 31 [Me, 31]
8. →NNS: ¿Trabajas? [Do you work?]
9. NS: Sí, en un tema de obras, tuberías. ¿Sabes lo que es? [Yes, in construction, with pipes, do you know what it is?]
10. NNS: No [No]
11. NS: Tuberías, agua [Piping, water]
12. NNS: Agua, sí [Water, yes]
13. NS: Ese tipo de obras en la montaña, en los pueblos, ¿entiendes? [That kind of construction, in the mountains, in little towns, do you understand?]
14. NNS: Sí [Yes]
15. NS: No en la capital, no en la ciudad. Yo trabajo a 20 minutos andando de aquí, ¿me entiendes? [Not in the capital, not in the city, I work 20 minutes by foot from here, do you understand?]
16. NNS: Sí, 20 minutos. [Yes, 20 minutes]
17. NS: Andando [Walking]
18. NNS: Sí [Yes]
19. NS: Desde mi casa [From my house]
20. →NNS: ¿Cuánto tiempo tienes esta casa? [How long have you had this house?]

In Excerpt 4.1 there are 3 tokens of topic nomination by the learner. The topic shifts are accomplished through questions that are semantically connected to the

preceding topic through co-class membership. The learner is asking questions semantically related to a more general topic of personal questions such as *where do you live?* or *what do you do?*

Interlocutors shift from one topic to the next by means of semantic extensions. By looking at these shifts one can obtain an indication of how interactionally competent learners are. In a NS-NNS conversation, however, there are other constraints that govern the selection of topics; namely, communication problems or topic difficulty. The learner did not nominate as many topics as the NS because the conversation did not present a symmetrical situation in which both speakers bore the same responsibility. Erica was placed at the Novice Mid level because she was able to satisfy only basic communicative exchanges. She relied on learned utterances and her vocabulary centered on places. In Excerpt 4.2, now in her fourth month of SA, Erica abruptly changes the topic of the conversation while they are talking about religion. The reason for the shift may be because Carmen is the only NS who was over 50 years old (the ages of the other NSs ranged from 26 to 32). The topic shift in turn 8 might have been motivated by boredom or discomfort with a sensitive theme. Likewise, it might have been caused by the difficulty of the topic for the learner, in which case this occurrence would represent a case of avoidance as a communicative strategy. This excerpt shows that Erica, now at the Intermediate Mid level, developed the ability to switch the direction of the conversation, thus gaining control of the floor.

Excerpt 4.2: Erica, Intermediate Mid (fourth month with Carmen)

1. NS: Aquí en España, la religión mayoritaria es católica [Here in Spain, the main religion is Catholic]
2. NNS: Sí [yes]
3. NS: Ahora como hay más inmigrantes hay musulmanes, hay judíos, pero la mayoritaria, que no es confesional es la católica [Now that there are more

- immigrants, there are Muslims, Jews, but primarily, non confessional, they are Catholic]
4. NNS: Sí [Yes]
 5. NS: Pero voluntariamente [But voluntarily]
 6. NNS: ¿Hay muchas personas que practican? [Are there many people who practice?]
 7. NS: Un poco, cuarenta, cincuenta por ciento, bautizados sí hay una mayoría grande, 90 95 por ciento, pero practicante menos, sí, mucho menos, como me imagino que pasara allí también [A little bit, 40, 50%, the great majority are baptized, 90, 95%, but practicing less, yes, much less, as I assume is the case there, too]
 8. →S: Sí. ¿Tienes que trabajar hoy? [Yes, do you have to work today?]

On other occasions learners nominated the topic of the conversation when the NS relinquished the floor of the conversation to the learner, as seen in Excerpt 4.3 from Brendan, at the Novice Mid level, during his first month with Cristina. Cristina had been asking Brendan questions, and allowed him to nominate the topic in turn 1 by telling him to ask questions about Alicante. As a result, he nominates two new topics in turns 2 and 18, where he asks about the weather in Alicante and how safe the city is.

Excerpt 4.3: Brendan, Novice Mid (first month with Cristina)

1. →NS: Pregunta tú si quieres saber algo más [Ask me if you want to know anything else]
2. →NNS: ¿Cuándo hace frío? [When is it cold?]
3. NS: ¿Frío? [Cold?]
4. NNS: Sí [Yes]
5. NS: Noviembre al final, diciembre, no mucho y luego enero y febrero, febrero hace más frío, febrero, febrero el peor mes [The end of November, December not much, but then January and February, February is colder, February, February is the worst month]
6. NNS: ¿Normalmente hace bonito? [Usually is it nice?]
7. NS: En este mes sí, hace buena temperatura, y no hace tanto calor, en septiembre ¿pasaste calor aquí? [In this month yes, temperatures are nice, it's not too hot. In September, were you hot here?]
8. NNS: Oh, yeah [Oh yeah]
9. NS: Este verano ha sido muy malo [This summer has been very bad]
10. NNS: Yeah [Yeah]
11. NS: Normalmente en Alicante no hace tanto calor [Usually in Alicante it is not that hot]

12. NNS: Yo recuerdo en septiembre mi [silence] suda [I remember in September, (silence) sweats]
13. NS: Sudar sí [To sweat, yes]
14. NNS: Sudar [To sweat]
15. NS: ¿Sudabas mucho? [Did you sweat much?]
16. NNS: Sí [Yes]
17. NS: Sí, claro [Yes, of course]
18. →NNS: ¿Alicante es seguro? [Is Alicante safe?]
19. NS: Ahora menos [Now it is less]
20. NNS: ¿Peligroso? [Dangerous?]
21. NS: No, peligroso no, pero hay zonas por las que no se debe ir mucho, pero en el centro normalmente no hay peligro [No, not dangerous, but there are areas where you shouldn't go, but downtown is not usually dangerous]

Long (1983) found a preference for questions in NS-NNS discourse. The data in the current study show that the nature of the topics varies in a continuum from the *here-and-now* orientation to more complex topics such as architecture or the war in Iraq, depending on the learner's level of proficiency. It is through negotiation and scaffolding that the NS finds the appropriate topics to discuss with the learner. In order to examine this issue more closely, two levels of topic difficulty were assigned. For one level, NNSs asked personal questions about the city, foods, and local customs. These topics were labeled as *here-and-now*. A second level of difficulty was assigned for more abstract topics where interactants talked about world events, religion, history, or topics that required some personal opinion or more detailed explanation. This level of difficulty was labeled as *abstract topics*. For instance, the interlocutors might talk about the history of religious centers in a town. It is assumed that, in discussing this kind of topic, less proficient learners would require more negotiation. The data also show that the nature of topics had an impact on the number of tokens of corrective feedback and negotiation.

Table 4.1 reveals that there is a significant difference by level of proficiency in terms of topic nomination. A One-Way ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean of topic nomination for SA learners. Results indicate that there was a difference among the

three groups, $F(2,61) = 5.74$, $p = .005$. A Scheffé post-hoc analysis revealed that Intermediate learners nominated significantly more topics than Novice learners, but there were no significant differences between Intermediate and Advanced learners. In all levels there is a positive correlation between topic nomination and time, which means that learners tended to nominate more topics as the semester advanced.

Table 4.1: Topic Nomination by learners in SA Context (Mean)

	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Novice	1.71	2.28	2.57	3.85	2.50	.381, $p=.045$
Intermediate	4.00	4.80	3.40	4.6	4.17	.238, $p=.312$
Advanced	2.25	2.50	4.00	5.50	3.00	.625, $p=.003$
All Levels	2.56	3.00	3.18	4.68	3.35	.392, $p=.001$

The differences among levels might be correlated to their level of confidence or their growing linguistic ability to nominate topics in the conversation, or both. At the Novice level there are more silences and more negotiation routines, suggesting that there are more communication breakdowns and fewer topic nominations. At the Intermediate level of proficiency, learners are presumably more interactionally competent. This assumption is supported here by the greater number of topic nominations found, probably because these learners have the confidence and the tools to interrupt the NS or take the lead in the conversation. On the other hand, there are more topic nominations at the Intermediate level than at the Advanced level. As learners become more competent, the topics are developed more thoroughly; thus, fewer topics are nominated in the conversation at the Advanced level. A possible explanation for this unexpected difference between the Advanced and Intermediate levels is that learners experience backsliding or

apparent regressions in their linguistic development when they reach the Advanced level, as proposed by Isabelli (2000). Another possible explanation is that Intermediate learners have the ability to nominate topics, but still are not as skillful as Advanced learners to sustain the topics longer, resulting in more topic nominations. The correlation is positive at all levels of proficiency, however. In other words, the learners' development of topic nomination is steady and positive relative to the various levels of proficiency.

There are different factors that may result in fewer topic nominations during the first months at the Advanced level. It can be observed that the total mean of topic nominations is higher for the Intermediate level but, in the third and fourth months, Advanced learners initiated a higher number of topics. It may be that they were simply interactionally less competent and did not develop this ability to interact until the third month of the study. At the Advanced level, and by the third and fourth months, topics may be developed in detail, and learners can talk more at length about different topics and even acknowledge jokes. At the same time, there were very few articulations of stories, and most of the conversations were sequences of topical talk. As Maynard (1981, p. 259) notes, topical talk "often proceeds by one person being signed as topical-speaker and one as a recipient", and it is the role of the recipient to give conversation continuants such as *sí* [yes], or gestures of acknowledgement. The roles change when the learner takes the initiative to nominate the new topics or when the floor is granted to the learner by the NS.

Another difference that was noted among the learners of different levels of proficiency is the quality of the topics nominated in the conversation. Table 4.2 shows that there are differences in the way in which topics are changed or nominated in the conversation and in the nature of topics. As expected, there is a tendency to nominate topics that are semantically related to the previous topic. Abrupt changes at all levels of

proficiency are not significant. *Co-class* or semantic extensions of previous topics are predominant in every group and a One-way ANOVA revealed that there are significant differences among groups ($F(2,61) = 5.25, p = .08$). Novice speakers used co-class topic shifts on an average of 2.46 per conversation as compared to 4.00 at the Intermediate level and 3.31 at the Advanced level. A Scheffé post-hoc analysis revealed that Intermediate learners nominated significantly more co-class topics than Novice learners, but there were no significant differences between Intermediate and Advanced learners, and Novice and Advanced learners. A Pearson correlation coefficient showed that there is a positive relationship between co-class topic nomination and number of months for the Novice ($r = .40, p = .04$), Intermediate ($r = .19, p = .405$), and Advanced ($r = .69, p = .012$) learners.

Results also show that there were no differences among the three groups in the mean of abrupt topic changes for SA learners, $F(2,61) = 2.65, p = .07$. A Pearson correlation coefficient showed that there is a positive relationship between abrupt topic changes and number of months for the Novice and Intermediate levels, but not for the Advanced level. These correlations are not significant at the .05 level. Therefore, no inferences may be drawn from the relationship between time and abrupt topic change.

A One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean of nomination of here-and-now topics for SA learners. Results indicate that there was a significant difference among the three groups, $F(2,61) = 5.72, p = .005$. A Scheffé post-hoc analysis revealed that Intermediate learners nominated significantly more here-and-now topics than Novice learners, and Advanced learners nominated significantly more here-and-now topics than Intermediate learners, but there were no significant differences between Intermediate and Advanced learners. A Pearson correlation coefficient showed that there is a significant positive relationship ($r = .36, p = .01$) between the mean of all levels and number of

months, thus confirming the general trend that learners tend to nominate more topics over time.

A One-way ANOVA revealed that there are significant differences in the mean of topic nomination of abstract topics for SA learners, $F(2,61) = 4.43, p = .01$. A Scheffé post-hoc analysis revealed that Advanced learners nominated significantly more abstract topics than Novice learners, and there were no significant differences between Novice and Intermediate learners, or Advanced and Intermediate learners. A Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a positive relationship between the mean of nomination of abstract topics by all levels and time ($r = .43, p = .03$).

Table 4.2: Topic nomination by the learner, transitions, and nature of the topic

Novice	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Co-class	1.71	1.71	.85	2.42	2.46	.41, $p=.04$
Abrupt	0	.28	0	.28	.25	.18, $p=.57$
Here-and-now	1.71	2.28	2.28	3.14	2.39	.31, $p=.13$
Abstract topics	0	.14	.14	.71	.25	.43 $p=.03$
Intermediate	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Co-class	3.6	4.4	3.4	4.6	4	.19, $p=.40$
Abrupt	.4	.4	0	.2	.25	.25, $p=.57$
Here-and-now	3.4	3.8	3	4	3.55	.10, $p=.64$
Abstract topics	.61	.60	1.4	1.2	.70	.32, $p=.16$
Advanced	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Co-class	2.00	1.57	3.5	5.25	3.31	.69, $p=.01$
Abrupt	.25	0	.5	.25	.25	-.10, $p=.51$
Here-and-now	1.2	1.8	3	4	2.38	.50, $p=.02$
Abstract topics	.75	.25	1	1.5	.87	.40, $p=.07$

As shown in Table 4.2, at the Novice level learners used mostly simple topics such as place of origin, academic specialization, and length of time abroad. Abstract topics, defined previously as topics that required some personal opinion and abstraction or more detailed explanation, were addressed more by Advanced speakers (.87 abstract

topics per conversation versus .70 at the Intermediate level and .25 at the Novice level). At all levels there is a positive correlation for the use of abstract topics, which means that learners felt more comfortable in talking about topics that required more details as they became more interactionally competent over time.

In sum, it has been observed that, as learners become more proficient, they nominate more topics until their proficiency stabilizes at the Intermediate and Advanced level. The correlations show that learners' development of topic nomination is steady and positive across levels of proficiency, which may be correlated to the development of their IC over time. Questions are a preferred way of nominating new topics, and topical talk is present in all conversations. It has also been observed that co-class membership topic nomination is the preferred mechanism for changing topics in a conversation. The correlations and statistical differences illustrate that the nature of topics also changes as learners become more competent, as they shift from simple to more abstract topics.

Topic nomination by the NS

Another important trait of IC is the sequential organization of conversation. This trait is manifested not only by the organization of turns at talk, but also by the organization of topic nomination. That the NSs choose the topic provides much information about the IC of the learner in three aspects: (a) nature of the topic; (b) length of the topic; and (c) the way in which the topic is proposed. Some learners take responsibility and ask questions in a conversation, or sometimes the NSs yield the floor to the learners by encouraging them to talk and ask questions about Spain. The length of the topics varied and they were sustained longer with learners at the Advanced level of proficiency.

In interactions with NNSs of higher levels of proficiency, the topics were expanded through questions and elaborations of the topic, often leading to new topics that

were more complex in nature. Since topics were more elaborated by learners of higher levels of proficiency, there were not only more words per turn, but also fewer topics. The differences can be seen when comparing a Novice with an Advanced learner. In Excerpt 4.4, Luke, who was at the Advanced level when he arrived in Spain, answered the question with detailed information about the location of the city of Boulder, Colorado, and how far it was from his home. The conversation then led to where he was living now, which opened a new topic because he lived close to the bull ring in Alicante, and heard his NS interlocutor talk about bull fighting. In Erica's case in Excerpt 4.5, she did not provide any detail about the location of Boulder but, in both cases, the learners were speaking about the same topic, which was classified as a *here-and-now* topic.

Excerpt 4.4: Luke, Advanced Low (first month with Pablo)

1. NS: ¿De dónde eres? [Where are you from?]
2. NNS: Vengo de Colorado, vivo allí por toda mi vida. Nací en Denver, Colorado y fui allí hasta que fui a la Universidad de Colorado que está en Boulder, es más o menos cuarenta y cinco minutos en coche de mi casa. [I come from Colorado, I have lived there all my life. I was born in Denver, Colorado, I was there until I went to school at the University of Colorado at Boulder, it is about 45 minutes from home by car]

Excerpt 4.5: Erica, Novice Mid (first month with Pablo)

1. NS: En Estados Unidos, ¿en qué estado vives? [In the US, in which state do you live?]
2. NNS: ¿Las playas? [The beaches?]
3. NS: En Estados Unidos ¿en qué parte? [In the US, in which part?]
4. NNS: (Silence)
5. NS: ¿En qué ciudad? [In which city?]
6. NNS: Oh, sí, Denver, Boulder [Oh, yes, Denver, Boulder]
7. NS: Denver, sí, Colorado [Denver, yes, Colorado]

On the other hand, for learners at the Novice Low level, topics are nominated by the NS when there is a communication breakdown as a way to restore interaction. In Excerpt 4.6, topic shifts are produced by the NS to accommodate to the learner's

communicative needs. As a result, the learner does not nominate the topics and relies on the NS to take the initiative. Excerpt 4.6 shows that there are many overlapping processes in the form of (a) different types of negotiation, (b) accommodation by the NS to the level of proficiency of the learner (through simplification of grammar), and (c) the use of simple topics with the *here-and-now* orientation. Despite the effort by the learner to gain some control of the conversation in turn 4, the NS insists on asking the learner what city she is from in turn 9. Nonetheless, despite the simplicity of the topic and the negotiation for meaning, the learner is unable to follow the conversation, and the NS is forced to move on to another topic in turn 17. In this case, two tokens of topic nomination were counted for the NS, and none for the learner (*Where are you from* and *what do you study?*).

Excerpt 4.6: Danielle, Novice Low (first month with Rosario)

1. NS: ¿Dónde naciste? [Where were you born?]
2. NNS: Estadounidense, mi nacionalidad [American, my nationality]
3. NS: ¿En qué ciudad? [In which city?]
4. →NNS: ¿Qué tu nacionalidad? [What your nationality?]
5. NS: ¿Nacionalidad? [Nationality?]
6. NNS: Sí [Yes]
7. NS: Española, ¿y tú? [Spanish, and you?]
8. NNS: Estadounidense [American]
9. NS: Estadounidense, ¿Y en qué ciudad naciste? [American, and in which city were you born?]
10. NNS: (Silence)
11. NS: Ciudad, pueblo, tú naciste [City, town, you were born]
12. NNS: (Silence)
13. NS: De nacer, de pequeña, tú cuando eras pequeña ¿dónde vivías? [Born, when you were a kid, as a child, where did you live?]
14. NNS: (Silence)
15. NS: ¿Cerca de una ciudad importante en Estados Unidos? [Near an important city in the US?]
16. NNS: Mucho lejos de Estados Unidos? [Very far from the US?]
17. →NS: Bueno bueno, ¿cuántos años tienes? [Ok, ok, how old are you?]

Maynard (1981, p. 261) notes that “on some occasions, a series of silences occur, indicating the failure of prior topic to yield successful transfer of speakership. It is in these situations that topic changes regularly appear, as a solution to the problem of producing continuous talk”. The same pattern is seen here.

As learners advance to higher levels of proficiency, the routines and ways in which topics are nominated start to change. In a NS-NS exchange it is more likely that there will be more symmetry in the level of responsibility of interactants to be in charge of developing the topic, since topical talk is a collaborative procedure. In a NS-NNS interaction, it is the NS who is in charge of developing the topic, while the learners at the Advanced level of proficiency are able to use continuants, questions, and other developmental utterances that help with the sequence of the conversation. For instance, Ryan, an Advanced speaker, is discussing in Excerpt 4.7 the same topic as Danielle, about his city of origin. In this example, the dynamic of the conversation is very different. The NS Carmen wants to know the city that Ryan comes from, so she opens the topic in turn 3. Since topical talk is collaborative, when Carmen makes a joke about Indiana Jones in turn 5, Ryan is able to continue or acknowledge the joke, which he does in turn 6. Although the NS is still in charge of nominating the topics, and the nature of the conversation is still topical (not narrative), Ryan is able to use conversation continuants, answer the questions without communication breakdowns, and acknowledge a joke.

Excerpt 4.7: Ryan, Advanced Low (Second month with Carmen)

1. NS: Yo soy española [I am Spanish]
2. NNS: Yo soy americano [I am American]
3. NS: ¿De qué parte de América? [From which part of America?]
4. NNS: Vivo en un estado se llama Indiana [I live in a state called Indiana]
5. NS: Como Indiana Jones [Like Indiana Jones]
6. NNS: Sí, sí él vivía en Indiana, pero muy cerca de Chicago, el lago Michigan [Yes, he lived in Indiana, but near Chicago, in Lake Michigan]

7. NS: ¿Y tú de qué parte de Indiana eres? [And which part of Indiana are you from?]
8. NNS: Mi ciudad se llama Fort Wayne, está dos horas al norte de Indianápolis y tres horas al sur de Detroit, más o menos en el medio de las dos ciudades.[My town is called Fort Wayne, it is about two hours north of Indianápolis, and three south of Detroit, about half way between both cities]
9. NS: De las dos ciudades. ¿Has ido a Indianápolis alguna vez? [Between both cities. Have you ever been to Indianapolis?]
10. NNS: Sí [Yes]

In this case, only one topic nomination was counted for the NS (*where are you from*). Nevertheless, since the topic is continued by the learner with the correct answers and questions about the topic, the topic is sustained longer, and the NS is not forced to switch topics, as is typically seen in exchanges with learners of lower levels of proficiency.

Table 4.3, in accordance with what has been observed above, shows a similar tendency for NSs to nominate fewer topics as learners become more interactionally competent, $F(2,61) = 12.30, p = .02$. The differences among groups are significant at the .05 level, and the table shows that the most notable change is seen at the Intermediate level, in which learners started receiving 7.4 topic nominations from the NSs and ended with 6.4. A Scheffé post-hoc analysis revealed that there were significant differences between the Novice and Intermediate levels, and between the Novice and Advanced levels, but there were no significant differences between the Intermediate and Advanced levels. At the Novice level, learners received more topic nominations from the NSs than at any other level, with a total average of 9.06 topics per ten minutes of conversation. At the Advanced level, learners received more topic nominations than those at the Intermediate level, as shown by their overall average (7.65). Combining all learners abroad, a Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a negative correlation ($r = -.38, p = .001$), showing that the number of proposed topics by NSs decreased over time.

Table 4.3: Topic nomination by the NSs with learners of different levels

	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Novice	11.28	9.28	8.57	7.28	9.06	-.46, <i>p</i> =.04
Intermediate	7.40	7.40	5.80	5.00	7.65	-.60, <i>p</i> =.001
Advanced	8	7.50	6.25	6.50	6.41	-.24, <i>p</i> =.12.
All Levels	9.25	8.25	7.12	6.37	7.82	-.38, <i>p</i> =.001

According to Gass and Selinker (2001), topic shifts may result from repeated attempts to negotiate for meaning. There is also a negative Pearson correlation ($r = -.40$, $p = .001$) between the number of topics nominated by the NSs and those nominated by the learners, which means that there is a tendency of the learners to nominate more topics as they become more interactionally competent and take some control of the conversation. As shown by Schmidt-Rinehart (1994, p. 179), “the listener’s stereotypical knowledge based on prior experiences predisposes him or her to construct expectations in terms of seven areas: speaker, listener, place, time, genre, topic, and co-text”. Schmidt-Rinehart showed that when learners talked about religion in a second language, religious background influenced listening comprehension: learners recalled more information, and provided more elaborations when talking about their own religion. Chiang *et al.* (1992) had shown a positive effect of topic familiarity on second language listening comprehension. Table 4.4 shows the distribution of the nature of topics by learners in each level of proficiency. The majority of topics nominated in conversations with Novice speakers are familiar to the learners, while the number of familiar topics decreases at the end of the continuum. Advanced learners, however being more interactionally competent, are able to sustain a conversation about a more complex or abstract topic.

Table 4.4: Nature of topic nomination by the NSs with learners of different levels

	Here-and-now	Abstract
Novice	94.54%	5.46%
Intermediate	83.53%	16.47%
Advanced	73.24%	26.76%

4.1.2 Turn taking

In IC, the way that turns are organized in the conversation is also important, along with topic nomination. This information provides an insight into how language is used in NS-NNS interactions. Turn-taking, like topic nomination, provides information about the way in which conversation routines are established. Turn-taking is organized under certain social rules that govern who is taking a turn in a conversation. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) described turn-taking in conversation and the preference hierarchy that underlies the system and organization of turns. They made an inventory of these preferences and observed that speaker change is recurrent, so there is almost always one party talking at a time. They noticed the turn-allocation component of conversation, and distributed it in two groups: (a) the group in which the turn is allocated by the current speaker's selecting the next speaker; and (b) the group in which a next turn is allocated by self-selection. In Excerpts 4.8 and 4.9 of Danielle and Ryan interacting with NSs (cited as Excerpts 4.6 and 4.7 above), it can be seen that it is the NS who allocates the turns of the conversation. By maintaining the question-answer routine, two maxims of turn-taking in conversation are maintained. First, via control of the conversation, the NS unconsciously assures that the one speaker talks per turn, and makes sure that no gaps or overlaps are present in the conversation. Comparing Danielle's excerpt at the Novice Low level of proficiency in Excerpt 4.8 with that of Ryan at the Advanced level of proficiency in Excerpt 4.9, one can observe some differences. They are talking about the same topic, which is their hometown or origin. In both cases the topic is simple and should have been managed well by the NNS. The NS is in charge of managing the turns

when the learner is not able to do so. In Danielle's interaction, she does not speak during her turns because she is not interactionally competent enough to maintain the conversation by giving answers or conversation continuants to the NS in turns 2, 4, and 6. This case illustrates the learner is not proficient to provide these continuants. There were only two learners at the Novice level who were not able to use conversation continuants; however, by the second month, the number of silences decreased dramatically in Danielle's case even when she was still at the Novice Low level of proficiency. This pattern shows that the development of IC is parallel to the development of linguistic proficiency. When the one-speaker-at-a-time preference is broken, there are mechanisms to make up for these violations. The NS changes topics, completes the learner's utterance, corrects the learner, or negotiates with the learner by reformulating the question and making sure that the turns are maintained. Ultimately the NS will switch topics as shown with Danielle in turn 9.

Excerpt 4.8: Danielle, Novice Low (first month with Rosario).

1. NS: Estadounidense, ¿Y en qué ciudad naciste? [American, in which city were you born?]
2. NNS: (Silence)
3. NS: Ciudad, pueblo, tú naciste [City, town, were you born?]
4. NNS: (silence)
5. NS: De nacer, de pequeña, tú cuando eras pequeña ¿dónde vivías? [Born, when you were small, where did you live?]
6. NNS: (Silence)
7. NS: ¿Cerca de una ciudad importante en Estados Unidos? [Near an important city in the US?]
8. NNS: Mucho lejos de Estados Unidos ..? [Very far from the US?]
9. NS: Bueno bueno, ¿cuántos años tienes? [Ok, ok, how old are you?]

In the case of Ryan in Excerpt 4.9, when discussing the same topic of origin, the NS is managing the turns and Ryan is able to interact with the NS by accepting all the turns and even acknowledging a joke. Not only does he answer the questions but he also expands his answers as in turn 8.

Excerpt 4.9: Ryan, Advanced Low (second month, with Carmen)

1. NS: Yo soy española [I am Spanish]
2. NNS: Yo soy americano [I am American]
3. NS: ¿De qué parte de América? [From which part of America?]
4. NNS: Vivo en un estado se llama Indiana [I live in a state called Indiana]
5. NS: Como Indiana Jones [Like Indiana Jones]
6. NNS: Sí, sí él vivía en Indiana, pero muy cerca de Chicago, el lago Michigan [Yes, he lived in Indiana, but near Chicago, in Lake Michigan]
7. NS: ¿Y tú de qué parte de Indiana eres? [And what part of Indiana are you from?]
8. NNS: Mi ciudad se llama Fort Wayne, está dos horas al norte de Indianápolis y tres horas al sur de Detroit, más o menos en el medio de las dos ciudades.[My town is called Fort Wayne, it is about two hours north of Indianápolis, and three south of Detroit, more or less between both cities].
9. NS: De las dos ciudades. ¿Has ido a Indianápolis alguna vez? [Both cities, have you ever been to Indianapolis?]
10. NNS: Sí [Yes]

Thus, the variable of complex-simple topic is a parameter that can be correlated to the length of turns. As the number of complex topics increases, the number of words per turn also increases and the number of silences decreases.

In both Excerpts 4.8 and 4.9, turns are organized in pairs of questions and answers, which illustrates what Schegloff and Sacks (1973, p. 296) called “adjacency pairs”. These pairs provide structure to the way in which turns are organized in the conversation. The rule underlying this process is that, “given the recognizable production of a first part, on its first possible completion its speaker should stop and a next speaker should start and produce a second pair part from the part type in which the first is recognizably a member”. As they pointed out, *a priori*, the number or length of turns at talk cannot be predicted, and the organization of adjacency pairs is a characteristic of unplanned conversation. In these two excerpts the organization of turns at talk follows the adjacency pair pattern by means of question and answer. The quantity of speech in each turn, and the number of pauses or silences also affects the number of turns of each

learner. For learners at lower levels of proficiency, there are also more silences by the learner, fewer WPT, and more topics initiated by the NS.

On the other hand, as the number of complex topics increases, the number of words per turn also increases, while the number of silences and the number of turns per conversation decreases.⁵ Table 4.5 shows that the number of turns per conversation is not significantly different among levels of proficiency, $F = .12, p = .88$, even though there is a decrease in turns. There are more turns-at-talk by Novice learners (66.92) at the beginning of the semester than by Intermediate (57.8) or Advanced (58) learners. Over time, as they become more interactionally competent, this tendency becomes less evident because the turns become longer, and the total number of turns per learner per conversation at the Novice level decreases to 57. On the other hand, the tendency is positive for Intermediate learners and negative for Advanced learners. It was expected that the number of turns would decrease over time and among levels of proficiency because learners can handle topics better and can discuss topics in greater depth, and there are fewer communication breakdowns and fewer negotiation routines, but this pattern is only partially confirmed by these data. A Pearson correlation coefficient revealed that there was a non-significant negative correlation between number of turns and time for Novice learners ($r = -.24, p = .13$) and the Advanced level ($r = -.35, p = .17$), and a positive correlation at the Intermediate level ($r = .18, p = .43$). These coefficients are not significant, and the overall correlation for all levels is not significant ($r = -.13, p = .27$).

⁵ Turns were counted in the first 10-minutes of conversations

Table 4.5: Learners' number of turns per conversation

	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Novice	66.92	61.42	58.42	57	60.94	-.24, <i>p</i> =.13
Intermediate	57.80	66.90	61.60	65.50	62.95	.18, <i>p</i> =.43
Advanced	58.00	54.62	53.75	49.12	53.87	-.35, <i>p</i> =.17
All Levels	61.84	61.43	58.25	57.68	59.80	-.13, <i>p</i> =.27

No conclusive patterns have been observed in the data, but there is an inverted U shaped pattern observed in the total number of turns across levels of proficiency. This shape is also observed during the second, third, and fourth months, which might also be explained by the linguistic and IC of learners, and their development during the semester abroad. This shape or pattern has been observed in previous studies (Ellis, 1994; and Isabelli, 2000) because the process of acquisition is a complex one that requires learners to develop a gradual development of each facet of language, including IC. Therefore, learners experience periods of backsliding or regressions in their process of acquisition, which are more evident at the Intermediate level.

4.1.3 Number of silences and words per turn

In order to measure the learners' ability to follow the flow of the conversation, two traits were examined. First, the length of turns has traditionally been measured by the mean length of utterance (MLU). MLU has been used to measure children's linguistic development, and it can be applied in the same way to L2 development to measure if the learner improves in the number of words in each turn. MLU is an important indicator of the learner's ability to negotiate for meaning because if there are many silences, it indicates a lack of the necessary communicative resources to avoid conversational trouble and, therefore, the ability to repair discourse. MLU averages the number of morphemes over 100 utterances. The present study measured the number of words per turn (WPT)

averaged per every 10 minutes of conversation. The first pattern shows that learners are interactionally competent at the level of conversation management, and the number of silences affects this pattern and the overall number of WPT. For instance, in the example of Danielle's interaction, it is clear that she could understand and produce verbal cues. In her second month, even though she is still at the Novice Low level of proficiency, Danielle was able to use these types of cues even if she did not understand, as seen in Excerpt 4.10. In this case there is a communication breakdown in turn 5 but Danielle was able to use a clarification request instead of not responding at all. The level of proficiency was still Novice Low, but she was interactionally more competent and had drastically reduced the number of silences. Also, she used more words per turn than she did during the first interview and she was able to answer simple questions with the *here-and-now* orientation.

Excerpt 4.10: Danielle, Novice Low (second month with David)

1. NS: Hola, ¿cuánto tiempo llevas en España? [Hi, how long have you been in Spain?]
2. NNS: Dos meses [Two months]
3. NS: Dos meses [Two months]
4. NNS: Hoy [Today]
5. NS: ¿El cumpleaños? [The birthday?]
6. NNS: ¿5 de abril? [5 of April?]
7. NS: Cuéntame qué experiencias has tenido en España interesantes [Tell me what interesting experiences you have had in Spain]
8. NNS: Voy a la castillo [I am going to the castle]
9. NS: Al castillo [To the castle]
10. NNS: Fue interesante, y la gente caminan los bares [It was interesting, and people walk the bars]
11. NS: Ahá [Uhum]

Since most conversations in the data are carried out via questions and answers, there is a pattern of adjacency pairs. Questions, by nature, are likely going to produce adjacency pair units because they need an answer in order to be functional. Therefore, the number of turns per 10-minute conversation is revealing of the IC level of the learners.

For instance, in the case of Danielle, in the first interview she was not able to manage a conversation about her origin, while in the third interview she conversed about the national custom of Thanksgiving dinner more adequately. Even though there were communication breakdowns, she was able to request clarification and solve problems. At a higher level of proficiency, Luke was able to talk about U.S. history and the churches of Alicante.

The number of silences and WPT are good indicators of IC because many silences can indicate a lack of the necessary communicative resources to avoid conversational trouble and, by extension, the ability to repair discourse. At the same time, the data suggest that as the learners become more fluent and interactionally competent they tend to elaborate topics more. Consequently, it is expected that learners at the Advanced level will express significantly more words and fewer silences, which should also decrease over time. Table 4.6 shows that this argument is confirmed. The number of silences among groups decreases from 1.46 to 0. However, a One-Way ANOVA revealed that the difference among levels of proficiency was not significant, $F(2,61) = 2.57, p = .08$. The Pearson correlation coefficient between the number of silences and time for all levels is significant, ($r = -.65, p = .02$). Thus, considering the data from all groups, it appears that these SA learners used significantly fewer silences over time.

Table 4.6: Number of silences (lack of response)

	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Novice	4.42	.57	.42	.42	1.46	-1.12 <i>p</i> =.47
Intermediate	1.60	.40	.60	.20	.70	-.40 <i>p</i> =.12
Advanced	0	0	0	0	0	0
All Levels	2.43	.37	.37	.25	.85	-.656 <i>p</i> =.02

Table 4.7 shows that the differences in WPT are significant among levels of proficiency, $F(2,61) = 9.22$, $p = .001$. A Scheffé' post-hoc analysis revealed that there were significant differences between the Novice and Advanced levels and between the Intermediate and Advanced levels, but not between the Novice and Intermediate levels. A Pearson correlation coefficient reveals that there is a positive tendency when considering all levels ($r = .29$, $p = .02$).

Table 4.7: Words per turn

	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's r
Novice	5.33	5.83	7.33	7.85	6.59	.43, $p=.02$
Intermediate	6.92	6.34	6.96	7.49	6.93	.15, $p=.51$
Advanced	8.39	11.17	13.82	14.18	11.89	.46, $p=.06$
All Levels	6.59	7.32	8.85	9.32	8.02	.29, $p=.02$

Considering this finding, it can be suggested that this group of learners shows a pattern of more improvement in their elaboration as shown by their WPT. This tendency is more apparent at the Novice and Advanced levels, which would confirm previous studies by Brown (1994), and the U-shaped curve of learning proposed by Ellis (1994). Despite the fact that the correlation between WPT and time is only significant at the Novice level, $r = .43$, $p = .02$, the frequencies suggest a more notable improvement between the Intermediate and Advanced levels.

4.1.4 Register

Another important component of IC is register knowledge and control because the learner has to learn not only the linguistic and communicative features of a language but also the sociocultural and pragmatic features of the target community. The model used in this study includes linguistic and sociolinguistic components. Wells (1981, p. 47) defines interaction as a collaborative activity that involves “the establishment of a triangular relationship between the sender, the receiver, and the context of situation.”. Following

this definition, it is important to include the context of communication as a factor in the IC of the learner. The sociocultural rules of the particular target culture will determine the appropriate register to employ in a given situation. In Spanish, variation in politeness use relates to the expression of various subject forms and conjugations. The use of second person singular *tú* or *usted* [you] are subject forms that encode a system of politeness and have different syntactic manifestations in the form of different verb forms: *tú* is used with the second person singular verb paradigm and *usted* is used with the third person singular paradigm of the verb. The knowledge of the implied sociocultural rules associated with these pronominal forms is part of the IC required for conversation and involves the use of the proper register in a given situation. Thus, it is also important to look for indicators of that knowledge. In the present study, all the learners were paired at least one time with Carmen, a NS who was 58 years old. Given the fact that all learners were between 19 and 26 years old, it was expected they would use *usted* with Carmen, at least the first time they met with her. Their syntactic choices are also reflective of their knowledge of these sociocultural norms. For instance, Ryan, an Advanced learner, did not use the *usted* form when asking a question. Although it might have been a performance error, it might also implies that he was not aware of this use.

Excerpt 4.11: Ryan (first month with Carmen).

1. NNS: ¿Has vivido aquí en Alicante toda tu vida? [Have you lived in Alicante all your life?]
2. NS: Llevo 33 años. [I have for 33 years]

There are other sociocultural patterns that entail the sociocultural knowledge of the target language, in which both participants co-construct a social hierarchy, but they would be difficult to measure. One example is the use of conditional verb forms as a mark of politeness to make a request as opposed to the use of the imperative or direct questions in the present tense: *¿podrías pasarme la sal?* [Would you pass me the salt?]

versus *pásame la sal* [pass me the salt] or *¿me pasas la sal* [will you pass me the salt?]. In the present study the use of *tú* and *usted* was found to be a tangible indicator of the learners' knowledge and control of use of those L2 sociocultural values. Agar (1994) called these indicators *rich points*. For Young (1998), rich points are

those interactional phenomena experienced by us as users of a second language that seem to contrast greatly with our native practices. Rich points are not only just linguistic differences; however, they are deep clues to the culture and values that appear saliently in speech that the natives command effortlessly but that may appear strange, weird, and even despicable to outsiders. (p. 357)

As an example, Regan (1995) studied the deletion of *ne* in French and used this aspect to measure the sociocultural acquisition of French. The French *ne*, as a mark of negation, is omitted in informal style. She found out that the rates of *ne* deletion more than doubled after the year abroad, which suggests that learners accommodate to the NS sociolinguistic norms as a result of a stay abroad.

According to Regan (1995), sociolinguistic norms are acquired in the advanced stages of language development. As shown by Regan (1995) and Guntermann (1995), learners at the Advanced level of proficiency do not show a great improvement in linguistic proficiency after one semester abroad, but they show development of sociocultural and pragmatic rules. Young (1991) maintains that sociolinguistic norms and stylistic variation can be acquired only after the linguistic structural elements of language have been acquired. Thus, it was hypothesized that learners would acquire the use of *tú* and *usted* only at the higher levels of proficiency. The data of the present study showed that, when interacting with an older speaker, none of the learners at the Novice level of proficiency used *usted* when interacting with Carmen. Only three at the Intermediate level and two at the Advanced level used this mark of register, which agrees with the previous findings by Regan (1995) in French or Marriott (1995) in Japanese. However,

no statistical analyses were conducted due to the low frequency of instances; thus, the results cannot be taken as a quantitative indicator.

4.2 DISCUSSION OF CORRECTION AND NEGOTIATION

4.2.1 Corrective feedback by NSs

Another variable that was observed in this study was the amount of corrective feedback that the learners received. The pattern shows that the amount of feedback given to the learners decreased over time at every level of proficiency. The NS normally assumed the role of trying to fix the communication breakdown when the learner did not understand or when the learner made a grammatical mistake. The role of corrective feedback is to point out grammatical or lexical mistakes that are perceived by the NS as problematic.

Table 4.8 shows that the amount of feedback received by the learners decreased over time. Tokens of corrective feedback by the NS were counted for each month in which learners were interviewed. A One-Way ANOVA revealed that there is a significant difference in the quantity of corrective feedback that learners received among levels of proficiency, $F(2,61) = 1.23, p = .01$. A Scheffé post-hoc analysis revealed that there is a statistical difference between the Novice and Intermediate levels, and between the Novice and Advanced levels, but no statistical differences were found between the Intermediate and Advanced levels. A Pearson correlation coefficient revealed that, as a group, SA learners received less corrective feedback over time ($r = -.18, p = .13$), but this correlation is not significant. NSs use fewer tokens of corrective feedback, which are aimed at solely correcting the learner and not at solving a communication breakdown as in the case of negotiation. The literature (Chun *et al.*, 1982; Doughty, 1987) shows that NSs tend not to correct learners, probably because correction is a face-threatening speech

act. Table 4.8 confirms that there is very little correction at all levels of proficiency. From an interactional point of view, the tendencies show a greater interactional development as learners advance, since the NSs do not feel the urge to correct them when there is no communication breakdown.

Table 4.8: Corrective feedback received by levels of proficiency.

	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Novice	8.00	5.42	4.42	5.14	5.75	-.95 <i>p</i> =.06
Intermediate	3.00	3.40	3.00	3.00	3.10	-.029 <i>p</i> =.90
Advanced	2.00	2.50	2.00	1.75	2.06	-.12 <i>p</i> =.66

It is also important to account for the type of feedback received by learners because it may have different effects on the acquisition of Spanish and IC in Spanish. NSs showed different types of corrective feedback for each level of proficiency. Recently, Koike and Pearson (2005) established a relationship between explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of pragmatic rules in Spanish in the classroom setting. They drew the conclusion that explicit corrective feedback helps learners understand the pragmatic rules that underlie the production of suggestions in Spanish, but they also found that implicit feedback helps learners *produce* appropriate pragmatic utterances. Thus, they noted that the effect of implicit or explicit feedback may have a different effect on different areas of language acquisition.

Pica (1998) found that explicit corrective feedback may force learners to be aware of the pragmatic resources available in the language while mitigating the face-threatening act of a correction. Therefore, it is important to show the type of corrective feedback received by learners. In the present study, the data show little explicit correction at all levels, implying that the learners got better interactionally, and showed more confidence

that was perceived by NSs as a sign for less intervention. A direct correction might be produced as a recast in which the NS repeats the correct form of an error, while an indirect correction is a recast without explicitly pointing out that there is an error, as shown in Excerpt 4.12.

Excerpt 4.12: Indirect corrective feedback. Erica, Novice Mid (first month with Pablo)

1. NNS: Ayer estuve a la universidad [yesterday I was to the university]
2. NS: ¿Ayer estuviste *en* la Universidad? [Yesterday you were *at* the university]

Table 4.9 shows that NSs interact differently with Novice learners. Results show that there are differences among groups regarding the use of explicit and implicit corrective feedback. A One-Way Anova revealed that there were not statistical differences in the use of explicit corrective feedback among levels of proficiency, $F(2,61) = 1, p = .37$. On the other hand, the analysis revealed statistical differences in the use of implicit corrective feedback by NSs among levels of proficiency, $F(2,61) = 7.03, p = .002$. As stated previously, corrections are a face-threatening speech act, which in many cases the NSs may choose to mitigate by making the correction implicit. Sometimes, the indirect corrections were done in the form of recasts with options because the NSs may feel that they have to provide the learners with the linguistic tools that they lack so they continue their conversation and avoid communication breakdowns. This assistance is a way in which NSs adjust to the learners' level of proficiency. For this reason, it is understandable that it happens more in the lower levels of proficiency, thus demonstrating the learners' inability to interact with the interlocutor. For all SA learners, a Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a decreasing use of implicit feedback ($r = -.23, p = .057$) and explicit feedback ($r = -.09, p = .46$). These correlations, although showing a decrease in number over time, are not very strong and they are not significant. The small number of corrective feedback make it difficult to make inferences for the population, but

the decreasing tokens of corrective feedback among groups and over time confirm the learners' improvement on IC, and the reluctance of NSs to correct learners. Schegloff *et al.*'s (1977) theory of preference for self-correction and mitigated correction are also confirmed from the data. It is also interactionally revealing because it shows that more Advanced learners, even if they make grammatical mistakes are not usually corrected by the NSs.

Table 4.9: Types of corrective feedback by level of proficiency

Novice	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Explicit	1.42	1.28	1.28	1.14	1.28	-.071 <i>p</i> =.72
Implicit	5.13	2.28	2.28	1.71	2.83	-.58 <i>p</i> =.05
Intermediate	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Explicit	.40	1.60	.60	1.40	1.00	.20 <i>p</i> =.72
Implicit	2.70	1.20	1.80	.60	.132	-.240 <i>p</i> =.21
Advanced	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Explicit	1.75	.75	.75	0.00	.81	-.52 <i>p</i> =.01
Implicit	0.50	0.50	1.75	1.25	1	.15 <i>p</i> =.13

In conclusion, it is shown in this section that the amount of corrective feedback received in natural conversations is not very high, and significantly decreases over time and among levels of proficiency, which confirms previous studies. There is a steady and constant decrease. The data confirm that learners made steady progress between the Novice and Intermediate levels, but tend to stabilize at the Advanced level. These results are similar to the tendencies of other categories examined here, in which they even experience backsliding. On the other hand, NSs prefer correcting the learners with

implicit feedback in order to mitigate the impact of a direct correction. This result is also in line with original research about correction by Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) among NSs.

4.2.2 Negotiation

Negotiation is the main device speakers have to avoid conversational trouble and to repair it. In the present study, when there was a communication problem, the learner would use a trigger to initiate the negotiation and, as a result, the NS would normally accommodate to the learner's communicative needs. It is important to understand the devices learners and NSs use in conversation to account for the interactional competence of the learner because they can show if the learners had the strategies necessary to obtain modified input from the NS. As seen before, during their first interactions with the NSs, Danielle and Erica were not able to ask for clarification when they did not understand a word, which put the responsibility on the NSs to adjust their speech to facilitate the learner's understanding.

Excerpt 4.13 is an example of how negotiation functioned in the data. This interaction was Erica's first in the study, only six days after her arrival in Alicante. Erica, who started the program at the Novice Mid level of proficiency, was able to interact, but her conversation reveals that she had difficulties understanding the NS, which forced the NS to make extra efforts to get his message across. The negotiation routine starts with a trigger in turn 3. The NS repeats the message in different ways. He adjusts his grammar by changing the tense of the verb in turn 3. There are a series of triggers that indicate the learner's lack of comprehension in turns 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14. The NS simplifies his grammar by changing the verb *llegar* [to arrive] for *venir* [to come] in turn 5, and reformulating the question five more times in turns 7, 9, 11, 13, and 15. She finally understands the message in turn 16, probably triggered by the contextual cue *más* [more].

Excerpt 4.13: Erica, Novice Mid (first month with Pablo)

1. NS: ¿Cuándo has llegado? [When did you arrive?]
2. NNS: →¿Qué? [What?: clarification request]
3. NS: ¿Cuándo llegaste a España? [When did you arrive in Spain?]
4. NNS: →¿Llegaste? [You arrived?]
5. NS: ¿Cuándo viniste de Estados Unidos? [When did you come from the US?]
6. NNS: ¿Cuatro meses? [Four months?]
7. NS: Has estado cuatro meses en España, ¿y cuándo te vas? [You have been four months in Spain, and when do you leave?]
8. NNS: [silence]
9. NS: ¿Cuándo vuelves a Estados Unidos? [When do you go back to the US?]
10. NNS: [Silence]
11. NS: ¿Cuándo vuelves? ¿cuándo te marchas a Estados Unidos? [When do you return, when do you leave for the US?]
12. NNS: No sé [I don't know]
13. NS: ¿Cuándo vuelas?, ¿Cuándo dejas Alicante? [When do you fly, when do you leave Alicante?]
14. NNS: [Silence]
15. NS: ¿Cuánto tiempo, cuánto tiempo vas a estar aquí en Alicante? ¿Cuánto tiempo más? [How long, how long are you staying in Alicante?, how much longer?]
16. NNS: Cuatro meses [Four months]

The main goal of this conversation, unlike corrective feedback, is to repair a communication breakdown, not to correct the learner. The structure underlying this process is Trigger → Negotiation → Repair (→ confirmation of the repair), (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks, 1977).

Tokens of negotiation were counted when there was a trigger followed by a reformulation. In the following sections, negotiations routines both triggered by the learners and the NSs are analyzed.

4.2.2.1 Learner-triggered negotiation

Avoidance, silences (including gestures denoting a lack of understanding), use of L1 words, implicit requests for clarification, explicit requests for clarification, overgeneralization, and paraphrasing are forms by which learners trigger a negotiation

routine. In this case the source of the communication trouble is triggered by the learner. The devices found in the data are negotiation-for-meaning strategies.

One of the triggers that initiated negotiation routines most often by learners at the lower levels of proficiency was a *silence*, denoting a lack of understanding by the learner. Avoidance was used more often by learners at the Novice level, as shown in Excerpt 4.14. Danielle used a great number of L1 words, avoidance of the topic in turn 3, and a topic change in turn 9. The NS accommodated to the unsolicited change of topic by the learner. In this excerpt the NS was asking Danielle about the classes she was taking and how much Spanish she was speaking at home. After she avoided the topic, the NS Rosario shifted topics and asked her how long she would stay. In turn 9, Danielle changed topics again because she did not understand what Rosario was asking. There is the possibility that the learner thought Rosario was asking a question about the weather, which also translates as *tiempo* in Spanish. Rosario accepted the unsolicited topic shift and continued the conversation.

Excerpt 4.14: Danielle, Novice Low (first month with Rosario)

1. NNS: Nosotros practicamos mucho. En la casa *we are sick of* hablar español a la clase. [We practice much. At home *we are sick of* (in English) speaking Spanish in class.]
2. NS: No. [No]
3. NNS: *I need a break from* español. [*I need a break from* Spanish]
4. NS: ¿Y cuánto tiempo vas a estar aquí en Alicante? [And how long are you going to be here in Alicante?]
5. NNS: Sí [yes]
6. NS: No, ¿cuánto tiempo para volver a Estados Unidos? [No, how long to go back to the US?]
7. NNS: (silence)
8. NS: Dos meses, un mes. [Two months, one month]
9. →NNS: Ah, más o menos *the same*. En Estados Unidos *less humidity*. Menos *Sticky*. *It cools out at night*. *More* frío en la noche. [Ah, more or less, *the same*. In the US *less humidity* less *sticky*. *More* cold at night]
10. NS: ¿Aquí? [Here?]

11. NNS: En Estados Unidos. Aquí muy calor en la noche. [In the US, here very heat at night]

The use of L1 words was more common by learners at the lower levels of proficiency, and it is seen as an indicator of the lack of lexical competence. For instance, John, who was at the Intermediate Low level at the beginning of the semester, answered by using an English word when he was asked about his major in Excerpt 4.15.

Excerpt 4.15: John, Intermediate Low (third month with Rosario).

1. NNS: Es negocios logísticos y computadoras, en inglés *operations and information system management* [It's business logistics and computers, in English *operations and information system management*]

On the other hand, clarification requests can be made directly or indirectly. A silence could be considered an indirect clarification request, if it is accompanied by facial expressions of doubt or gestures. For instance, if a learner repeats a word uttered by the NS, it may be an implicit clarification request if the tone of the repetition denotes a question. In the following interaction between Erica and Pablo during her first month in Alicante (Excerpt 4.13 reproduced here as Excerpt 4.16), Erica uses an *echo* or repetition as a trigger to ask implicitly for clarification. For Long (1980), the repetition of the other's utterances constitutes a tactic for negotiation, which is more frequent in NS-NNS interactions than between NS-NS.

Excerpt 4.16: Erica, Novice Mid (first month with Pablo)

1. NS: ¿Cuándo llegaste a España? [When did you arrive in Spain?]
2. NNS: ¿Llegaste? [Arrive?]
3. NS: ¿Cuándo viniste de Estados Unidos? [When did you come from the US?]

Explicit clarification requests occur when the learner explicitly asks for the meaning of a word or asks the NS for a lexical item. In Excerpt 4.17, Jeff makes a direct appeal for clarification in turn 1. Explicit clarification requests are more common by learners at the Intermediate level because the learners are still experiencing many

communication breakdowns (unlike at the Advanced level) but they have the linguistic resources to ask explicitly for clarification.

Excerpt 4.17: Jeff, Intermediate Mid (first month with David).

1. →NNS: No, vivo en Alicante pero viajo a muchas países. ¿*Países* la palabra correcto? [No, I live in Alicante, but I travel to many countries (with agreement error) Is *countries* the right word?]
2. NS: No sé ¿qué quieres decir? *Países* son España, Francia, Italia [I don't know, what do you mean? *Countries* are Spain, France, Italy]

In Excerpt 4.18, Shanti, an Advanced level learner, used an L1 word during her first interaction with Paco, but she also used paraphrasing and a confirmation check in the same utterance to ask for clarification. Paraphrasing was defined by Lafford (2004) as a circumlocution in which the speaker exemplifies or illustrates the target lexical item with a similar word or phrase. Turn 1 would be considered a clarification request and a trigger for a negotiation routine, solved in turn 4 by the NS.

Excerpt 4.18: Shanti, Advanced Low (first month with Paco)

1. →NNS: Yo quiero trabajar conno pienso en español, pero *United Nations*, está en Estados Unidos de nacionales. ¿Entiendes? [I want to work with...I don't think in Spanish, but *United Nations*, it is in a United States of Nationals, do you understand?]
2. NS: Sí [Yes]
3. NNS: Y en los... [and in the....]
4. NS: En las Naciones Unidas [The United Nations].

As shown in these examples, there is a response from the NS to all these triggers, or NS adjustments. They embody what Long (1983) called “modified interaction,” and include the devices that triggered the negotiation initiated by the learner. After these triggers the NSs negotiate meaning to fix the communication breakdown. The triggers elicit NS modifications in the form of *repetitions*, *reformulations*, *grammar simplification*, and *topic shifts*. In all these cases, the goal of the negotiation is to help the

learner understand the message because of a communication breakdown, but not only for correction.

According to Long (1981), an interaction between a NS and a learner differs from an interaction between two NSs because it shows more repetitions and reformulations. According to Long (1985), *repetitions* are pervasive in NS-NNS conversation and are the first device the NSs use to adjust their speech to the learner's level of proficiency. Excerpt 4.19 is an example of a repetition to solve a communication breakdown.

Excerpt 4.19: Megan, Intermediate Mid (first month with Isidro)

1. NS: ¿Tú vives con tus padres? [Do you live with your parents?]
2. NNS: [Silence]
3. NS ¿Tú vives con tus padres? [Do you live with your parents?]
4. NNS: No, porque mis padres viven en Washington, y voy a la escuela en Las Vegas y ahora en Las Vegas, ¿te gusta Valencia? [No, because my parents live in Washington, and I go to school in Las Vegas and now in Las Vegas. Do you like Valencia?]

The topics of where the learner was from and how long the learner had been in Spain, or how long the learner would stay in Spain, are recurrent at the beginning of each conversation with the learners. They are also a good indicator of the interactional competence of the learner because they illustrate the differences among the learners and among levels of proficiency, especially when learners are interacting with the same NS. If the learner does not understand, the NSs often try to negotiate the topic several times before moving on to the next topic, or try to shift topics. The last resort of the NS is to avoid the topic or shift the topic.

Table 4.10 shows the frequencies of negotiation routines. Routines are triggered by the learners of all levels of proficiency. At the Novice level, learners initiated a total of 7.5 negotiation routines per conversation versus 5.18 at the Advanced level. Negotiation triggers were followed by NS modifications very consistently across levels. At the

Novice level, 83% of the triggers were followed by NS modifications. At the Intermediate level, 85.5% of the negotiation routines triggered by the learners were followed by NS modifications. At the Advanced level, 86.8% of the negotiation routines triggered by the learners were followed by NS modifications. It is important to notice that learners initiate more negotiation routines at the Advanced level than at the Intermediate level (5.18 versus 3.45). In Table 4.10 it might be observed that during the third and fourth months the learners initiate dramatically fewer negotiation routines, which may have lowered the total average. In addition, some of the learners that started the semester at the Intermediate level finished the semester at the Advanced level (by the fourth month). Advanced learners may be more confident and comfortable asking for clarification without feeling threatened or feeling less proficient. It is important to look at what types of negotiation routines are typical at each level of proficiency.

Table 4.10: Negotiation abroad

Novice	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Learner initiated	10.57	7.85	7.42	4.14	7.50	-1.97 <i>p</i> =.005
NS modifications	9.28	5.71	6.42	3.57	6.25	-1.64 <i>p</i> =.009
NS initiated <i>p</i> =.24	1.00	1.00	1.71	.42	1.03	-.09 <i>p</i> =.62
Learner modifications	.57.	.71	1.14	.28	.67	-.30 <i>p</i> =.76
Intermediate	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Learner initiated	4.40	3.20	3.80	2.40	3.45	-.54 <i>p</i> =.107
NS modifications	4.00	2.80	3.00	2.00	2.95	-.58 <i>p</i> =.08
NS initiated	.40	.60	.80	.60	.60	.57 <i>p</i> =.57
Learner modifications	.40	.20	.80	.20	.40	.00 <i>p</i> =1.00
Advanced	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Learner initiated	5.00	6.25	4.00	5.50	5.18	-.022 <i>p</i> =.936
NS modifications	4.50	5.25	3.50	4.70	4.50	-.1 <i>p</i> =.904
NS initiated	.75	.50	.75	1.25	.81	.17 <i>p</i> =.31
Learner modifications	.75	.50	.75	1.00	.75	.10 <i>p</i> =.56

The negotiation routines were triggered mostly by the learners who, as expected, encountered more communication breakdowns than the NSs. Unlike NSs, who did most of the clarifications, the learners used sentences such as *no entiendo* [I don't understand] or *¿qué significa?* [what does it mean?]. On the other hand, when faced with a communication breakdown, NSs preferred an implicit clarification request in which they tried to process what the learner meant and recast it in the form of a confirmation check. Excerpt 4.20 shows an example of how a NS implicitly asks for clarification in the form of a confirmation check.

Excerpt 4.20: Jeff, Intermediate Mid (second month with David)

1. NNS: Sí, yo fue a Ibiza en el fin de semana pasada [Yes, I went to Ibisssa on the last weekend]
2. NS:→ ¿Pisa, Italia? [Pisa, Italy?]
3. NNS: [silence]
4. NS: No entiendo [I don't understand]
5. NNS: Ibiza [Ibisssa]
6. NS: Ah, Ibiza [Oh! Ibisssa]

This example illustrates that NSs were more apt to try to decode and recast what the learner was saying when they did not understand and have it confirmed by the learner. Thus, instead of eliciting the information from the learners, they tended to try to make the conversation smoother and not to disrupt the flow of the conversation.

Varonis and Gass (1985) suggested that non-classroom interactions elicit fewer negotiations because learners do not want to expose their linguistic deficiencies. Iino (2006) proposed that interlocutors tend to avoid direct requests or clarification due to concerns for the interlocutors' face. According to Iino, informal natural conversations evoke less negotiation because they focus more on meaning, and not on form. However, this is not the case in the present data. As shown in this section, negotiation is necessary in natural conversations for the sake of the flow of the conversation, and NSs give feedback and restructure their utterances to accommodate to the learners' level of proficiency.

It is also important to see how much comprehensible input and pushed output were the result of negotiation. Following McMeekin's (2006) methodology, it was assumed that the number of modifications would indicate how much comprehensible input the learners received. In the case of Novice learners they modified their output in 65% of cases. The major difference was seen at the Advanced level, where learners modified their output 92.5% of the cases, while at the Intermediate level they did so in

66% of the cases. This fact is remarkable in terms of the value of interaction in language learning because it illustrates the use of interaction as a tool for receiving not only comprehensible input but also for pushing learners to produce output, as Swain (1985) proposed.

4.2.2.2 NS-triggered negotiations

Negotiation routines were also initiated by the NSs and the learners had to modify their output in order to solve the communication breakdowns. In this case, it was more common for the NS to make a direct appeal for clarification in an *explicit clarification request*. An example can be seen in Excerpt 4.21. In this example there is confusion because John talks about his host brother as if he had to attend a wedding, when he meant that he was getting married. The NS Rosario did not understand and asked for clarification in turn 2, thus starting a negotiation routine that was solved in turn 7.

Excerpt 4.21: John, Intermediate Mid (fourth month with Rosario)

1. NNS: Sí, yo tengo 22 años y uno tiene 25 años pero él tiene una novia y tiene una boda en noviembre.[Yes, I am 22 and one (*of his host brothers*) is 25 but he has a girlfriend and he has a wedding in November]
2. →NS: ¿Qué? [What?]
3. NNS: Boda [Wedding]
4. NS: Ah, la boda [Oh, a wedding]
5. NNS: Sí [Yes]
6. NS: ¿Se casa en noviembre? [Is he getting married in November?]
7. NNS: Sí [Yes]

It was also common for the NSs to ask for confirmation to make sure that the learners were answering the questions correctly. These echoes or confirmation checks are illustrated in Excerpt 4.22, where Julio also repeats the learner's utterances as a form of confirmation checks in turns 3 and 5.

Excerpt 4.22: Michael, Novice High (second month with Julio)

1. NS: ¿Cuánto hace que estás en Alicante? [How long have you been in Alicante?]

2. NNS: Hace un año [For a year]
3. NS: ¿Hace un año? [For a year?]
4. NNS: Sí, hasta mayo [Yes, until May]
5. NS: ¿Hasta mayo? [Until May?]
6. NNS: Sí [Yes]

When the NSs triggered the negotiations because what was said was not clear, they often reformulated the learners' utterances to make sure they had understood correctly or, as a last resort, they made the learner reformulate or repeat the utterance. All these mechanisms provide clues regarding the IC level of the learners. Because IC also depends on the interlocutor, and not only on the learner as speaker, the length to which the NS accommodates to the learner is also reflective of the learner's IC. As in every category, the IC of the learner is developed by interacting; just as in playing tennis, or any other interactive activity, the level of one *player* acts to determine the kind of response from the other participant.

It has been explained that the basic routine of negotiation is as follows: Trigger → Negotiation → Repair (→ confirmation of the repair) (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977). In Table 4.11, a One-Way ANOVA revealed differences in the use of negotiation resources among levels of proficiency, $F(2,61) = 12.19$, $p = .001$. A Scheffé post-hoc analysis revealed statistical differences between the Novice and Intermediate levels, but not between the Novice and Advanced levels and between the Intermediate and Advanced levels. A Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a negative correlation between negotiation required and time for the SA group ($r = -.26$, $p = .03$). Nonetheless, when observing the correlation between negotiation and time within each group, the correlation is stronger for the Novice level ($r = -.48$, $p = .008$). The correlation for the Intermediate level is negative but not significant ($r = -.29$, $p = .21$), and it is positive for the Advanced group ($r = .02$, $p = .03$).

Table 4.11: Negotiation abroad: number of negotiation routines

	First Month	Second Month	Third Month	Fourth Month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Novice	11.57	8.85	9.00	4.57	8.50	-.48 <i>p</i> =.008
Intermediate	4.80	3.60	4.80	2.80	4.00	-.29 <i>p</i> =.21
Advanced	5.75	6.75	4.75	6.75	6.00	.02 <i>p</i> =.92
All groups	8.00	6.68	6.62	4.56	6.46	-.26 <i>p</i> =.03

As a group, SA learners needed less negotiation as they improved their linguistic and interactional abilities, supporting previous studies by Lafford (1995; 2004). The majority of negotiation routines were initiated by the learners, granting the role of leader or teacher in the conversation to the more expert speaker. This result corroborates a previous study by Wilkinson (2000) that illustrates these learner-teacher roles in most NS-NNS interactions.

In the present study, as learners become more competent, they display fewer pauses or silences, and the NSs start to use more complex or detailed topics that may not be familiar to the learners. Nevertheless, these NSs always started conversations with simple topics related to the city of origin and the learners' hometowns, and from there they moved to more complex topics selected by the NSs, since it is normally assumed that it is their responsibility to adjust to the learners' comfort zone in a process of scaffolding. This process is not unlike that which happens in simulated oral interviews with learners in which the teacher progressively adjusts to the learner's level.

CHAPTER FIVE

SA versus AH as a variable and the effect housing for SA learners

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first section, results of corrective feedback, negotiation of meaning, and topic nomination both by the learner and the NS are presented comparing the SA and the AH learners. In this way, the correlation of the learning context and the interactional practices of corrective feedback, negotiation, and topic nomination can be seen. In the second section, results are presented for the SA group according to the type of housing of the learners. The importance of the housing variable derives from the hypothesis that learners who spend the semester living with a family will show greater linguistic improvement due to more contact and time interacting with NSs. Research findings highlight the family stay as generally the only source of interaction out of the classroom (Laubscher, 1994; Schmidt-Rinehart *et al.*, 2004; and Segalowitz *et al.*, 2004). However, some SA learners reported to have limited contact with their host families, except for lunch and dinner time. For this reason a section is dedicated to the study of this variable. It is important to note that the living arrangement choice by participants might have influenced the outcomes with other NSs (as shown in interviews). One important aspect of learning a second language abroad is the variable of motivation. Motivation has been defined by

5.1 THE EFFECT OF SA ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERACTIONAL FEATURES

In this chapter, differences in interactional development between SA and AH learners are shown. First, as a baseline for the study of interactional development, the change of proficiency level of each group was calculated. Table 5.1 shows that learners

abroad improved in proficiency by a mean of 1.81 points, or about 60% of a level of proficiency, from Intermediate Low to almost Intermediate High, while the group at home improved by only .83 units, or 27% of a level of proficiency, from Intermediate Low to Intermediate Mid. This pattern is consistent with those of previous studies (Lafford, 1995; Guntermann, 1992). An independent t-test revealed that the difference between the two groups is significant ($t(134) = 10.95, p = .003$) at the end of the semester. If the t-test is conducted for the level of proficiency at the beginning of the semester, the results indicate that there are no significant differences ($t(134) = -.03, p = .97$).

Table 5.1: Improvement in level of proficiency: AH vs. SA

Group		Level initial	Level final
At home	Mean	4.14	4.97
		Intermediate Low	Intermediate Mid
	N	18	72
	Std. Deviation	2.11	2.21
Study abroad	Mean	4.09	5.90
		Intermediate Low	Intermediate High
	N	16	64
	Std. Deviation	2.12	2.09

These differences are consistent with findings of previous studies by Segalowitz *et al.* (2004) and Lafford (2004). Segalowitz *et al.* (2004) found that learners who go abroad achieve a higher level of proficiency than their counterparts at home, but they did not examine the differences in proficiency gains between learners who interacted more with NSs out of the classroom and those who did not. The current study addresses this issue by investigating the importance of the housing variable.

The results of the proficiency pretests and posttests administered in the present study should be interpreted with care. At first glance, the resulting proficiency gains for

study abroad students might seem lower than expected. However, it is important to recognize that proficiency gains at higher levels of language acquisition (for example from Advance Low to Advance Mid) are much harder to make than proficiency gains at lower levels of language acquisition (for example from Novice Low to Novice Mid). Therefore, while lower-level proficiency gains in this study are not remarkable, the same amount of gain, when observed at higher levels, could be considered highly notable even though these are both equal gains in proficiency in a quantitative perspective.

Given that the learning curve is steeper at the beginning levels, there are other methodological considerations that need to be addressed when looking at these frequencies. In Tables 3.6 and 3.7 (p. 57), it might be observed that Jeff, an IL learner, improved more than a level of proficiency, and he reached the Advanced Mid level. This outcome is not supported by previous studies and seems a higher improvement than expected from one semester abroad. There might have been causes that could have caused a low classification during the pretest. For instance, the researcher might have failed to explain thoroughly the procedures of the TOPT exam or the learner, being a volunteer, might have wanted to finish the test as soon as possible. Although the tests were reviewed by two researchers, a misperception might have caused them to overestimate the learner's performance during the posttest. Also surprising, Luke started the program at the Advanced Mid level and he achieved the Superior level. In his case, both raters observed that he had displayed with many of the requirements for a Superior speaker. The ACTFL guidelines state that a Superior speaker is able to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations. The topics may range from practical to social and abstract topics. They can support opinions and hypothesize using native-like discourse strategies. Luke presented native-like strategies in the use of discourse fillers, conversation continuants, openings and closings. Due to the structure of

the TOPT, which is different from an OPI, the raters needed to look not only at the tests but also at the interviews with the NSs. After some hesitations and looking over the tapes again, the two reviewers decided to assign this level to Luke. Nonetheless, it might be taken cautiously given the rater's hesitancy to assign a level of Superior.

Surprisingly, there were three cases in the AH group in which the proficiency of the learners actually decreased. Jennifer and Meredith moved from Advanced Low to Intermediate High and Matt moved from Novice High to Novice Mid. These results are abnormal, and might be due to the fact that the interviews were conducted in a Teaching Assistant office, which was very crowded and distracting. In addition, the learners were given the tests during their final examinations and the need to prepare for other classes might have caused these students to allow less time and effort to complete their posttest, thus explaining their poor performance.

5.1.1 Corrective feedback

Chapter 4 showed that SA learners tend to receive fewer tokens of corrective feedback over time as they improve in proficiency, thus corroborating results by Liskin-Gasparro (1996), Lafford (2004), and Segalowitz *et al.* (2004). In terms of corrective feedback, it was shown that AH and SA learners received more implicit feedback than direct or explicit error corrections from the NS. In comparing the SA and the AH learners, Table 5.2 shows that those who stayed in the U.S. received significantly more tokens of corrective feedback when talking to a NS than SA learners (10.04 versus. 4.00). A t-test showed a significant difference ($t(101.50) = 10.32, p = .00$). This trend indicates that learners made more linguistic errors and were corrected more often by the NSs, while the learners abroad tended to receive significantly less correction. Smartt and Scudder (2004) showed a negative correlation between level of proficiency and communication repair, which is consistent with the findings and previous studies. Repair

is a very important feature in the development of IC. The fact that there are fewer corrections implies that learners not only have improved in their level of proficiency, but they may have also learned strategies to avoid the kinds of language mistakes that might be corrected by the NS.

Smartt and Scudder (2004) also found a negative correlation between the SA group and the AH group, in that AH learners needed more repair.

Table 5.2: Corrective Feedback: At Home versus Study Abroad

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
At home	18	12.30	5.46	.64
Study abroad	16	4.00	2.78	.34
Total	136	7.19	5.33	.45

These results indicate that the interactions of learners who went abroad and those who stayed at home were different. First, SA learners did not receive as much corrective feedback, especially direct or explicit corrections from the NSs, who seemed to avoid putting learners in a self-conscious or uncomfortable position. The correlation between the amounts of corrective feedback received by SA and AH learners is $-.56$, which was significant and moderately high. This result means that SA learners received less than half of the corrective feedback that AH learners did.

Several reasons might be given for these results. The NSs who interacted with AH learners were mostly language teachers and, even though they were instructed to maintain a natural conversation with the learners, their role as teachers might have influenced the outcomes of the conversations. Second, SA learners were engaged in conversations in a very different context. The NSs in Spain might have felt the need to make learners feel more comfortable in a foreign country when they were trying to learn Spanish. This hypothesis might be substantiated by the fact that explicit correction was the least

common way of giving corrective feedback to learners in the SA setting. Other studies (Lyster & Mori, 2006) show that in the classroom, learners receive more correction than in natural conversations where there is a preference for self-correction. The AH NSs of this study, because they were mostly teachers, often feel obligated or accustomed to bring errors to the attention of learners. Finally, regarding IC, the SA learners might learn new routines of conversation in which they feel comfortable.

This hypothesis has two implications. First, learners at lower levels of proficiency might tend to avoid new topics because they want to avoid language difficulties or embarrassment. Pienemann (1989) showed that learners learn only what they are prepared to learn. If NSs try to interact with them at levels for which they are not prepared, neither interaction nor acquisition will take place. In this sense, the role of NSs as language guides was important. NSs in Spain corrected SA learners mostly through implicit corrective feedback and adjusted to the learners' level of proficiency as seen in Chapter 4. Comparing SA learners and AH learners, frequencies in Table 5.3 shows that the SA learners received fewer tokens of corrective feedback in both settings. The preferred mode of correction for both NSs in SA and AH contexts was implicit. The conversation is maintained without interruption via implicit corrective feedback, and salient feedback is still given to the learner. It is also less threatening to offer the learner indirect feedback than explicitly correcting the mistake. Thus, NSs look for the most efficient means of communication without threatening the learner.

Table 5.3: Corrective feedback from the NS by Group

	At home	Study abroad
Explicit	2.27	1.04
Implicit	5.56	1.95

The number of explicit corrections in the SA group is lower than that of the AH group (1.04 vs. 2.27). In a recent study, Lyster and Mori (2006) observed that teachers in two different immersion programs preferred implicit over explicit corrective feedback. About 7% of the corrections made by the teachers were explicit, and recasts were shown to be the most effective way of providing corrective feedback to learners. In the present study, both groups of NSs used more recasts or remodeling of the learners' errors than any other form of feedback. Thus, some parallels between the learner-teacher role and NS-NNS talk can be established.

The implications for IC and the ongoing study of the Interaction Hypothesis are important in the SA group. Learners who went abroad did benefit from their interactions perhaps because, while spending more time with NSs out of the classroom and NS teachers in their language intensive courses, they received more recasts, a form of indirect correction. This finding has also been shown in Chapter 4 and indicated by the fact that NS corrective feedback decreased over time. The AH group did not attain significant changes throughout the semester. Frequencies in Table 5.4 show that learners abroad received fewer tokens of corrective feedback than AH learners, and the Pearson correlation coefficient indicated a negative correlation for both the AH ($t = -.11, p = .35$) and the SA ($r = -.22, p = .07$) levels. These correlations are not significant.

Table 5.4: Corrective feedback from the NSs by group by month

	1 st month	2 nd month	3 rd month	4 th month	Pearson's <i>r</i>
At home	10.55	9.55	9.61	9.55	-.11, <i>p</i> =.35
Study abroad	4.93	4.06	3.37	3.62	-.22, <i>p</i> =.07

Although learners abroad started with a much higher incidence of NS corrective feedback, it is important to question whether NSs would continue more corrective feedback depending on the learning context (SA vs. AH). The samples, although small, are very similar in distribution of levels of proficiency. Hence, there might be two reasons to account for the differences in amount of feedback received. First, as explained above, the nature and roles of the NSs abroad and AH were probably different, given the fact most of the AH NSs were teachers. Second, the context might have also influenced the outcome as mentioned above. NSs in the SA setting might have felt the need to make the learner feel at ease in a foreign country, trying to avoid face-threatening speech acts such as direct corrections. Third, and as shown by Segalowitz *et al.* (2004), interaction might cause what is called the feedback loop. In other words, interaction might reinforce learned routines and prepare learners to acquire the following stages, producing a motivational effect (positive or negative, depending on the trend) that might favor or foster the process of acquisition. An examination of the other variables of negotiation and topic nomination can provide a better idea of what the processes in acquisition of IC are.

5.1.2 Negotiation

Negotiation for meaning, as it has been defined in this dissertation, accounts for the number of routines in which learners and NSs engage to solve a communication problem. Table 5.5 shows that the overall average occurrence of negotiation routines is higher in the AH group than in the SA group (7.65 versus 6.46). An independent t-test

revealed that the differences between the two groups are not significant ($t(134) = .43, p = .66$).

Table 5.5: Negotiation by group

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
At home	18	7.65	3.46	.408
SA	16	6.46	4.39	.54

Negotiation routines were more common in the SA than in the AH setting. Table 5.6 shows the difference regarding who initiated the negotiation routines. In the group abroad, negotiation routines were initiated by the learners in 87% of the cases, although the difference between the AH group (82%) and the SA group is very high. In the SA group, NSs initiated the negotiation routines in 13% of the cases as opposed to 18% in the AH group. This result might imply that learners AH were more difficult for NSs to understand by the NSs than the learners abroad or that NSs abroad were less apt to interrupt the learners for clarification. As was also pointed out before, the AH NSs might have been influenced by the fact that they were mostly language teachers. On the other hand, SA learners received more comprehensible input because, after the negotiation routine was triggered by the learners, the NSs modified their original utterance 84% of the time, while AH NSs modified their utterances 77% of the time.

The effect that these negotiation routines had over comprehension can be measured by the number of modifications that took effect after the negotiation trigger. Modifications are defined as the number of times interlocutors responded to clarification requests by clarifying their own utterances. McMeekin (2006) found that learners who went abroad obtained 81.8% of modifications when a communication breakdown or a

trigger arose. She also observed that learners made only 37.2% modifications in the classroom setting.

Table 5.6: Negotiation initiations by group

	N	Learner initiated	NS Modification	NS initiated	Learner Modification
At home	72	6.26 82%	77%	1.37 18%	53%
Study Abroad	64	5.65 87%	84%	.84 13%	72.5%

Table 5.7 shows that the numbers are very similar during the first two months, which implies that this time period is when SA learners become accustomed to talking routinely about themselves, dealing with topics such as introductions, city of origin, home university, number of siblings, etc. After the third month, the differences in negotiation routines are more notable between the two groups, and it is proposed that the SA context correlates to the number of communication breakdowns because fewer negotiation routines are needed. A Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a negative tendency for the AH ($r = -.11, p = .35$) and the SA ($r = -.26, p = .03$).

Table 5.7: Negotiation by month for SA and AH learners

	1 st month	2 nd month	3 rd month	4 th month	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Abroad	8	6.68	6.62	4.56	-.26, $p=.03$
At home	8.5	6.88	7.33	7.72	-.11, $p=.35$

Regardless of the level of proficiency at which learners started the semester abroad, by the third and fourth months, their results tended to stabilize. This pattern was shown in Chapter 4, and it was also shown that in different categories there were periods of backsliding and the numbers of Intermediate and Advanced learners sometimes overlapped. At the Intermediate level, learners were becoming more interactionally

competent, seen in fewer use of pauses, more topic nomination, more awareness of pragmatic rules, and an ability to hold the floor of the conversation. By the fourth month, the numbers of the three levels of proficiency for the SA learners tended to merge.

Negotiation routines were most commonly started via direct clarification requests by the SA and AH learners. Table 5.8 shows that the overall number of negotiation triggers for learners is well distributed between direct and indirect clarification requests. A direct clarification request would be an explicit request for assistance such as *how do you say...?* or *Is pueblo the correct word?* Other times learners just tried their hypothesis to check if they were saying something right, sometimes with a rising intonation or by topic avoidance. Silences and avoidance were used only by learners in the Novice Low and Novice Mid levels of proficiency because, at the Novice High level of proficiency, the learners were already accustomed to asking for clarification and solving communication problems.

Table 5.8: Types of negotiation triggers by group: SA vs. AH

	SA	AH
Silences	.76	1.09
Direct Clarification Request	2.32	2.55
Implied clarification request	2.85	3.30
Avoidance	.43	.56

Silences were more common by the first months of the Novice learners due to their lack of linguistic resources. Avoidance was not very common because Novice NNSs quickly learned how to fill silences and they occurred only during the first month. Clarification requests were either direct or implied. Implied clarification requests are less face-threatening than direct clarification requests. Direct clarification requests were

uttered many times either by asking the meaning of a word or by asking how to say something.

5.1.3 Topic nomination

Upon examination of the selection of topic and who nominates the topics in the NS-NNS interactions, another general pattern can be observed. Learners in all groups tended to nominate more topics over time as their level of proficiency improved. Comparing the SA and AH groups, Table 5.9 shows that the SA group nominated an average of 3.35 topics during a ten-minute conversation in the first month. The AH group nominated 2.94 topics. A t-test revealed that the differences were significant ($t(119.12) = -1.41, p = .04$). A Pearson correlation coefficient yielded a significant correlation for the SA group ($r = .39, p = .00$) but not for the AH group ($r = .21, p = .07$).

Table 5.9: Learner topic nomination by group

	N	Mean	SD	SE	Pearson's <i>r</i>
At home	64	2.94	1.48	.17	.21, $p=.07$
Study Abroad	72	3.35	1.88	.23	.39, $p=.00$

Upon examining the way topics were nominated, significant differences according to the two categories of learners were found. First, SA learners nominated more abstract topics than AH learners. Second, SA learners made more abrupt topic shifts than AH learners. These frequencies are very low, and there is a preference in both groups for co-class topic shifts and simple topics. Due to the nature of the conversations, and the fact that the NSs did not know the learners well, learners were not often presented with abstract topics, both at home and abroad. In these informal conversations, interactions were usually limited to introductions and informal comments about the learners' experiences and home stay. As shown in Chapter 4, however, Advanced learners

nominated more abstract topics than Novice and Intermediate learners because they had the linguistic tools to do so. The variable of group shows that learners who went abroad used more abstract topics per conversation, although the frequency is small in both groups. They also made abrupt topic changes more frequently than AH learners, showing that they had the tools to change the direction of the conversation.

Table 5.10: Frequencies of types of topic nomination and topic initiation

	Abrupt	Co-class	Here-and-now	Abstract
At home	.27	2.87	2.66	.29
Study Abroad	.42	3.12	2.82	.54

On the other hand, findings in Chapter 4 indicated that there was a negative correlation between the number of topics nominated by the NSs and those nominated by the learners. When comparing both groups, Table 5.11 shows that in both groups the NSs nominated approximately the same number of topics. NSs talking to AH learners nominated 7.88 topics per conversation, and NSs in interactions with SA learners nominated 7.75 topics, and an independent t-test revealed that the difference was not statistically significant ($t(134) = .30, p = .76$). A Pearson correlation coefficient between NS topic nomination and time yielded significant results for the SA group ($r = -.38, p = .002$) but not for the AH group ($r = -.18, p = .11$). Because these frequencies are low, and not significant between the two groups, it is important to look at the change over the four-month period.

Table 5.11: Topic nomination by the NS

		Pearson's <i>r</i>
At home	7.88	-.18, <i>p</i> =.11
Study Abroad	7.75	-.38, <i>p</i> =.002

Table 5.12 shows the frequencies of NS topic nomination by month. In the SA group the number of topics nominated by the NSs there seems to be not only a significant and stronger correlation over time, but also a higher difference between the first and the fourth months.

Table 5.12: NS Topic nomination by month

	1 st month	2 nd month	3 rd month	4 th month	Pearson's <i>r</i>
At home	8.16	8.5	7.83	7.05	-.18 <i>p</i> =.11
Study Abroad	9.25	8.25	7.12	6.37	-.38 <i>p</i> =.002

In the same way, and as shown in Chapter 4, NSs tended to nominate fewer topics, but the difference in topics nominated by NSs was not significant in terms of context (SA vs. AH). The data do show differences in the results corresponding to the first two months as opposed to the third and fourth months of the stay. It has also been observed that the frequencies are more numerous for SA learners. Standard Error and Standard Deviation measures show that there is less variation in the SA group, and the development between months is steady and stable.

5.1.4 Words per turn, turn taking, and silences

As shown in Chapter 4, there is a positive correlation in the number of turns taken by learners as they improve in proficiency. It was also shown that as learners become

more proficient in the language, the number of words per turn increased. Table 5.13 also reveals a difference in the number of words uttered by learners. Learners who studied abroad show a mean of WPT of 8.02 versus 6.7 for AH learners. An independent t-test revealed that the difference was not significant ($t(134) = -6.44, p = .14$). A Pearson correlation coefficient revealed that the correlation between WPT and time was significant for the group abroad ($r = .29, p = .02$) and not significant for the AH group ($r = .07, p = .46$). This finding may be related to the context of learning, because learners abroad spent more time in and out of class speaking Spanish and interacting with NSs.

Table 5.13: Words per turn by group

	WPT mean	Pearson's <i>r</i>
At home	6.7	.07, $p=.46$
Study abroad	8.02	.29, $p=.02$

It was also shown in Chapter 4 that the number of turns decreased as learners became more proficient. This variable is complex because two factors intervene in the results. On one hand, learners at the Novice level may produce more hesitation and silences, thus decreasing the number of turns per conversation. On the other hand, it might be that the NS is very talkative and may not give the learner much chance to talk, thus reducing the number of turns per conversation. Moreover, at more advanced levels as stated in Chapter 4, learners and NSs treat each topic more thoroughly, reducing dramatically the number of turns per conversation. Despite the individual differences among NSs and learners, Chapter 4 showed that there were significant differences in the number of turns among learners of different levels of proficiency. It can be assumed, then, that despite silences and other factors, turns are longer as learners become more proficient both linguistically and interactionally. Therefore, it is expected that learners abroad will use fewer turns per conversation. Frequencies in Table 5.14 show the difference in number of turns between SA and AH learners. The number of turns

produced by SA learners is much lower than the number of turns produced by AH learners (59.8 versus 84.59). These frequencies are the result of a higher IC as shown by more language production.

Table 5.14: Number of turns by group

Study Abroad	59.80
At Home	84.59

Table 5.15 shows a difference in the number of silences between SA and AH learners. SA learners generated fewer silences as a group than AH learners (0.85 vs. 1.80). The numbers are too low to generate a reliable t-test, and therefore only the frequencies are presented. These frequencies can be misleading, because they represent the overall mean of all the learners in all levels of proficiency during the 4 months. It was revealed in Chapter 4 that Novice Low learners paused the most. When learners reach the Intermediate level, they usually have more of the necessary interactional and linguistic resources to negotiate for meaning and silences are less frequently found at the Intermediate level, and basically nonexistent at the Advanced level.

Table 5.15: Silences by group

Study Abroad	0.85
At home	1.80

Excerpts 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate the difference between the interaction of a AH and a SA Novice learner. In 5.1, Gillian, an AH learner, shows little confidence and no interactional resources to request clarification. She is limited to answering yes or no, and it is difficult to determine if she really understands or is simply echoing what the NS is saying. The NS seems to have trouble determining if she understands what he is saying, and gives her recasts with options in turn 11, reformulations and expansions of his

original question in turns 6 and 9, and a confirmation check in 13. The learner has not acquired the interactional resources necessary to do more than respond to the NS queries.

Excerpt 5.1: Gillian with Pedro, second month (At Home)

1. NS: ¿Estudias, estás en la universidad? [Do you study, are you at the university?]
2. NNS: Estudio comunicaciones [I study communications]
3. NS: ¿Qué parte de las comunicaciones? [What part of communications?]
4. NNS: (Silence)
5. NS: ¿Como periodismo? [Like journalism?]
6. NNS: Periodismo [Journalism]
7. NS: ¿Algo más? [Anything else?]
8. NNS: No [no]
9. NS: ¿Sólo periodismo? [Only journalism?]
10. NNS: Sí [Yes]
11. NS: ¿Te gusta el periodismo escrito, televisivo? [Do you like written journalism, televised?]
12. NNS: Sí [Yes]
13. NS: Televisivo [Televised]
14. NNS: Sí [Yes]

Excerpt 5.2 of SA learner Thomas shows a higher interactional level despite his low level of proficiency (Novice Low) in that he is able to make a direct appeal through a question, even though he is still using some L1 words. He was aware of what he needs to do in order to avoid miscommunication, despite his heavy reliance on the NS to conduct the conversation. His low level of confidence is also corroborated by the length of the turns, and requests for clarification. Nonetheless, his interactional ability is much higher than that of the AH learner Gillian.

Excerpt 5.2: Thomas, second month with José (Study Abroad)

1. NS: No, sé, están haciendo muchos campos de golf aquí en Alicante [I don't know they are making many golf courses here]
2. NNS: Yo quiero jugar golf, necesito encontrar dónde [I want to play golf, I have to find where]
3. NS: Comprar [To buy]
4. NNS: Sí, clubs [Yes, *clubs*]
5. NS: Palos [Clubs]

6. NNS: Sí, o necesito, ¿cómo se dice borrow en español? [Yes, I need, how do you say *borrow* in Spanish?]
7. NS: Pedir prestado, creo [To borrow, I think]
8. NNS: Quiero jugar golf, San Juan cerca de la playa, veo comprar casa grandes, quiero vivir, pronto [I want to play golf, San Juan, near the beach, I see to buy big houses, I want to live, soon]

In sum, the tendencies observed in this section are complementary and show a greater development in interaction by SA learners because, as they advance during the semester, they produce more language —more WPT, longer turns, and less hesitation.

5.2 THE EFFECT OF HOUSING OVER DEVELOPMENT OF INTERACTIONAL FEATURES BY SA LEARNERS

As remarked in the introduction, it was assumed at the start of the study that the type of housing might have an effect over the acquisition of the language and the interactional practices for the SA learners. Table 5.16 shows that the improvement in proficiency did not differ much between the learners who stayed with families and the learners who stayed in an apartment with other English-speaking students.

The mean level of proficiency for learners who stayed with a family was 4.8 at the beginning of the semester, indicating that they were almost at the Intermediate Mid level when they arrived in Spain. They moved up to 6.7 by the end of the semester, almost reaching the Advanced level. They improved by 63% in their proficiency. Learners who stayed in an apartment with other students improved from a mean of 2.9 to 4.6, which indicates that, as a group, they moved from the Novice High level to approximately the Intermediate Mid level, almost 56%. An independent t-test revealed that the difference between the two groups at the beginning of the semester was significant ($t(62) = -3.61, p = .001$) and the difference between the two groups at the end of the semester was significant ($t(60.89) = -4.22, p = .001$). This comparison implies that learners who stayed with families improved more than the ones who stayed with other students. However, this

finding must be taken cautiously because the difference in proficiency levels between the apartment group and the family group, although significant, was only 7%. When interpreting this result, two factors should be taken into account.

First, the number of learners in each group was very low and not approximate; thus, variation may not be explained due to the low instances. Second, it should be considered that the level of proficiency of both groups (family versus apartment) at the beginning of the semester was very different. The initial mean level of proficiency of learners staying with a family was Intermediate Mid, while learners who stayed in apartments started the semester at the Novice High level. As it was explained at the beginning of Chapter 5, improvement from the Novice to the Intermediate level has been shown to occur faster than improvements from the Intermediate to the Advanced level.

Table 5.16: Level of proficiency by housing

Housing		Level initial	Level final
Apartment	Mean	2.91	4.58
	N	6	6
	Std. Deviation	1.76	1.17
Family	Mean	4.80	6.70
	N	10	10
	Std. Deviation	2.01	2.12
Total	Mean	4.09	5.90
	N	16	16
	Std. Deviation	2.12	2.09

5.2.1 Corrective feedback

Table 5.17 shows that learners who stayed with families received less corrective feedback when they interacted with our NS informants. The differences in feedback between the Apartment group and the Family group are significant. An independent t-test revealed that the differences among groups were significant ($t(36.18) = 3.28, p = .002$). A

Pearson correlation coefficient also showed that learners who lived with families had a significant correlation between feedback received and time.

Table 5.17: Feedback by housing for the SA group

	1 st month	2 nd month	3 rd month	4 th month	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Apartment	7.00	4.66	3.83	6	-.13 <i>p</i> =.52
Family	3.70	3.0	3.10	2.20	-.26 <i>p</i> =.09

The difficult question of the advantage of the homestay has been addressed in the literature mostly from a qualitative point of view (Wilkinson 1998). In general, previous studies have shown that the homestay is an advantage both linguistically and culturally (Rivers, 1998; Brecht *et al*, 1997). Despite the small number of subjects in the present study, the results are in accordance with what has been shown in previous studies. The homestay represents an advantage in terms of corrective feedback. The proficiency gains of students who stayed with families are higher, and the trends in other categories are also significantly different. It has been reported by Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2002) that families help learners linguistically, culturally, and psychologically. Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004) also reported that lunch time was the opportunity for most interaction. The types of corrective feedback received by learners abroad are also different depending on the type of housing. Table 5.18 shows that there is a preference for NSs to correct learners with implicit corrective modes, which was the trend in the AH group also. The number of corrective tokens received by learners is lower in every category in the Family group. Although a direct direction between corrective feedback received and development of IC cannot be established, it is significant that the NSs correct more with implicit modes. Despite of the number of grammatical mistakes, it is possible that NSs perceive learners in a different way depending on their IC, which might explain the higher frequency of explicit corrections for a certain group.

Table 5.18: Type of corrective feedback by housing

	Explicit	Implicit
Apartment	1.25	2.54
Family	.97	1.57

No final claims can be made because the levels of proficiency of the Apartment and the Family group are not equal, which might have an effect on the results. However, the implications of these results might be that, as a result of interacting more with their families outside of the classroom, learners might make significantly fewer mistakes or are more confident and needed less correction from the NSs. Another possibility is that these SA learners were more confident and their IC higher, and therefore the NSs did not see a need to correct them. There have been studies that show that learners who choose to stay with families do so because they are motivated to interact with and integrate into the target culture (Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight, 2004).

5.2.2 Negotiation for meaning

In terms of negotiation, as seen in Table 5.19, learners who lived with families engaged in fewer negotiation routines than learners in apartments, and an independent t-test revealed that the difference was significant ($t(62) = 2.69, p = .009$). As discussed in Chapter 4, negotiation provides comprehensible input for the learner by means of modified speech.

Table 5.19: Negotiation by housing

	N	Negotiation
Apartment	6	8.29
Family	10	5.37

Frequencies in Table 5.20 also show that learners who stayed with families received more modifications from the NSs when a negotiation routine was initiated by

the learner (90% versus 78%). Learners also modified their output more when they lived with families (69% versus 73.5%).

Table 5.20: Learner initiated vs. NS initiated

	N	Learner initiated	NS Modification	NS initiated	Learner Modification
Apartment	6	7.12 85%	78%	1.25 15%	69%
Family	10	4.77 88%	90%	.6 12%	73.5%

As McMeekin (2006) showed, the interactions with the families might have been routinized and formulaic, leading to fewer communication breakdowns and negotiation routines. However, learners in families might have chosen or been obligated to talk about more abstract and culturally based topics. These topics might have been harder to understand during the first two months but, by the third month, learners might have been more accustomed to the conversations and routines. Therefore, it is proposed that the repeated interactions with the family members had an effect on the learners' listening comprehension.

Table 5.21 shows the differences between implied and explicit negotiation triggers. There is a slight preference for implied clarification requests.

Table 5.21: Types of negotiation triggers.

	N	Silence	Direct Clarification request	Implied clarification request	Avoidance
Apartment	6	1.37	2.79	3.54	.54
Family	10	.40	2.05	2.45	.37

These results are consistent with the literature that showed that learners abroad are more apt to modify their speech when faced with communication breakdowns (McMeekin 2006, Pica 1992). As shown in Chapter 4, in the category of NS corrective

feedback, there is a preference by NSs to use mitigated speech acts that are not face-threatening to the speakers. As McMeekin (2006) points out, it is more efficient for a NS to give learners an indirect clarification request in the form of a recast or confirmation request than to try to make the learners clarify their own message, especially when they do not have the linguistic resources to do so.

Frequencies in Table 5.22 indicate that learners who stayed in an apartment experienced a slightly greater change in use of negotiation triggers than learners who stayed with families. A Pearson correlation coefficient revealed that the correlation between negotiation and time was not significant for the Apartment ($r = -.30, p = .14$) or the Family group ($r = -.26, p = .10$).

Table 5.22: Negotiation by month and housing

	1 st month	2 nd month	3 rd month	4 th month	Pearson's r
Apartment	10.66	8	8.33	6.16	$-.30, p = .14$
Family	6.40	5.90	5.60	3.60	$-.26 p = .10$

These results highlight again a change during the last two months of their homestay abroad, which may imply that it is not until the third or fourth month that learners begin to see significant changes in their development of interactional routines.

A preference for more indirect speech by NS, as in the case in corrective feedback, is again noted. Implied clarification requests were more common, and they were more effective for the sake of the conversation flow, but learners were less prompt to modify their speech for implied clarification requests than for overt or direct appeals for clarification. As shown by McMeekin (2006), the focus is on communication in their interactions. Implied clarification requests operate by the principle of economy and clarity and at the same time provide learners with modeled feedback. The overall number of learner modifications was higher for learners who stayed with families (73 % versus

69%), which means that they took more advantage of the interactive opportunities to repair discourse.

5.2.3 Topic nomination

Comparing topic nominations by housing, Table 5.23 shows the differences in topic nomination by housing. Learners in families nominated more topics than learners in apartments in their interactions with the NS informants. An independent t-test revealed that the difference was not significant ($t(62) = -3.37, p = .84$). A Pearson correlation coefficient revealed that the correlation between topic nomination and time was not significant for the Apartment ($r = .20, p = .21$) or the Family ($r = .06, p = .77$).

Table 5.23: Topic nomination by housing

	N	Mean	SD	SE	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Apartment	6	2.37	1.52	.31	.06, $p=.77$
Family	10	3.95	1.85	.29	.20, $p=.21$

It was expected that SA learners who stayed with families would nominate more complex topics. According to McMeekin (2006), learners who stay with families are involved in more negotiation because

...the participation structure in the host family was more symmetrical, students were able to openly exchange ideas and information with their host family members and to choose topics that interested them—they were therefore encouraged to participate more actively in conversations. As a result, students may have been more motivated to overcome comprehension difficulties because they were more invested in the topic. (p.189)

As seen in Chapter 4, the nature of topics is also important because learners at more advanced levels of proficiency tended to nominate more complex topics. Frequencies in Table 5.24 show that learners staying with families nominated more complex topics than learners who stayed in apartments. In sum, there were more learners at the Novice stage in the apartment group, and their improvement is more marked than

that of the learners at the Intermediate and Advanced levels. In both groups, however, there is a remarkable improvement during the fourth month, more so in the group that stayed with families, although the difference between groups is not significant.

Table 5.24: Complex topics by housing

Abstract	1 st month	2 nd month	3 rd month	4 th month
Family	.65	.60	.30	.50
Apartment	.37	0	.33	.33

Table 5.25 shows that NSs who interacted with SA learners staying with families had a slightly higher frequency in topic nomination over time than in their conversations with learners in apartments. An independent t-test revealed that the difference was not significant ($t(62) = 1.73, p = .08$). A Pearson correlation coefficient between NS topic nomination and time revealed that the correlation was negative and significant for the Family group ($r = -.41, p = .003$) and not significant for the Apartment group ($r = -.36, p = .08$).

Table 5.25: NS Topic nomination by housing

	1 st month	2 nd month	3 rd month	4 th month	Total	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Apartment	10.1	9	8	7	8.54	-.36, $p=.08$
Family	8.7	6.8	6.6	6	7.27	-.41, $p=.003$

The negative correlation between the number of topics nominated by learners as opposed to those by NSs implies to what extent learners have begun to control the conversation. Two factors may influence this topic control: (1) the overall number of topics in the conversation decreases over time and across levels of proficiency; and (2) NSs nominate fewer topics as learners nominate more topics.

5.2.4 Words per turn, turn-taking, and silences

It has been discussed that SA learners produced more language than AH learners. Assuming that SA learners who stay with families have more opportunities to interact in the target language, this result would be expected. As shown in Table 5.26, SA learners who stayed with families produced slightly more words per turn than those who stayed in apartments. An independent t-test revealed that the difference was not significant ($t(62) = -1.51, p = .13$).

Table 5.26: WPT by housing

Family	8.57
Apartment	7.11

Table 5.27 reveals that learners staying with families produced slightly more turns than learners in apartments (62.61 versus 55.12). This difference was significant, as revealed by an independent t-test ($t(62) = -2.33, p = .02$). As shown in the previous sections, it was expected that learners at higher levels of proficiency would produce fewer turns because the turns would be more detailed and developed more thoroughly. The results might be explained by the small difference in proficiency between the two groups. There was an overall difference of only 7% in proficiency by the end of the semester.

Table 5.27: Number of turns by housing

Family	62.61
Apartment	55.12

Another interactional and linguistic indicator consistent with the results of the previous sections is the number of silences by the learners. Again, the differences are not significant but the results are representative of the interactions the learners had with NSs.

Learners who stayed with families produced fewer hesitations per conversation (.4) than learners who stayed in apartments (1.37).

Silences are a feature almost exclusive to the Novice level of proficiency because learners develop tools for clarification requests early in acquisition; if they do not understand, they develop interactional conversational continuants very early on. The results are consistent with the number of words per turn.

Table 5.28: Silences by housing

Family	.40
Apartment	1.37

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

The results of Chapter 5 have shown that the SA experience appears to correlate with gains in L2 proficiency and in the interactional features studied here (correction, negotiation, topic nomination, and language production). Results of NS corrective feedback showed that SA learners needed significantly less correction over time. However, the overall number of negotiation routines and topic nominations by learners are not significantly different. SA learners' routines of negotiation and topic nomination decreased at a higher pace over time than those of AH learners. It was observed that the most progress occurred during the third and fourth months of their stay, thus implying that it is after this time that learners start to experience notable changes. In the language production section, it was seen that learners who went abroad produced more language, as shown by the differences in WPT, turn-taking, and smaller number of silences. SA learners produced more words per turn, with an improvement at a higher pace; they also produced longer turns, and a significant lower in number of pauses or hesitations.

By looking at the housing setting in the SA context, some differences may also be observed. There were more significant differences between learners who had been abroad

with a family and learners who had lived in an apartment with other English-speaking roommates. Because learners participated in more L2 interaction with families, as evidenced by their personal interviews (which will be discussed in Chapter 6), they presumably received more comprehensible input through negotiation and correction. It is assumed that learners who stayed with families modified their output more often and their progress is reflected by the decreasing need for corrective feedback and negotiation. It was also observed that there was a preference for mitigated or indirect speech by the NSs, while learners preferred direct clarification requests. This pattern can be seen by the type of corrective feedback received by learners. The preferred modes of corrections were mitigated or indirect corrective feedback.

In the case of negotiation, the most common negotiation triggers for NSs were indirect clarification requests or confirmation requests. Learners preferred more direct ways of requesting clarification. This result might respond to pragmatic rules of politeness in the conversation. NSs feel the need not to impose on the learner, and avoid direct correction unless they perceive that what the learner is saying is not appropriate. NNSs are more direct in requesting clarification, which might be perceived as rude or coarse by NSs not used to conversing with second language learners.

The lower number of tokens of corrective feedback for grammatical accuracy as compared to negotiation triggers for the sake of communication shows that NSs preferred not to correct learners if there was no communication breakdown. Indirect correction or feedback may comply with two functions: (1) it provides learners with comprehensible input and forces them to produce responses and focus on form; and (2), indirect speech is more effective for the sake of communication because it is less disruptive, less face-threatening, and may save time. Learners who stayed with families engaged in fewer negotiation routines and nominated more topics of conversation. Both of these are good

indicators that NNSs have learned to interact better because not only do they need less negotiation, but when they need a clarification from the NSs, they are successful at making NSs modify their utterances. Therefore, learners abroad obtain more comprehensible input, as shown by the number of modifications made by NSs when prompted by learners' clarification requests. Recasts and reformulation are usually noticed by the learners and have a long-term effect over interlanguage, as evidenced in the literature (Mackey and Philp, 1998; Philp, 1999). It was also observed that learners who stayed with families produced more language in terms of WPT and silences. These learners produced more WPT than learners who stayed in apartments; they also had fewer hesitations and pauses. There is a preference for direct clarification requests on the part of the learners. Questions are the most common resource used in order to negotiate for meaning and also to nominate new topics. The other resources observed are direct appeals, but the degree of complexity of the utterance depends on the learner's proficiency level. The premises of the present study are that interaction aids and promotes acquisition, and that learners who go abroad will improve their IC by means of more interaction and out-of-class language contact. According to the frequencies observed in the present chapter, it is reasonable to conclude that SA learners benefited more from language contact, as shown by the tendencies of their interactional practices. SA learners showed more steady progress in every category as shown by their correlations between improvement and time, and at the same time showed more control over conversation, thus confirming the hypotheses of Chapter 1.

CHAPTER SIX

Examples of SA learners' perceptions about their programs and their interactional gain

6.0 INTRODUCTION

Beyond the results of the learners' talk, it is important to consider the SA learners' comments reflecting their own perceptions of linguistic and interactional gain while abroad, and of their SA programs. In Mendelson (2004b), learners reported their expectations before arriving in Spain. Mendelson then compared the learners' expectations and their actual linguistic gains. One of the groups in her study stayed in Salamanca for four weeks, while another group stayed in Granada for approximately one semester (four months). Her data showed that learners in Salamanca did not meet their expectations because they encountered a lack of opportunities to interact with NSs and their resultant linguistic gain was not as high as they had expected. They cited a lack of confidence, time, effort, and courage, and a more comfortable environment among English-speaking peers. They also mentioned that living in dorms had negatively affected their improvement, and they wished they had lived with families. The group of students in Granada had positive comments about the achievement of their expected goals. Apparently, learners in Mendelson's study in general placed a high value on the opportunity for interaction with NSs.

In the present study, learners who studied abroad, particularly those who stayed with families, enjoyed an advantage over AH learners in different categories of interactions, as shown in Chapter 5. First, learners who went abroad began the program at roughly the same level of proficiency as their counterparts in the U.S. and continued to

develop at approximately the same pace during the first three months. But in the third month, the SA learners experienced a more dramatic change, while AH learners showed signs of backsliding even though they also improved in proficiency.

In the present chapter, learners were interviewed at the end of the semester about their linguistic experiences abroad and of their SA programs. All the learners who went abroad reported that they had improved linguistically and were generally satisfied with their experience in their SA program, but many expressed disappointment at their inability to interact with NSs, as stated earlier. In the following sections, the comments of the learners who studied abroad are displayed according to their level of proficiency, along with a brief description of their improvement.

6.1 NOVICE LEARNERS

The group of Novice learners included seven learners who ranged from Novice Low to Novice High. Four were female learners and three were male. Two of the learners, Erica and Alexandra, improved one whole level of proficiency, and the rest improved two-thirds of a level of proficiency, except for Michael, who improved one third of a level (from Novice High to Intermediate Low). In this section, four representative examples of Novice learners are presented. They were chosen because they were at the same level of proficiency but their interactional resources and linguistic progress were different.

6.1.1 Danielle (Novice Low>Novice High)

Danielle lived in an apartment with two other Americans. She reported speaking very little Spanish and was very frustrated that she was unable to make Spanish friends. The only Spanish she spoke was during class time, and she spent 95% of her time among Americans. Her interactions were limited to service encounters at the store or in

restaurants. She reported that it was very difficult to interact in stores and that she let her friends do everything for her, but she did not show much concern about her missed opportunities to interact with NSs. She stated that her experience was very positive and that she had improved her Spanish considerably through the few interactions that she had with NSs. Even though her level of proficiency was very low at the beginning, she managed to hold simple conversations at the end of the semester and ask for clarifications, and she did not use the silences in her interviews at the end of the semester that were present at the beginning. However, she still relied heavily on the NS and L1 to communicate her messages. Excerpt 6.1 for Danielle illustrates her interactions at the beginning of the semester. In turns 4, 6, 10, and 18, she did not know how to answer and either kept silent or said *I don't know*. She was only able to answer in very formulaic utterances as in turns 2 and 8 that she had memorized from class. Although she received many recasts and implied correction, in turn 15, the NS still had to make a great effort to keep the conversation flowing. The excerpt shows her interactional level is very low, as shown by the number of silences (3), recasts (5), and corrections (1), the number of words per turn (3.6) and topic nominations (0). The topics are oriented to here-and-now and the number of turns is very high. These features reflect that not only is she a Novice Low learner linguistically, but also interactionally.

Excerpt 6.1: Danielle (first month with Rosario)

1. NS: Bueno, ¿cómo te llamas? [Well, what is your name?]
2. NNS: Me llamo Danielle, ¿cómo estás? [My name is Danielle, how are you?]
3. NS: Muy bien, y ¿qué tal? ¿cuándo te viniste para aquí, para Alicante? [Very good, and who is it? when did you come here, to Alicante?]
4. NNS: [Silence]
5. NS: ¿Desde cuándo estás aquí en Alicante? [Since when have you been here?]
6. NNS: [Silence]
7. NS: ¿Cuándo llegaste? [When did you arrive?]
8. NNS: Yo vivo la calle Portugal número 14 [I live Portugal St. Number 14]

9. NS: No, no, ¿cuándo llegaste en avión a España? A Alicante [When did you arrive by plane in Spain? To Alicante]
10. NNS: No sé [I don't know]
11. NS: Hasta Madrid [To Madrid]
12. NNS: ¿Madrid? [Madrid?]
13. NS: Madrid [Madrid]
14. NNS: Cinco días voy aquí [Five days I go here]
15. NS: ¿Llevas cinco días en Alicante? [You have been five days in Alicante]
16. NNS: Domingo, el domingo [Sunday, on Sunday]
17. NS: Ya, ah poquitos días [Yes, ah, a few days]
18. NNS: (Silence)

By the end of the semester Danielle was able to sustain a conversation a little better. She was a Novice High learner due to her linguistic improvement, especially in comprehension, and also in her lexical advancement, but she had a little more confidence. The structure of the conversation is still the same—the NS still holds the flow of the conversation—but Danielle shows progress in her confidence, too. Now her number of WPT is 4.3 and there are no silences and, even though the topics used in her conversations are very basic, she shows a little more elaboration of her discourse considering that she is still a Novice learner. Danielle's development of IC and proficiency seem parallel.

By looking at Thomas, another learner who was at the same level of proficiency as Danielle, it can be observed that IC can be developed at every level of proficiency and, even though there is a close correlation between proficiency and interaction (shown in Chapters 4 and 5), the interactional level of some learners can be higher than others at the same level of proficiency.

6.1.2 Thomas (Novice Low>Novice High)

Thomas shared an apartment with two other Americans, one of whom was Danielle. Thomas reported that he had taken Spanish in the eighth and ninth grades nine years before the program. He had not studied Spanish in college. He was very excited to

learn the language and his main goal was to learn it to use at work. By the end of the program he reported that he was able to buy tickets and move around in Spain with no problems, but he spoke English most of the time except when he was in class or when he had to go to the store or to drink in the bars. He reported speaking Spanish during less than 35% of the day and stated that he was too tired at the end of the day to speak Spanish because he felt very frustrated. He also said that he expected more diversity in the program, by which he meant he had expected to interact more with other Europeans in Spain. The following show Thomas's reflections about his linguistic experiences and how he gained confidence to do basic transactions in the target culture.

Excerpt 6.2: Thomas's reflections about his interactional progress.

This program has definitely improved my proficiency. Without a doubt I didn't really know Spanish before I came to Spain, and I can travel now by myself in Spain, and get a hostel, I can rent a car, I can get an airplane ticket, I reserve seats on trains, I can do all that, I can get around. I'm definitely more comfortable when I am by myself, when I am on the street, doing something, I don't know, I just work it out, I communicate with my hands, gestures or it just comes to me, it happened to me I went to rent a movie yesterday, two days ago, and I didn't have my account number, I give them my address and my roommates', and I did not have their phone numbers, but I was able to communicate, and in a few minutes I had this worked out. I get more frustrated when there are people around me because I get embarrassed, more self-conscious. It's easier when you have a few beers, they should do a test on that. When I go out at night and when I meet people, I love speaking Spanish. I love going out and practicing my Spanish.

Thomas showed that despite his low level of proficiency, he was able to carry more responsibility in the conversation. Excerpt 6.3 shows that he is able to nominate new topics and take some initiative from the beginning. In this excerpt he starts talking about his plans to travel to Germany during the weekend and, even though he lacks linguistic resources, he is able to make his point with the help of the NS, even correcting himself in turn 9. In this excerpt he nominated the topic and he needed only one recast. There were no silences, no corrections, and the number of words per turn was 4.1. The

differences between Thomas and Danielle show that their linguistic level is the same, but their interactional level differs.

Excerpt 6.3: Thomas (first month with José)

1. NNS: Quiero el fin de semana para Munich [I want the weekend to Munich]
2. NS: Sí [Yes]
3. NNS: Para October fest [For October fest]
4. NS: Oh [Oh]
5. NNS: Sí [Yes]
6. NS: Muy bien, muy bien [Very good very good]
7. NNS: Tienes...eres de Munich... [You have... you are from Munich]
8. NS: No [No]
9. NNS: ¿Viajes a Munich? [You travel to Munich?]
10. NS: No, no lo conozco, Alemania, no he estado nunca en Alemania [No, I don't know it, Germany, I have never been to Germany]
11. NNS: ¿No Alemania? [No Germany?]
12. NS: Me gustaría ir [I would like to go]

Interactionally, Thomas showed that gain in confidence in the interviews with the NSs. At the end of the semester his number of words per turn is 5.3, and he showed the confidence to start new topics, even though he is still at the Novice level. His comments about his linguistic gains were corroborated by his interactions. He showed signs of elaboration. He also took the initiative of starting the conversation with new topics. His indications of confidence and elaboration, as well as the lack of recasts and corrections—despite his grammatical mistakes—and the conversational responsibilities that he took by nominating topics and elaborating discourse make him interactionally more advanced than Danielle even though they were placed at the same proficiency levels.

6.1.3 Erica (Novice Low > Intermediate Low)

Erica lived with a Spanish host family, and stated that she spent 50% of her day speaking in Spanish. She reported speaking with the family during lunch and dinner, but spent most of the time with American friends, except when she was in class. She took advantage of her living situation because her host family did not speak English, but she

wished she had spent more time speaking Spanish out of class. She had taken Spanish in high school. She was satisfied with her progress abroad as reflected in her interview.

Excerpt 6.4: Erica's perception of her experience abroad and her linguistic gain.

I speak a lot more and I feel more comfortable speaking. When I cannot communicate, I try to describe whatever it is I am talking about, so that they can understand with other words, gestures, not English, because they don't speak any English. I live with a family, and they don't speak English, so I learned a lot from them, just because I have to speak Spanish everyday, I have more confidence.

From an interactional point of view, Erica was able to ask for clarification and communicate more comfortably by the end of the semester. She also was able to carry out simple conversations, albeit with grammatical mistakes, showing more confidence, longer turns and a greater degree of elaboration and speech quantity. She started the semester with a mean of 3.5 WPT, and ended with 4.7. Her interactions with NSs show much more control of the conversation at the end of the semester. By the end of the semester not only had her mean of WPT increased, but her ability to sustain a conversation had also increased dramatically. In Excerpt 6.5 it may be seen that, after proposing a new topic in turn 1, she is able to ask questions about the topic and encourage the NS to elaborate her answers. Her willingness to participate in conversations with her host family and to meet other NSs might have affected her improvement on her interactive level. Excerpt 6.5 suggests that by the end of the program, she needed few correction and little negotiation mainly because the topics used are still simple, but when she did not understand something she was able to ask for clarification.

Excerpt 6.5: Erica (fourth month with Carmen)

1. NNS: Sí. ¿Tienes que trabajar hoy? [Do you have to work today?]
2. NS: Ya trabajé esta mañana, mi horario es de ocho a tres de la tarde, pero no toda la mañana tampoco, hay días que tengo más horas y otros días que tengo menos horas. Hoy por ejemplo, he tenido de ocho a doce. [I already worked this

- morning, my schedule is from eight to three in the afternoon, but not all morning, some days I have more hours and some other days I have less hours. Today, for instance, I have had eight to noon]
3. NNS: ¿Te gusta? [Do you like it?]
 4. NS: Es buen horario, unos días más, o menos, pero nunca ningún año el horario es el mismo, depende de los grupos, de los alumnos. El año pasado tenía un horario fatal pero bueno. [It's a good schedule, some days more, or less, but I never have the same schedule every year, it depends on the groups, on the students. Last year I had a very bad schedule, but oh well!]
 5. NNS: ¿Y cuantos meses trabaja? [And how many months do you work?]
 6. NS: Al año nueve, de septiembre a diciembre, hasta Navidad, de enero a Semana Santa [In the year, nine, from September to December, until Christmas, from January to Easter]

6.1.4 Michael (Novice High > Intermediate Low)

Michael had taken two years of Spanish in high school. He lived with two other Americans in an apartment. He reported speaking Spanish 5% of the time. Like Alexandra, he complained about the lack of opportunities for interacting with Spaniards. He also reported to get what he needed at stores, but that one does not really have to know Spanish to buy something at a store.

Excerpt 6.6: Michael's perceptions of his experience abroad and his linguistic gain.

Now that I am here I would have rather lived with Spanish people, not a family, but with Spanish students, but I didn't think I wanted to before I came. I know my Spanish could be a lot better if I did because it would force me to speak Spanish. I don't feel like I am forced at all right now. We speak in class a little bit, but it is never, like, if I wanted to communicate I had to speak Spanish. My teacher speaks English.

Michael did not show much progress interactionally. During his first month his average number of words per turn was 3.7, and 8 at the end of the program; nonetheless, he exhibits here little confidence.

Excerpt 6.7: Michael (fourth month with Paco)

1. NS: ¿A ti te gustan más las grandes ciudades? [Do you like big cities?]
2. NNS: No, Madrid es demasiado grande para mí, pero Granada me gusta mucho [No, Madrid is too big for me, but I like Granada a lot]

3. NS: Granada es muy especial. Y de la gente, ¿qué piensas de la gente de Alicante por ejemplo? [Granada is very special, and what about people? What do you think of people from Alicante, for instance?]
4. NNS: [Silence]
5. NS: ¿Has conocido a gente de aquí? [Have you met people here?]
6. NNS: No sé, nunca hablo [I don't know, I never talk]
7. NS: ¿Nunca has hablado con ellos? [You have never talked to them?]
8. NNS: Muy mal pero [Very badly, but...]
9. NS: Te has relacionado a lo mejor con gente de EEUU [Maybe you have related to more people from the US]
10. NNS: Sí [Yes]

By the end of the semester his speech quantity increased, but interactionally he experienced only a slight improvement because he showed more elaboration of his answers as in turn 2. He still relied heavily on the NS to carry the conversation, however, needing recasts as in turn 5, and it was still the responsibility of the NS to hold the floor of the conversation. He was still unable to nominate any topics of conversation. The fact that he lived with other Americans and his lack of confidence and interaction with NSs might have contributed to his poor interactional abilities in the interviews, leading to small improvement in proficiency.

Summary of Novice level SA learners

At the Novice level of proficiency there were two general comments on which almost every learner agreed. They all claimed that it was very difficult to meet NSs with whom they could interact, and they all valued the importance of the homestay with a host family. Only Alexandra was dissatisfied with her improvement, and the rest were satisfied with the fact that they were able to fulfill basic needs in a foreign country such as buying things at the store, renting a car, and buying train tickets. In all cases the learners who stayed with families reported having more contact with NSs and valued it positively. Nonetheless, as seen in these examples, the homestay with a family was not a guarantee for a better improvement in all cases. Alexandra improved one whole level of

proficiency despite the fact that she lived with Americans. Michael expressed his desire to have lived with other Spanish students in an apartment, but not with a family. Erica, who lived with a family, also improved one entire level of proficiency. The rest of the learners improved by two thirds of a level of proficiency. The Novice learners also reported to have gained confidence even in spite of their linguistic deficiencies. Surprisingly, the majority of learners at this level reported that the *intercambios* or conversation hours with NSs that were arranged by their resident directors were not very helpful.

6.2 INTERMEDIATE LEARNERS

The Intermediate level consisted of six learners, three of whom were male and three were female. Four of them lived with a family—Shanti, Jeff, John, and Megan—and of those four, only Shanti did not show any linguistic progress. John improved only by one third of a level of proficiency, while Megan improved two thirds, and Jeff improved a whole level of proficiency. On the other hand, Julian and Mollie lived in an apartment with other students. Julian improved one third of a level of proficiency and Mollie improved two thirds of a level of proficiency. Shanti, Jeff, and Mollie were picked as representative examples of Intermediate learners.

6.2.1 Shanti (Intermediate High > Intermediate High)

Shanti started and ended the program at the Intermediate High level of proficiency. She had taken two semesters of Spanish in college and lived with a host family. She reported using Spanish about 30% of the day. The case of Shanti is very special because she was the only learner who did not show advancement in proficiency. She reported that her living situation was satisfying, as seen in Excerpt 6.11, but she wished she had lived with other Spanish students so that she could have more

opportunities to interact with people with whom she would have more in common. She also missed the opportunities to engage in more activities with the family. Nevertheless, she placed high value in living with a host family because of the cultural knowledge that she gained in Spain.

Excerpt 6.8: Shanti's perception of her experience abroad.

I think that it would have been nice if I could live with Spanish students because I would have been able to interact with them more. I think living with a family is definitely a positive because you get to know the culture, you are surrounded by Spanish at all times.

It is noticeable that learners, when asked about their progress in their SA programs and accommodations, sometimes focus more on their development of independence and knowledge of a new culture than on their actual linguistic change. Laubscher (1994) reported that independence and self-reliance were two achievements that were specially cherished by SA participants. Shanti reported that she wanted to go back to Spain and live on her own by finding a job there, which she eventually did a year after her SA program. She also commented on her intentions of going to India to work for a year and going back to the States to work for the UN. Although self-reliance might not seem to be connected to IC, it is feasible to say that more confidence and interdependence probably lead to better results on IC and linguistic development by means of self-assurance when carrying on a conversation.

Her level of proficiency allowed her to carry on a wide range of conversations, and she was able to show some of the features of the Advanced level of proficiency in her talk, but she also used some features that were from lower levels of proficiency by the end of her stay, as illustrated in Excerpt 6.9. She showed slightly more progress interactionally than linguistically. Her average number of words per turn increased from 4.95 to 8.4. At the beginning of the semester, the dialogue reveals that she needs

negotiation, but she is able to nominate a new topic (work) and ask for clarification when she encounters a linguistic deficiency. Also, there are no silences or corrections. Many of her answers are limited to *yes/no*, although there are no corrections or silences. She received recasts in turns 10 and 12.

Excerpt 6.9: Shanti (first month with Paco)

1. NNS: ¿Qué es tu trabajo? [What is your job?]
2. NS: Soy abogado. Toco casi de todo, no estoy especializado. Temas penales, criminales, temas civiles. Y de eso vivo. ¿Tú piensas hacer algo después de estudiar? ¿Algo en concreto? [I am an attorney, I do almost every thing, I am not specialized. Federal, criminal, civil issues. That is my living. What do you plan to do after you graduate? Anything in particular?]
3. NNS: ¿Después de mis estudios? [After my studies?]
4. NS: Sí. [Yes]
5. NNS: Yo quiero trabajar conno pienso en español, pero United Nations, está en estados unidos de nacionales. ¿Entiendes? [I want to work with... I don't think in Spanish, but the *United Nations* it is in united states nationals, do you understand?]
6. NS: Sí [Yes]
7. NNS: Y en los .. [In the].
8. NS: En las Naciones Unidas [In the United Nations]
9. NNS: Sí [Yes]
10. NS: En las naciones internacionales [Yes in international nations]
11. NNS: Sí [Yes]
12. NS: En las naciones internacionales, en las naciones unidas. Está muy bien. Más concretamente ser embajadora o diplomática. ¿Sabes lo qué es? [In the international nations, the United Nations. That is very good. More specifically to be an ambassador or diplomat? Do you know what it is?]
13. NNS: Sí [Yes]
14. NS: Es eso o en la propia organización internacional de las naciones unidas? [That is it or in the international organization of the United Nations]
15. NNS: Sí [Yes]

By the end of the semester she showed some Advanced and some Intermediate features. For instance, she could not understand and use a contrary-to-fact if-clause in Spanish with the past subjunctive correctly. In Excerpt 6.10, recorded after four months abroad, she expresses disappointment at the lack of opportunities to interact with Spanish people. In terms of IC, she shows very similar numbers at the beginning and end of the

semester. For instance, she was still relying on the NS to carry on the conversation. She did not understand the advanced level question asked by the NS in turn 2, and the NS has to give her the possible answers implied in his questions in turns 5 and 6, which is a feature more common at the Novice level. Also, the NS still recasts and completes the sentences for her. There is still much negotiation with two recasts, even a silence, which is more common to Novice learners. Nonetheless, she improved her language production after four months. Her turns are longer and more elaborated, but the topics are still simple. It may be that her level of confidence does not allow her to be more active and take more initiative in the conversation because the NS still holds the floor but her level of elaboration has improved slightly, as shown by her answers and her follow-up question in turn 15.

Excerpt 6.10: Shanti (fourth month with David)

1. NNS: Yo no hablo mucho español, porque estoy con mis amigos de los EEUU. [I don't speak much Spanish because I am with my friends from the US]
2. NS: ¿Eso lo cambiarías? si volvieras, ¿cambiarías eso? [Would you change that?, if you came back, would you change that?]
3. NNS: ¿Si estoy? [If I am?]
4. NS: Si volvieras, ¿estarías mucho tiempo con amigos de los EEUU? [If you came back, would you spend much time with your friends from the US?]
5. NNS: [Silence]
6. NS: ¿O intentarías estar menos tiempo con americanos? [Or would try to spend less time with your American friends?]
7. NNS: Yo quería pasar mucho tiempo con los españoles, ¿si yo volver, vuelvo?. [I wanted to spend much time with Spaniards, if I to come back, I come back?]
8. NS: Sí [Yes]
9. NNS: Pero yo no me quedo mucho tiempo ahora para conocer más personas españoles.[But I don't stay much time now to meet more Spaniards]
10. NS: Sí [Yes]
11. NNS: Entonces es muy difícil para mí encontrar españoles. [So, it is very difficult for me to meet Spaniards]
12. NS: ¿Has encontrado españoles que tengan facilidad para comunicarse en inglés contigo? [Did you find Spaniards who had the ability to communicate easily in English with you?]
13. NNS: ¿Los españoles? [Spaniards?]
14. NS: Sí [Yes]

15. NNS: A veces ¿tú conoces el programa intercambio? Hay personas de España que quiere aprender inglés. [Sometimes, do you know the program conversation hour? There are people in Spain who want to learn English?]
16. NS: Sí [Yes]
17. NNS: Entonces, los estudiantes de EEUU, y los estudiantes de España [Then, the students from the US and students from Spain..]
18. NS: Hacen intercambio para hablar ¿no? [They have a conversation exchange, right?]
19. NNS: Sí [Yes]

Shanti did not improve her proficiency, and was frustrated at her failure to meet more Spaniards. The results might be correlated to her lack of out-of-class contact, although there were learners who improved and also complained about the lack of meeting Spaniards. For instance Jeff, who reported the same concerns, improved greatly in proficiency. Shanti's perseverance made her go back to Spain and find a job, although her linguistic and interactional progress after her stay are outside the scope of the present study.

6.2.2 Jeff (Intermediate Low > Advanced Low)

Other learners at the Intermediate level also had some negative comments about their stay with a host family. For instance, Jeff started the program at the IL level of proficiency and finished at the AL level. He had studied Spanish in high school, and had taken two semesters of Spanish at the college level. He lived with a family and reported speaking Spanish about 20% of the day. He expressed disappointment about his family, citing his main concern that he did not get along with the father, and he could only talk to the host mother during meal times. Excerpt 6.11 shows the importance he placed on interaction and the pragmatic demands implied by natural conversations. He felt he was actually losing proficiency, although that loss is not corroborated by his pretest and posttest.

Excerpt 6.11: Jeff's perceptions of his improvement in Spanish

I only speak Spanish with my mom, but I wasn't in class, or with my friends. So, (my level) is going down a little, most of the time I can get by more or less, I mean, my problem is... I can write pretty well, because then, if I don't know exactly what I want to write, then I'll say it in a different way. When I am speaking is when I have a problem, because you have to say it right then. So, I come up with some real simple words. If I don't know a word. I don't know that much vocabulary.

The number of negotiation routines and corrective feedback decreased in Jeff's case. At the beginning of the semester the NS proposed the simple topics of conversation; Jeff still received corrective feedback from the NS and much negotiation with recasts. There were no silences and his average number of WPT increased from 6.3 to 7.5 by the end of the semester. He was able to ask for clarification from the beginning and make confirmation checks although he still relied on the L1. He was also able to form follow-up questions.

Excerpt 6.12 shows that by the end of the semester Jeff still relies on the NS to carry the conversation, but his speech quantity has increased as well as the elaboration of his answers, as shown in turns 6 and 8. In turns 12 and 16 he still asks for clarification with recasts from the NS. The topics are still simple topics, and they are primarily nominated by the NS.

Excerpt 6.12: Jeff (fourth month with Rosario)

1. NS: ¿Convives con quién? [You live with whom?]
2. NNS: ¡Ah! sí vivo con mi familia [Oh! Yes! I live with my family]
3. NS: Ah, ¿con una familia? [Oh, with a family]
4. NNS: Sí [Yes]
5. NS: ¿Y también pasas de ellos? [And you don't care for them?]
6. NNS: Hablo mucho con mi madre de mi familia, y padre también pero padre habla muy rápido y no entiendo todo el tiempo [I speak very much with my mother of my family, and father too, but the father speaks too fast and I don't understand all the time]

7. NS: Sí, ¿le dices que hable un poco más despacio? ¿Se lo dices a él? [Yes, do you tell him to speak slower? Do you tell him that?]
8. NNS: Sí, pero mi padre no está en la casa mucho y no hablamos mucho. Tengo dos hermanos españoles pero no me gustan. [Yes, but my father is not home very often and we don't speak much. I have two Spanish brothers, but I don't like them]
9. NS: ¿No? [No?]
10. NNS: Me gustan pero no hablamos mucho [I like them but we don't speak much]
11. NS: ¿Qué edad tienen ellos? [How old are they?]
12. NNS: ¿Qué? [What?]
13. NS: ¿Qué edad tienen estos chicos aquí? [How old are these guys here?]
14. NNS: Sí, el mismo. Uno tiene 22 años y uno tiene 25 años [Yes, the same, one is 22 and the other is 25]
15. NS: ¿Y tú cuántos tienes? [And how old are you?]
16. NNS: ¿Qué? [What?]
17. NS: ¿Tú qué edad tienes? [How old are you?]
18. NNS: 22 [22]
19. NS: ¿Y no habláis? [And you don't talk?]
20. NNS: No [No]

The fact that he improved linguistically from the beginning to the end of the program does not reflect his perceptions about his progress. Jeff did not show much difference in his IC. This individual difference needs to be explained. It might be that he did not speak much with his family because he did not get along with the family members except for his host mother. He did travel fairly often, which might explain his linguistic progress.

6.2.3 Mollie (Intermediate Low > Intermediate High)

Mollie was another learner who started the program at the Intermediate Low level and she finished at Intermediate High. She had taken three years of Spanish in high school. Mollie lived with an American girl and two Finnish girls in an apartment. She reported speaking Spanish less than 10% of the time. Mollie also mentioned the importance of speaking more with NSs in order to really acquire everything she learned in the class, and she felt intimidated to speak to natives. Also, in talking about her experiences learning Spanish, her frustrations and complaints mirror those of other

students who lived with other Americans. She resented the lack of opportunities to talk to NSs, reporting that she had very few Spanish friends and that the only chances she had to speak Spanish were in the classroom or in stores.

Excerpt 6.13: Mollie's perception of her experience abroad and her linguistic gain.

I am here for a semester, but if you stay for a year, you really get the hang of it. I think I have improved, but I think that if I had stayed longer it would have been much better. You get so much information in such a short period of time that it is hard to remember it all. The best to remember is if you hear every day and you have to speak...I think they should emphasize living with a family more, but I like that we have intensive Spanish everyday. When I am speaking I usually say what I want to say, but it takes me a long time to think about it, so I get intimidated.

This lack of confidence was present in her interactions with NSs. At the beginning of the semester she relied much on the NS and used English words. Her mean of words per turn decreased a little during the semester, from 8.6 to 7.9, and she did not show progress in her level of confidence, need for clarification, correction, or topic nomination. At the beginning of the semester she was interactionally less competent than linguistically competent. Her answers were short, and the NS is continuously recasting and saying confirmation checks to make sure that she understood, which implies that lack of confidence and elaboration and also a perception of the NS about her lack of competence. Even though she tries to take the initiative, the NS carried all the weight of the conversation.

By the end of the semester she was able to request clarifications but, unlike the students at the Intermediate High and Advanced levels, she did not use direct clarification requests such as *no entiendo* [I don't understand] or *repita por favor* [repeat please]. She requested clarification by echoing the words she did not understand and using rising intonation. She was able to use expressions like *no entiendo* or *qué?* [I don't

understand/what?] for clarification. Mollie still relied on the NS to help her communicate, which can be seen in Excerpt 6.14 as shown by the high number of completions by the NS. That is, she relied on scaffolding techniques by the NS. At her level, the interactions are limited to the *here-and-now* or simple topics. The language is very much simplified by the NS. Topics are continuously raised by the NS in the form of simple questions. Whenever the learner wants to nominate a topic it is through questions like *¿y tú?* [and you?], usually following the same questions that the NS has asked, and there is even a silence in turn 23. Therefore, seems that Mollie did not progress interactionally because few differences cannot be observed between her excerpts at the beginning and at the end of the semester.

Excerpt 6.14: Mollie (fourth month with Rosa)

1. NS: ¿Tienes aquí amigas españolas? [Do you have Spanish friends?]
2. NNS: Sí, pero no mucho [Yes, but not much]
3. NS: No mucho, poquito, ¿de la universidad? [Not much, a little, from the university?]
4. NNS: Sí [Yes]
5. NS: ¿Estudias en la universidad? [Do you study at the university?]
6. NNS: Tenía intercambio, pero es difícil para [I had a conversation partner but it is difficult to...]
7. NS: Quedar de acuerdo [To agree]
8. NNS: Sí, cuando ah, ... cuando veíamos [Yes, oh.. when we saw (would see)..]
9. NS: ¿Cuándo nos veíamos? [When we saw]
10. NNS: No sé [I don't know]
11. NS: Es que son muchos verbos en español, cuando os veáis [It is just that there are many verbs in Spanish, when you saw each other]
12. NNS: Es muy difícil para mí hablando [It's very difficult for me speaking]
13. NS: ¿Hablar con la otra persona? [To talk to another person?]
14. NNS: Sí [Yes]
15. NS: O sea que al día, aparte de ir a la escuela ¿conversas con gente en español? [So, every day, apart from going school, do you speak to people in Spanish?]
16. NNS: (Silence)
17. NS: Durante todo tu día [recast] [During your whole day]
18. S: Sí [Yes]
19. NS: ¿Hablas con personas en español? [Do you speak to people in Spanish?]
20. NNS: No para más tiempo, cuando voy a mercado o una tienda [Not for more time, when I go to the market or a store]

21. NS: ¿Y lo entiendes bien? [And do you understand it well?]
22. NNS: Sí, comprar billetes el tren o autobús [Yes, to buy train or bus tickets]
23. NS: ¿Y una conversación por teléfono puedes tener? [And a telephone conversation you can have?]
24. NNS: ¿En español? [In Spanish?]
25. NS: Sí [Yes]
26. NNS: No, porque estoy [No, because I am...]
27. NS: ¿Difícil? [Difficult?]

Summary of Intermediate level SA learners

When looking at the whole picture of all AH and SA learners, we see that the frequencies show that there is a correlation between IC development and linguistic development. However, individual differences such as those found in Jeff's situation in which he did not improve in IC need to be explained.

The Intermediate SA learners, like the Novice learners, reported difficulty in meeting NSs, although learners who stayed with families placed great value on the interactions they had with the family members. Only Jeff was disappointed with his experiences with the family. Megan also reported that she had taken advantage of the *intercambios* organized by the resident directors. Intermediate learners, in general, are at a stage where they still depend on the NS, but some of these learners were starting to show some Advanced features by the end of the semester. In general, and regardless of their level of confidence, they tended to start asking more questions. The issue of confidence has been observed often in this dissertation. It seems reasonable that speakers gain confidence as they improve in their level of proficiency, regardless of the learner's personality or anxiety. For instance, several learners, and even one who was at the Novice High level at the beginning of the semester, tended to (1) ask more questions, (2) use more backchanneling, and (3) need less negotiation, because they were able to negotiate lexical terms or miscommunication. They also started sharing responsibility

over the floor of the conversation and asking follow-up questions, but sometimes they still needed negotiation or self-correction. Also, there was a difference between the students who lived with families and the ones who lived in other housing conditions. The learners who lived with families improved their level of proficiency by at least two thirds of a level of proficiency, for instance from Novice Low to Novice High, and some improved a whole level, for instance from Novice Low to Intermediate Low. Those who lived in apartments did not improve in their proficiency by such a large ratio.

6.3. ADVANCED LEARNERS

The group of Advanced learners included two males and one female. All three lived with families. Ryan and Theresa moved from Advanced Low to Advanced Mid, and Luke from Advanced Mid to Advanced High.

6.3.1 Luke (Advanced Mid > Superior)

Luke was one of the most advanced speakers in Alicante, starting at the Advanced Mid level and finishing the semester at the Advanced High level. He had taken four years of Spanish in high school. He lived with a family and took advantage of as many opportunities as possible to talk with NSs. He said he spoke Spanish more than 60% of the day. He probably was able to meet more Spaniards due to his level of proficiency. He never complained about the difficulty of meeting NSs and he engaged in conversations very easily. In fact, he reported that it was much easier to talk to strangers in Spain than in the US.

Excerpt 6.15: Luke's perceptions of his linguistic gain

I like that we have three weeks of intensive Spanish when we arrive because I had not spoken Spanish for a long time and that was good to remember. I like my grammar class because we learn much grammar that I have already learned, but I need to practice. I think that I have learned much with my family and I have learned much more than if I had not lived with a family. And I like my family too.

Most of the families are very good, I think they like Americans, and it is very good for learning the language.

He showed proficiency features of the Advanced speaker. Also, from his interviews, it can be noted that his interactional practices and tendencies were different from those of the Novice and Intermediate level learners. For instance, at the Novice level the NSs usually took over the responsibility of asking questions and nominating topics. Luke, however, was able to elaborate his discourse and shift topics. In other words, he was able to control the topics nominated by the NS, even if they were abstract and complex. He could understand jokes and, when he did not understand, he asked for clarification without making any assumptions or echoing the NS with a rising intonation.

By the end of the semester he also showed his ability to give detailed answers, as seen in Excerpt 6.16, in turns 4, 8, and 18. By the end of the semester he was able to engage in more complex topics in his interactions, such as art, history, and religion. At the beginning of the semester he had an average of 11.96 words per turn, while he finished with 12.2, which shows not much difference.

Excerpt 6.16: Luke (fourth month with Carmen)

1. NS: ¿Esta semana vas a salir? [Are you going out this week?]
2. NNS: Sí, vamos a Granada el viernes por la tarde, no tenemos clases el viernes [Yes, we are going to Granada on Friday afternoon, we do not have class on Friday]
3. NS: Sí [yes]
4. NNS: Y, uno de nosotros sí, y hemos alquilado un coche hoy y vamos a ir, solamente por una noche, pero voy a la Alhambra, y más o menos es todo [And, one of us yes, we have rented a car today and we are going, only for one night, but I am going to the Alhambra, and that is about it.]
5. NS: ¿Y cuándo volvéis? [And when are you coming back?]
6. NNS: El sábado por la noche, pero bastante tarde [On Saturday night, but very late]
7. NS: ¿Qué palizón no? [What a hassle! Right?]
8. NNS: Sí, pero está bien, porque creo que podemos ver todo lo que necesitamos ver, pues no, pero, ninguno de nosotros tenemos mucho dinero, entonces, es más barato alquilar un coche para dos días solamente [Yes, but it is ok, because I think

- we can see everything we need to see, well..... no. But none of us has much money, so it is cheaper to rent a car for only two days]
9. NS: Y así aprovecháis [And so you take advantage]
 10. NNS: La noche, sí [The night, yes]
 11. NS: ¿Y qué sitios vais a ver? [And what places are you visiting?]
 12. NNS: Pues la Alhambra [The Alhambra]
 13. NS: ¿Lleváis ya la entrada sacada? [Do you have the ticket already?]
 14. NNS: No, yo voy a hacerlo esta noche [No, I will do that tonight]
 15. NS: Si no, no entráis [If not, you will not be able to get in]
 16. NNS: Algunos de mis amigos han tenido problemas, tienen que esperar dos horas para entrar [Some of my friends have had problems, they have to wait for two hours to get in]
 17. NS: Sí [Yes]
 18. NNS: Y no queremos hacerlo, creo que en la Internet se puede escoger un tiempo, para entrar el palacio, puedes andar por los jardines, siempre, y después hay un tiempo específico para entrar al palacio, entonces vamos a hacer eso. Espero que durante la tarde [And we don't want to do it, I think that on the Internet you can choose a time to get in the palace, you can walk around the gardens always, then there is a specific time to get in the palace, so that is what we are going to do. I hope during the afternoon]

Luke's perceptions about his experience abroad match his linguistic gains. He interacted much with his host family and participated in different activities with NSs such as playing soccer or going to concerts. The fact that he traveled a lot might have also presented many possibilities for interaction. He reported that, unlike in the US, it was very easy to talk to strangers on the street in Spain. Like the informants in Laubscher's (1994) study, Luke reported gaining gained new insights into the culture and more confidence and tolerance for differences, making him more open-minded. All these opportunities were reflected in his improvement in proficiency and interaction.

6.3.2 Ryan (Advanced Low > Advanced High)

Ryan had taken more than two years of Spanish in college and had experience speaking Spanish at the restaurant where he worked in Indiana. He lived with a family in Alicante and spent a great amount of time conversing with his host family members (over 50% of the day). His discourse showed a great deal of elaboration. As he commented in

his fourth interview, he spoke mostly Spanish with his family and some in the classroom, but not the rest of the time when he interacted mostly with American friends. From his interviews it can be observed that the topics are still nominated by the NS, but he had the tools to nominate new topics. For instance, in one of the interviews he shifted to topics unrelated to the current conversation, and went on to ask the NS about a doctor's office and how he could get some x-rays. During the first two interviews the NS bore most of the responsibility of the conversation but, in the last two, the number of clarification requests was dramatically reduced, and he raised more topics during the conversation. The number of topics addressed was reduced because his turns were more elaborated, and he needed less negotiation than the speakers at lower levels of proficiency.

Excerpt 6.17: Ryan's perception about his linguistic and interactional progress and the SA program.

My understanding has improved a lot, just from hearing people talk, from hearing it with my family and hearing it in class every day. With my family we talk about things going on in Europe, in Spain, in the US. We talk about politics, but the mom doesn't like politics that much. The *intercambios* could be improved.

By the end of the semester Ryan showed similar interactional practices, although negotiation for meaning was very reduced. As seen in Excerpt 6.18, he showed a high degree of confidence and elaboration of his answers, as in turn 6. The fact that his average WPT is similar to the beginning of the semester might imply that, at the Advanced level, learners have acquired already the necessary linguistic tools to interact in the conversation in terms of holding the floor, elaborating their answers, and managing conversation in general.

Excerpt 6.18: Ryan (fourth month with Carmen)

1. NS: Hola Ryan [Hello Ryan]
2. NNS: Hola [Hello]
3. NS: ¿Qué tal ahora que se acaba tu tiempo en España? [How are you now that your time in Spain is ending?]

4. NNS: Bien, estoy contento porque el próximo semestre yo estaré en Sevilla estudiando otra vez el español [Fine, I am happy because next semester I will be in Seville]
5. NS: ¿Y eso cómo has podido hacerlo? [And how were you able to do that?]
6. NNS: Mis clases en mi universidad no funcionaron, y también yo puedo tener otra carrera en español si estoy aquí el próximo semestre [My classes in my university did not work, and also I can have another major in Spanish if I am here next semester]
7. NS: ¡Qué bien! [Good!]
8. NNS: Estoy contento, es caro, pero mejor que estar en EEUU [I am happy, it is expensive, but it is better than being in the US]
9. NS: ¿Y qué vas a hacer en Sevilla? [And what are you going to do in Seville?]
10. NNS: Tomar clases de español, y estudiar, no sé, yo quiero buscar un apartamento o piso [Taking Spanish classes, study, I don't know, I want to look for an apartment]
11. NS: Sevilla es más caro que aquí [Seville is more expensive than here]
12. NNS: Los pisos aquí son muy baratos, en EEUU yo pagaba 400, 450 cada mes, dólares y aquí 120, 180 [Apartments here are very cheap, in the US I paid 400, 450, dollars a month, and here 120, 180]
13. NS: Sí [Yes]
14. NNS: Pero Sevilla creo que 200, 250 [But in Seville I think it is 200, 250]
15. NS: Por lo menos [at least]
16. NNS: ¿Sí? [Really?]
17. NS: Sí, por lo menos 300 [Yes, at least 300]
18. NNS: ¿300? [300?]
19. NS: ¿Qué vais más de una persona a cada piso? [Do you have more than one person to each apartment?]
20. NNS: Yo quiero vivir con españoles pero no americanos [I want to live with Spaniards, not Americans]
21. NS: Sí, si no, no hablarás nada [Yes, if not, you will not speak at all]
22. NNS: Españoles, no me importa, pero quiero hablar español [Spaniards, I don't care, but I want to speak Spanish]
23. NS: Claro, y aparte de español ¿qué más vas a estudiar? ¿además del español? [Of course, and apart from Spanish, what else are you studying?, besides Spanish?]
24. NNS: Biología, pero no en Sevilla [Biology, but not in Seville]

6.3.3 Theresa (Advanced Low > Advanced Mid)

Theresa also lived with a family. She had taken four semesters of Spanish in college. Also, she commented on the advantages of living with a family for the opportunities that it gave her to speak Spanish, although she said she expected more interactions with her host family and with NSs outside the classroom. She reported

speaking Spanish about 40% of the day. She also said that she did not meet her expectations when asked about her improvement in Spanish. In Excerpt 6.19 Theresa explains the strengths of the program and her desire to have spoken more Spanish.

Excerpt 6.19: Theresa's perceptions of her SA program and her improvement.

We had that three-week intensive course at the beginning of the semester. I like that I live with a family...but it would be nice if I had to be with a NS 20 hours every day, who would be willing to help me. I have an *intercambio*, but I don't speak to him that much. He is always willing to help me.

Throughout the semester, she did not show much change in some of her interactional practices. For instance, the number of topic nominations did not change much throughout the semester, and there are more topics raised in her conversations than in those by Ryan in ten-minute excerpts of conversation. The number of clarification requests is low, which is probably related to her level of comprehension. The nature of the conversations, although not as advanced as those with Ryan, was more complex than those of learners in the Intermediate levels because the participants chatted about museums in the cities. She was able to raise topics in the conversation, but it was through simple questions. Even though she was rated at the Advanced level, she still showed some features of Intermediate speakers. Occasionally she made some grammatical mistakes and needed clarifications, but throughout the semester she was able to understand more, hold the conversation with fewer interruptions, and raise topics. The latter is definitely a feature more common to Advanced learners than to Novice speakers.

At the end of the semester Theresa's elaboration of speech was similar to the beginning point, as shown by her mean of WPT (15.2>14.95). Excerpt 6.20 shows that she still needed to negotiate for meaning but she had no problem receiving comprehensible input by asking direct clarifications, as in turns 11 and 13 in which she gave a circumlocution that solves the communication problem. Therefore, interactionally,

Theresa showed a feature of the Intermediate learners, such as more clarification requests. She even used a feature of the Novice learners, such as the use of the L1 in turn 3, although she offered an explanation of the English term for the NS.

Excerpt 6.20: Theresa (fourth month with Isidro)

1. NS: Bueno, ¿qué balance haces de este tiempo que has estado aquí en Alicante? [Well, what is your thought of your stay in Alicante?]
2. NNS: ¿Qué voy a hacer? [What am I going to do?]
3. NS: No, del tiempo que has estado en Alicante, de esta experiencia, ¿qué te ha parecido? [no, from your time you have been in Alicante, of this experience, what do you think?]
4. NNS: Ah, ¿en total? Era una experiencia muy buena, en total he visto mucha de España. He recibido una experiencia hispana, en inglés decimos *Hispanic experience*. Y pienso que he tenido la experiencia de España, pero sí, en total todo era perfecto. [Ah, in total? It was a very good experience, in total, I have seen much of Spain. I have received a Hispanic experience, in English we say *Hispanic experience*. I think I have had the Spain experience, but yes, in total every thing was perfect]
5. NS: ¿Te gusta o has adquirido la costumbre de la siesta? [Do you like or have you acquired the custom of *siesta* (afternoon naps)?]
6. NNS: Sí [yes]
7. NS: ¿La has practicado? [Have you practiced it?]
8. NNS: Casi nunca he visto el sol, ¿cómo se dice el *sunset*? [I have barely seen the sun, how do you say *sunset*?]
9. NS: Salir no, cuando, desaparece [Not come out, when, it disappears]
10. NNS: Sí, cuando desaparece porque siempre estoy durmiendo. Sí, me gusta la siesta mucho, y anoche, yo he registrado... [Yes, when it disappears because I am always sleeping, yes I like *siestas* a lot, and last night I have registered...]
11. NS: Intenta decírmelo, ¿cuál es la idea? [Try to tell me, what is the idea?]
12. NNS: Ah, vale, yo, mis clases, en la Universidad de Iowa, para el próximo semestre [ah, ok, I, my classes, at the University of Iowa for next semester]
13. NS: Ah, ya has hecho la solicitud [You have already applied]
14. NNS: Hice mi horario, sí, y no puedo hacer siesta porque tengo clase [I made my schedule, yes, and I cannot take *siestas* because I have class]

Summary of Advanced level SA learners

The comments made by Advanced learners about their SA programs are different from those of the Novice and Intermediate levels. Of the three students who started the semester at the Advanced level, two reported having no difficulty meeting or interacting

with Spaniards. Advanced learners possessed the interactional and linguistic resources to overcome the difficulties mentioned by other learners. They showed both more confidence and speech elaboration, as seen in their number of WPT, nomination of new topics and conversations about abstract topics such as religion or politics, longer turns, and very low frequencies of negotiation for meaning. A feature that was common to the Advanced learners was the fact that they did not increase their speech quantity like the learners of other levels, implying that they had acquired the linguistic tools to carry out a simple conversation, which occasionally includes more abstract topics. Furthermore, sometimes the learners showed more control over the floor of the conversation by asking questions and making the NSs complete their answers and elaborate the topics of conversation. Occasionally the Advanced learners (Luke and Ryan) also showed the ability to follow a joke by the NS, which was not observed in learners of other levels of proficiency but in the cases of Luke and Ryan.

6.4 CONCLUSIONS

As reflected in the comments stated by learners, the results of the present study are similar to those of previous research in the issue of housing (Mendelson, 2004b). In Mendelson's study, students praised the host family environment as a means of valuable interactive contact with NSs, while students who lived in student dormitories showed disappointment at their lack of contact with NSs. They blamed the dorm environment as unsupportive of Spanish usage and it was the main cause of their frustration. This result has been corroborated by the learners in the present study. Like Mendelson's subjects, the SA learners in this study reported not to have met their expectations in terms of interactive contact with NSs. Several learners in this study mentioned the family environment as the primary source of contact, and the contact with their teachers as their

secondary source of interaction with NSs. They also named vendors and clerks as the third most important source of interaction in Spanish, and not Spanish friends.

The interviews with the learners reveal that Novice learners are more concerned about gaining confidence and being able to interact with NSs. The speech shows improvement in fewer interruptions (silences and corrective feedback), fewer topics dropped without resolution, and the use of more resources to negotiate. Alexandra and Michael, who lived in an apartment, were concerned about the fact that they could not meet more Spaniards, and Thomas and Danielle, who lived with other Americans, complained that they had expected more diversity. Thomas, however, was satisfied with the level of confidence that he attained. Erica was happy about the fact that she got along with her host family, but she wanted to be more involved in family activities. Suparna was very satisfied with her experience, and she reported that she had easy access to the culture through the personal support of her host mother. Even though there were some issues of adaptation to the culture, this aspect did not seem to be a great concern for Novice learners; in fact, they longed for that experience and placed a high value on the family stay. The main concern of the Novice learners was their ability to gain confidence and to function in everyday situations such as transactions, finding transportation, etc.

At the Intermediate level, Shanti, Julian, and Mollie lived in apartments, and they expressed the lack of opportunities to meet more Spaniards. Shanti did not mention that she wanted to live with a family but she would have preferred to live with other Spanish students in an apartment so she could feel more connection to the people. Julian reported that he had improved in his confidence, and he had spoken a lot of Spanish. Mollie, who improved a whole level of proficiency, was clearly disappointed with her few opportunities to speak Spanish, and she planned on taking another semester in Costa Rica where she was determined to arrange a living situation with a family.

The Intermediate learners who stayed with families—Jeff, John, and Megan—had mixed comments about their experiences, but they valued their homestay. John reported that he did not get along well with the family but he could interact with a ten-year-old host brother. He was concerned because the host mother was not at home and the father did not speak to him, so he complained that the conversations were reduced to meal times, but the family did not converse much. John was satisfied with his linguistic progress and he also appreciated that the family made great efforts to make sure he understood. Megan was very pleased with her homestay. She said that not only did the family make her feel comfortable and served excellent meals, but they also helped her to improve her Spanish, so she made large gains in vocabulary and confidence. She mentioned that, at home with her Spanish family, she could apply everything that she had learned in class, and that conversations went beyond greetings and transactions. They could talk about politics, current events, the Iraq war, and issues that she would not have been able to discuss in the classroom. She placed high value on her family as providing a first-hand experience of the host culture and language. As a group, the Intermediate level learners did not have many negative remarks about their adaptation to the family, except for Jeff. They did, however, complain about the opportunity to interact with other NSs friends out of the family. These comments are reflected in their interactional practices. Intermediate learners experienced advancement in their confidence as shown by fewer silences, more speech quantity, the ability to raise topics by the end of the semester, and less correction. However, just as the comments were varied, so were the results. The Intermediate level learners represent a more heterogeneous group from an interactional point of view but they all experienced a remarkable reduction of corrective feedback and increase of speech.

The Advanced group of Luke, Ryan and Theresa had very positive comments about their experience. The three of them had lived with a family, and it seems that they had already overcome the issue of not feeling confident. Luke reported that it was easier to talk to people on the streets in Spain than in the US, and that his family was very inclusive and the homestay very desirable. Ryan also praised his homestay and reported to have improved his comprehension and vocabulary due to the conversations with his family. He also said that he could talk about current events and was generally satisfied with his opportunities. Theresa was also glad that she had stayed with a family, but she resented that she only talked to them during meal times. She also tried to interact more with NSs through the *intercambios* program, but she regretted that they were poorly designed and the placements were not very effective because most of the conversation partners would meet only for one or two times at the most. She had to go out of her way to get her conversation partners to keep their appointments with her. In general, the Advanced learners praised their homestay, and they valued the improvement in their Spanish comprehension and vocabulary. They did not have problems in adjusting to the family.

The comments made by the Advanced learners are also reflected in the interactional resources they acquired, such as their increase in topic nominations and the ability to carry the weight of the conversation by asking questions and gathering information from the NS. These practices might also lead to a stabilization of speech quantity. When the learners were asked about their lack of opportunities to interact, the Novice learners in particular mentioned that it was mainly linguistic barriers that made them feel intimidated to reach out to more people. They were frustrated that they were unable to express what they wanted to say. Therefore, learners at the Novice and Intermediate levels were concerned with their level of confidence and language

proficiency in order to interact with NSs. As a group, they all valued the homestay as more desirable than other living arrangements, except for Shanti, who advocated for apartment arrangements with other native Spanish students, and Julian who was satisfied with his living arrangements in an apartment with other American students.

Another feature that may be observed from the individual cases is that, although the general frequencies observed in Chapter 4 and 5 show a general correlation between proficiency and interactional development, cases such as those of Thomas and Jeff do not corroborate the general trend of improvement. Individual variation might be explained by the fact that Thomas did not live with a family. However Jeff lived with a family and the only evidence to explain his individual case is the fact that he did not enjoy living with his host family and he did not get along with them except for his host mother.

On the other hand, their perceptions of their linguistic improvement are generally accurate although, in cases such as the one with Jeff, there is a mismatch between his perception of his linguistic gain and his actual gain as measured by his post-test, since he improved more than he had commented in his last interview with the researcher.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions and implications

7.0 INTRODUCTION

The goal of this chapter is to answer the research questions presented in chapter 2 in view of the hypotheses stated at the beginning of the study, and to analyze the implications of the results presented in chapters 4, 5, and 6. It also focuses on the analysis of the interactional practices observed and the roles that the learners and NSs assume when interacting in the conversations of these data. At the same time, this chapter discusses how NSs give corrective feedback in conversations, why participants tend to negotiate less in the conversations, and how learners elaborate on their topics and gain control over the conversation. These results present a new perspective to the studies that have been done in this field because most of the previous studies have examined only OPI results and ethnographic interviews when analyzing the development of proficiency and interaction.

A corollary goal of this dissertation was to analyze the effect that SA and the type of housing seem to have on the conversational practices of learners with NSs in terms of the variables of corrective feedback, negotiation, topic nomination, and language production (WPT, silences, and number of turns).

In this chapter the following sections are presented. First, a summary is presented of the results observed in Chapters 4 and 5, divided among the four IC categories of correction, negotiation, topic nomination, and language production. The results are compared to those of previous studies and their contribution to the field is highlighted. Second, a list of implications for the improvement of SA programs are proposed based on

both the results and the insights provided by the learners in their personal interviews in Chapter 6, as well as implications for future research and the limitations of the present study.

7.1 INTERACTIONAL PRACTICES IN NS-NNS INTERACTIONS

Research question #1: What are the interactional practices (such as corrective feedback, topic nomination, language production, and negotiation for meaning) observed in the interactions between NSs and NNSs?

The interactional practices observed in interactions between NSs and NNSs show that learners rely on NSs as their language experts to provide models and comprehensible input by means of corrective feedback and negotiation. It has been observed that learners tend to receive less correction as they improve in proficiency, and that their frequencies of negotiation and topic nomination also tend to decrease over time. At the same time, the language production of learners improves as they gain L2 proficiency and confidence to nominate topics and hold the floor of the conversation. These tendencies corroborate the belief that NSs and NNSs interact in a novice-expert type of relationship that dissipates over time, as shown previously by Wilkinson (2002). The majority of learners showed a linguistic development in accordance with their interactional ability. Although these two developments progress separately, there might be a connection between a higher degree of interactional competence and a faster pace of acquisition.

Cases such as that of Thomas at the Novice level or Jeff at the Intermediate level are examples of learners whose interactional abilities are more developed than those of their counterparts at the same level of proficiency. Thomas's interactional practices as compared to other learners at the same level show more confidence and control over the conversation

It may be concluded from the results that learners in the SA program improve in their IC faster than AH learners. Results also indicate that the grammatical accuracy of learners may not be developed until they have reached the necessary level of confidence to be interactionally competent enough to obtain necessary input, test their hypotheses, use the necessary output, and nominate topics accordingly. In the cases of Thomas and Jeff, they achieved higher proficiency improvement than other learners at their same levels—a whole level for Thomas, and more than one level for Jeff (IM→AM), probably due to their superior interactional resources. These two examples show that not all learners develop their linguistic and interactional abilities in the same way. There are individual differences that can explain variation. However, there might be a correlation between interactional abilities and linguistic abilities. In other words, the trends observed in the present study suggest that those learners who started the program with better interactional abilities were able to progress in linguistic abilities more rapidly, especially noticeable at the Novice and Intermediate levels. This finding implies that the interaction with a more experienced learner or NS is necessary for the development of linguistic proficiency and interactional abilities, and it also suggests that learners need to develop their interactional abilities and be more proactive in their acquisition process in order to maximize their opportunities for development. This active participation should bring more conversational abilities that should improve the learner's linguistic ability. It is thus implied that learners should focus on these interactional abilities from an early stage of acquisition, both in the classroom and in natural settings.

7.2 DEVELOPMENT OF INTERACTIONAL PRACTICES

Do the learners show development of interactional practices in a SA context in the family environment as opposed to a context at home in the U.S.?

Chapter 5 showed that the context of learning—SA versus AH— has a significant influence on the use of conversational resources. As illustrated in the different categories of NS corrective feedback, negotiation, topic nomination, and language production, the context of learning made a difference not only in the level of proficiency attained by learners, but also in the way in which learners and NSs interact in their NS corrective feedback, negotiation, topic nomination, and language production.

7.2.1 Corrective feedback

The data revealed that learners receive less correction as they become more proficient, and there is an advantage to studying abroad because SA learners show a significant decrease in correction that NSs provide more steadily and consistently than learners who stay in the US. Within the SA group, learners who stayed with families received significantly less correction from the non-host family NSs they later conversed with than those who lived in apartments. The tendency for mitigated or indirect correction in the conversations is clear in the case of corrective feedback, as illustrated in the examples. Because NSs have a leading role in the conversations and, following the Principle of Cooperation, they usually do not want to impose any correction on the learners or make them feel uneasy; thus, they prefer to use mitigated speech. However, when learners need clarification, they prefer to request it in a direct way, which allows them to receive modified input in a seemingly effective, non-face-threatening manner.

As Loewen and Philp (2006) point out, corrective feedback ranges in implicitness. In the present study, corrective feedback was treated differently than feedback triggered by a negotiation routine. The difference between the two is that the correction documented here was generally unsolicited while correction during negotiation was solicited. The corrections made by the NSs, not solicited by the learner, are aimed at pointing out the incorrectness or lack of appropriateness of a message, be it grammatical,

lexical, or phonetic error. The data show that the preferred modes of correction in both the SA and the AH settings are implicit. In instructional settings, for instance, teachers tend to be more explicit about their explanations, even using meta-linguistic cues such as preterit or imperfect in their corrections. There are also studies that show that the type of correction in the classroom has a positive effect on the acquisition of language. For instance, Koike and Pearson (2005) find that, while explicit instruction may lead to a better understanding of pragmatic rules, implicit feedback helps learners produce appropriate pragmatic utterances.

Overall, the present study shows that NSs used implicit corrective feedback 68.15% of the time when they corrected the learners, as opposed to 31.85% for direct correction. The next questions explore why more learners in their home institutions are corrected by NSs than learners who go abroad, why learners who stay with families receive less correction, and why they prefer mitigated speech. Because corrective feedback deals with the correct form of the message, it is natural to assume that the perceptions of the NSs about their interlocutors lead them to correct more in the AH setting. Most of the NSs AH were language teachers, which may have led to a higher degree of corrective feedback even though they were instructed to have a natural conversation with the learners and had never been their teachers. In natural conversations where the teacher-student role is not immediately established, NSs tend to perceive assertiveness as a sign of gaining fluency and, when they perceive this confidence, they do not try to interfere with the learner's speech. The learners who went abroad gained more confidence, as shown by the personal interviews with the researcher at the end of the program. Novice learners declared that they gained the confidence necessary to buy bus tickets, go to the store, and make themselves understood in survival situations. They used a minimal number of silences by the second or third month of the stay abroad. At

the Intermediate level, learners tended to ask more questions and use more backchanneling, occasionally using native-like lexicon such as *vale*. These same tendencies were observed at the Advanced level, confirming the issue of increased confidence. At the same time, the boost in confidence is also corroborated by the fact that learners nominated more topics as they improved in proficiency. They also nominated more topics in the SA setting, indicating that they gained the assurance to initiate topic shifts.

This gain in confidence may be related also to the perceptions that the NSs have of the learners' speech because there is not necessarily a direct relationship between learners' errors and NS correction. The data show that the NSs tended not to correct the learners if the errors did not interfere with meaning unless they found an error that was somehow unacceptable. Thus, the researcher proposes that the gain in confidence may be perceived by NSs as sign of development, implying that the learner needs less intervention. Previous studies have shown this gain in confidence; for instance, Moyer (2006) reported a significant direct relationship between language contact with NSs and confidence and listening skills. As stated by Moyer,

...it is clear that access to native speakers, contexts for target language use (especially multiple sources of contact), time spent on target language activities beyond formal instruction, and mode and formality of target language use are all significantly related to listening comprehension and/or confidence in listening comprehension when the language used is high-level (i.e., relatively complex). Moreover, more is better than less; greater length of residence and more time spent on target language activities outside of the classroom are highly significant for performance, as well as for confidence. (p. 267)

It is also proposed that interaction with NSs in the SA setting, especially within the SA setting in the family context, may lead learners to gain confidence not only through routine conversations, but also in conversing successfully about more abstract topics. At the same time, the tendency towards mitigated speech may also be explained

by Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. If the message of the learner is generally relevant and coherent, the NS usually does not pay attention to the form but rather to the meaning of the message. When the NS perceives the learner's utterance as incorrect, incoherent, or inappropriate, direct correction is avoided and indirect modes are used in such a way that the illocutionary force of the speech act is a correction, but the learner can save face from the imposition of the correction. Because correction is a face-threatening speech act, this occurrence may also be explained by Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory because the NSs do not want to impose on the learners' face, which might be embarrassing to the learner.

Thus, since the gains in confidence that the learners show when interacting with NSs seem to correlate with the lesser amount of correction received, and because the learners in the SA setting—especially those staying with families receive less correction than those studying Spanish at home, future research should be directed towards the study of the correlation between the learners' linguistic gains and the amount of correction received by learners abroad. The present study does not show this correlation because learners were able to advance in proficiency with little negative evidence.

7.2.2 Negotiation for meaning

Negotiation is more common than correction because learners, and interactants in general, prefer self-correction to other-correction. Schegloff *et al.* (1977) demonstrated that participants prefer self-repair; thus, it is logical that the frequency of other-corrections (corrective feedback) was much lower than that of self-initiated negotiations in which the learners corrected themselves. Brouwer (2003, p. 535), states that “even after the explicit marker is produced, *other* does not come in and provide help. In order to get help from a hearer, the speaker has to do specific work to make it clear to the hearer that he wants *other* to participate”. For this reason, the main purpose for use of a

negotiation routine versus a correction is a need to fill a communication gap, normally in the learner's interlanguage. Our results have shown that learners in SA and AH contexts engaged in less negotiation as they became more proficient while SA learners engaged in less negotiation than the AH learners. Within the SA group, learners who stayed with families engaged in fewer negotiation routines than those who stayed in apartments.

In the case of negotiation of meaning, routines triggered by the NSs were made most frequently in the form of implicit clarification requests when they did not understand something. When triggered by the learner, however, negotiations were commonly in the form of explicit clarification requests. This occurrence confirms that learners defer to the NSs's expertise in the language by explicitly marking a negotiation routine with clarification requests such as *how do you say..?*, or *I don't understand*.

In Chapter 1 it was also proposed that Long's (1983) IH about acquisition would also relate to the findings of this study. The IH states that interaction promotes modifications, and that certain linguistic modifications trigger acquisition. In Chapter 5, it was shown that NSs went to great lengths to repair communication breakdowns and made modifications. NSs used various strategies to repair discourse, including recasts, repetition, and confirmation checks. The IH was supported by our findings, especially at the Novice level, because these learners receive more modifications as a result of negotiation. In addition, McMeekin (2006) found that modifications after a negotiation trigger do indeed lead to comprehensible input and output. In the current study, when prompted by a negotiation routine, NSs modified their output 84% of the time in the SA setting and 77% in the AH setting, thus suggesting that the SA learners received somewhat more comprehensible input. SA learners were able to modify their speech 72% of the time as compared to 53% modifications by the AH group, suggesting that SA learners produced more comprehensible output.

Thus, if learners received more modifications as a result of their interactions and produced more comprehensible output, it is also proposed that studies on the IH examine the actual output in qualitative terms and examine discourse features produced by the learner.

A remarkable feature about the negotiation data of the study was the way in which contextual cues were used in order to indicate or decode the temporal or spatial reference of a verb tense or a lexical item. For instance, in Excerpt 7.1 Danielle did not understand the question but tried to answer the question by testing a hypothesis. For this reason, she answered the question about where she lived with a rising intonation contour. The clarification from the NS was formulated with contextual cues: ‘by plane’ was accompanied by gestures that represented an airplane; and the words *España* [Spain] and Alicante.

Excerpt 7.1: Danielle, Novice Low (first month with Rosario)

1. NS: ¿Cuándo llegaste? [When did you arrive]
2. NNS: Yo vivo la calle Portugal número 14? [I live 14 Portugal street]
3. NS: No, no, ¿cuándo llegaste en avión a España? A Alicante [No, no, when did you arrive by plane to Spain? To Alicante?]

This usage might occur very naturally among NSs as well because these types of communication breakdowns are also common among NSs. Other cues, such as the adverbials *más*, *antes*, *en el pasado*, *normalmente*, [more, before, in the past, usually] also contribute to clarification of the temporal or spatial features of the verb. A change in verb tense by the learners from more Peninsular present perfect forms (e.g., *he comido* ‘I have eaten’) to the more standard preterit (e.g., *comí* ‘I ate’) in order to encode the temporal meaning of the perfective verb aspect was also observed. Interactionally, these features are important because they add elements that indicate the understanding and acquisition of the local elements by the learner.

In terms of the learning context, the number of negotiation routines decreased for SA learners faster than for AH learners. SA learners who stayed in apartments with other students engaged in fewer negotiation routines than learners who lived with families, which was unexpected. McMeekin (2006) found similar results regarding negotiation. In her study she correlated her results to the fact that learners in families take more risks by engaging in a wider variety of topics. That explanation might be true for the present study since it has been shown that SA learners living with families engage in more complex topics than SA learners who stayed in apartments. Results were also more positive for those SA learners in families for comprehensible input on the part of the NS and modified output on the part of the learner. Overall, within the SA group, results were more positive for learners who stayed with families, evidenced by the fact that both learners and NSs modified their utterances more frequently in the family group.

Regarding factors that affect the frequency of negotiations, unlike previous research (McMeekin, 2006), this study shows less negotiation in the SA setting, and in the family setting in particular. Those students who stayed in the US relied so much on the NS's guidance that the conversation was too asymmetrical for them to converse on an equal footing. The SA context provided pressures to speak and created situations in which the learners became accustomed to linguistic routines, making it easier for them to avoid miscommunication. NSs in the SA setting offered more comprehensible input in the form of recasts, including rephrasing and simplification of the grammar, and provided more opportunities for learners to focus on meaning. Thus, the learners received positive evidence necessary to acquire problematic lexical items or utterances. SA learners had more control over and confidence in their interactional skills. NSs in the AH setting formed questions that provided options from which learners could choose. This practice was more common in the AH setting, and it did not help the learners to develop their own

interactional resources, as observed by Long (1983). On the other hand, by the second month, SA learners decreased their use of negotiation routines more than AH learners. This result might be explained by the fact that the SA setting provides more NS contact and more opportunities to request clarification, resulting in more comprehensible input and less need for negotiation. The frequencies also show that the difference in negotiation for the AH learners was not significant between the first and fourth months of the semester, implying that they did not develop their negotiation abilities, while the SA learners showed a significant improvement. The results also show that SA learners living with families demonstrated a more steady development as opposed to those SA learners in apartments. The fact that SA learners used more direct clarification requests suggests that learners abroad used more proactive strategies, while AH learners showed a lack of that level of initiative and confidence. The SA setting provides a rich array of opportunities for learners to develop their interactional skills because they are surrounded by opportunities to focus more on meaning than on form. Therefore, results indicate that the communicative context in SA demands that learners express their ideas and that they do not focus so much on form.

The present study also considers the reactions and perceptions of the NSs. It has been shown that NSs very rarely correct learners directly in natural conversations, and they do not pay attention to incorrect forms as teachers would do. At the same time, most of the direct clarification requests made by the learners dealt with lexical items, which are resources that they need in order to avoid communication gaps.

In conclusion, results show that a greater degree of confidence in interactional ability not only correlates with less NS correction, but also with less negotiation, and a greater use of interactional resources. They confirm that both NSs and learners in natural talk are not very concerned about form, and NSs do not normally take on the role of a

teacher, but rather that of a guide and a facilitator in making sure that the conversation is flowing smoothly. As learners gain more confidence and control in talk, which is achieved by more interaction, NSs cede that role. These results contradict previous findings by McMeekin (2006) and call for further research on the relationship between the homestay and negotiation for meaning, as well as the effect of other types of housing and the overall design of the typical SA program on SLA.

7.2.3 Topic nomination

Regarding the variable of topic nomination, the quality of topics nominated was different at the Novice level of proficiency than at the other levels. Not only do learners nominate more topics of conversation when they reach the Advanced level, but the quality of these topics shifts from simple to abstract topics. It is noteworthy that questions were the most common way of nominating topics at all levels. This pattern indicates that learners and NSs alike do not want to impose the topics of the conversation, and conversations shift smoothly from one topic to the next via questions that are semantically related to the previous topic. Abrupt topic changes are rare and are seen only in cases in which the conversation cannot be repaired and speakers need a radical shift to avoid silence or miscommunication. The general trend observed is that, corresponding to increased levels of proficiency, learners begin to nominate more topics. At the same time, the overall number of topics per conversation decreases because topics are developed more thoroughly over the course of the semester as learners become more proficient. There were significant differences in the number of topics nominated according to level of proficiency. When considering the learning context, it is noticeable that SA learners nominated more topics than AH learners, and SA learners who lived with families nominated more topics than those who stayed in apartments.

These conclusions can also be correlated with the language production of the learners. The study of topic nomination has shown that there is a qualitative difference in the language between concrete, here-and-now topics and abstract topics, and that SA learners abroad nominated more abstract topics than AH learners, suggesting a more developed stage of proficiency.

Therefore, the variables of level of proficiency and learning context correlate with the quality of the interactions as shown by the quality of the topics (here-and-now versus abstract) and the degree of elaboration of answers. At the same time, the fact that SA learners nominated more topics also suggests more control over the conversation and a greater degree of confidence as they improve in proficiency. The linguistic resources developed and utilized by the learners support this finding.

7.2.4 Language production

Two main differences were observed about language production. First, the production of learners increased as they advanced in proficiency: Advanced learners produced fewer turns and pauses and more WPT. In the category of WPT, learners abroad used 29% more words over time than AH learners, who improved by only 7% more word usage. Within the learning context, learners who went abroad used significantly fewer pauses and a smaller number of topics per conversation. They also produced more WPT, but the difference was not statistically significant. On the other hand, when examining the variable of learner housing for the SA group, it was found that learners who lived with families produced more WPT and incurred fewer silences, although the differences were not statistically significant. Regarding the number of turns per conversation, SA learners who stayed with families had more turns per conversation than learners who stayed in apartments. The differences are very small for these SA learners, but it would be expected that, because they attained a higher level of proficiency

as a group, learners in families would use fewer turns per conversation seen in longer turns with more elaboration of each turn. One factor that might have influenced this result that SA learners in the apartment group, as a group, were at a lower level of proficiency at the beginning of the study. Learners who are at a lower level of proficiency probably take *longer* to produce language because they have to search for words they do not know or they might use a circumlocution that might help them compensate for their grammatical or lexical deficiency. This factor probably caused turns to be a little longer in time but shorter in terms of WPT for learners in lower levels of proficiency, thus yielding these results in the SA family versus apartment.

Overall results show that learners who went abroad yielded better results than those who stayed in the US in terms of speech quantity. They produced more language with less hesitation, and started to control the topics proposed in the conversation by the end of the semester. This finding is also consistent with previous research. For instance, Isabelli (2000) found that, during a semester abroad, quantity and flow of speech were two facets of communication that developed significantly over a period of one semester. One finding that is very similar to the present study is that, by the third month of the stay, learners showed almost no hesitation. As shown in the previous section, the degree of language elaboration is also reflected in speech quantity. Learners abroad showed a higher degree of elaboration, reflecting more language. This result is also in accordance with the degree of confidence that learners develop when they are abroad, and it illustrates more control over the conversation. These results imply that the interaction does not only affect negotiation routines but also language production and confidence and, by extension, fluency. If interaction is needed for acquisition because learners receive the necessary modified comprehensible input, it is also necessary for developing lexicon, and to mechanize production.

7.2.5 Conclusions

Although there have been studies that have shown the impact of SA and the homestay on SLA, none of the previous studies have focused on a comprehensive description of the interactive practices developed by learners abroad. The present study has shed light on these practices and presented insights to SLA. Recent studies have shown the impact of motivation on SLA (Csizer and Dornyei, 2005), but there is a need to study confidence as a factor for SLA. This investigation has shown that, despite the apparently small difference in proficiency levels between the SA and the AH groups, learners who went abroad gained confidence as reflected in the quantity and kind of corrective feedback they received from NSs. This result implies that future studies in SLA should focus on the perceptions that the host family members, and NSs in general, have about the appropriateness of learners' language and of their confidence level. Because this study has shown a greater degree of confidence as illustrated in more direct clarification, language elaboration, WPT, and number of turns, future research should examine the variable of confidence and the impact that a homestay has on the confidence of learners to corroborate the present study.

The study has also supported the IH in which interaction has been posited to be a direct factor on L2 acquisition (Long, 1981). Improvement in proficiency has been linked here to the SA setting and the family homestay, thus implying a relationship between the improvement of proficiency, interaction, and negotiation at the same time. The way in which these three variables interact needs more research, including variables such as the ability of the learner to hold the floor, the acquisition of pragmatic rules, the acquisition of politeness, negotiation routines, and other interactional variables that have not been researched in the homestay setting.

Although learners abroad scored higher in every category of IC than their AH counterparts, the findings are not as noticeable as expected. This outcome might be due to different factors. First, the need for negotiation does not always correlate in a linear way with the development in proficiency. For instance, in contrast to the present study, Smartt and Scudder (2004) found that learners who studied abroad increased their use of negotiation for meaning over time. They concluded that this outcome was the result of the motivation experienced by the learners. Smartt and Scudder (2004), Cook (1991) and Gardner and Lambert (1959) had observed previously that the motivation to learn the language and the need to immerse and integrate oneself in the target culture had a positive effect on the language proficiency of the learners who went abroad. At the same time, this motivation encouraged the learners to negotiate for meaning with greater frequency in order to be better conversationalists in the target language. Considering the fact that learners go abroad to learn a language with an integrative or instrumental motivation, it is expected that learners will learn more in the SA setting. Nonetheless, and due to the low number of participants, it might be true that the motivations for studying abroad might have been different. For instance, for some of the learners, the motivation might have been spending a semester abroad and becoming familiar a new culture, and not necessarily a new language. Following Wilkinson (2000), one would believe that SA automatically implies language acquisition. Thus, this dissertation was written assuming two facts that have been documented in the literature. It was assumed that learners went abroad with the goal of making language progress, and it was expected that proficiency gains would be higher in the SA setting. Like other studies, the present one has shown that SA makes a difference in proficiency gains. At the same time this study aimed to measure the interactional practices observed in conversations with NSs. Unlike other studies, results of the present study reveal that learners engaged in fewer negotiation

routines as they improved in proficiency. Although there were no significant differences in the amount of negotiation used by learners in the SA and AH settings, SA learners used less negotiation overall. These results are based on informal conversations in which the topics were not imposed or directed by the researcher. Nonetheless, one has to take into consideration that having to converse with unknown people could have created a somewhat *forced* setting and therefore one cannot consider the interactions as purely natural.

From an interactional point of view the four parameters used for this study—correction, negotiation, conversation management, and production—are good indicators of the improvements in conversational abilities of the learners. As shown in the previous section, learners became more skilled in certain aspects of interactional competence and more aware of the conversational demands and obligations in the foreign language.

Although the results have shown these tendencies, only one category yielded statistically significant differences: the need for correction. As Segalowitz *et al.* (2004) pointed out, the time spent interacting with NSs abroad has a positive effect on language learning; however, it is difficult to establish a direct and simple correlation between the language gain and amount of interaction, and there is a need to examine the quality of those interactions. It is crucial to study what goes on during the interactions because many times they become reduced to formulaic routines. Even in the ideal setting of a homestay, sometimes the family setting offers opportunities to converse about only very simple and basic *here-and-now*-oriented. The results of this study have shown that the complexity of the topics utilized in the SA conversations also changed, shedding some light on this issue as raised by Segalowitz *et al.* (2004). It was shown here that learners at higher levels of proficiency were able to nominate and deal with more complex topics than learners at lower levels of proficiency. At the same time, learners who went abroad

were able to converse about more abstract topics than learners who stayed at home. Within the SA setting, learners who stayed with families conversed more about complex topics than those who lived in apartments. Other variables regarding IC could have been reflective of the interactional ability of learners. For instance, cohesiveness and coherence at the discourse level could have shown more interactional abilities. Other studies regarding IC in the SA setting have studied factors such as speaker alignment or speaker selection. Dings (2007) showed that learners abroad develop the ability to assess communication, use the right backchannel signals, and complete the other interlocutor's utterances. The subject who participated in Ding's study did not show much progress in topic management. She called for new studies that research this facet of interaction. In the present study it has been shown that the group of SA learners developed an ability to nominate new topics, and that the quality of the topics changed over time. Despite the difficulty of characterizing IC, the present study has shown how the group of learners who studied in Spain for a semester developed their interactional resources.

The implication for SLA, and more particularly for those studies that focus on the effect of interaction on SLA, is that interaction promotes acquisition not only by means of negotiation and modified input (which by extension cause attention to form and noticing the mismatches between the IL and the TL), it also promotes modified output by means of automatization and raises levels of confidence. This confidence makes learners more aware of conversation responsibilities. Therefore, the quality of negotiations also changes over time. Learners become accustomed to negotiate not only meaning of lexical items and structures, but they also learn to negotiate the quality and quantity of conversation as discourse. It is inferred that the family setting is more beneficial than the apartment setting because it creates more opportunities to test hypotheses at the discourse level. In the same way in which learners acquire structures and lexicon by means of trial

and error, they learn to try new topics of conversation that change in quality as they become better conversationalists. The concept of confidence is also a factor that needs more research and needs to be operationalized in future studies. It is narrowly linked to the concept of proficiency and conversation. It is common to hear concerns such as “I sound stupid when I try to express my thoughts in another language,” or “it is difficult to express my thoughts in Spanish”. These comments, although trite and vague, are significant and are caused, among other things, by self-perception and the lack of discursive abilities that need to be acquired to be fully interactionally competent in a second language, such as control over cohesion and cohesiveness. Other factors may also affect the way in which learners perceive themselves and the way NSs perceive learners’ proficiency, such as markers of foreign accent or fluency. If the motivation of a learner who goes abroad is an integrative motivation as defined by Csizer and Dornyei (2005), one would expect that learners will benefit from a family stay. Csizer and Dornyei (2005, p. 30) redefine motivation as the “desire to achieve one’s ideal language self by reducing the discrepancy between one’s actual and ideal selves. It also follows from this argument that the strength of this motivation will be dependent on the learner’s ability to develop a salient vision of the self as an agreeable, competent, and successful L2 user”.

Through the interaction provided in the family setting, the learner should have access to more comprehensible input, opportunities to produce comprehensible output, and the chance to discover discrepancies between the L2 and the IL. The latter should create an opportunity for hypothesis testing and fluency, both at the word level and the discourse level. One of the problems of interaction research is the complexity of all the variables that interact in the talk of every individual. The present study does not attempt to address all the variables, but it has shown how interactional resources of learners evolve in different settings. Another desirable outcome of future study would be to check

the long-term effects of interaction. It has been proposed in SLA that only by researching the delayed effects of a variable one can conclude that a language feature has been fully acquired by a learner. Such an endeavor is beyond the scope of the present study. Nonetheless, the results present some implications for future studies: more studies should focus on perceptions of confidence and the effect of interaction on the development of discursive abilities.

7.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF SA PROGRAMS

The learning context and the homestay were related in this study to the conversational and linguistic gains of SA learners. The present study provides new findings regarding the quality of improvement in learner-NS interactions. It was shown that SA learners, especially those who stayed with families, had an advantage over AH learners in confidence, initiative, and language production. The results, however, also raise the issue of SA program improvements that could be made so that learners could take greater advantage of their sojourn abroad and show greater improvements in L2 linguistic and sociocultural proficiency.

By looking at the results of the interactions and the comments of the learners about their linguistic gains and SA experience, one issue in the improvement of SA programs may be raised: what can be done to facilitate more interaction with NSs while learners are abroad?

Mainly at the Novice level, learners reported in personal interviews on their gains in confidence to speak Spanish. These learners were satisfied with their improvement, seen in functions that they were able to perform adequately in the target community: going to the store; buying plane tickets; renting cars; and traveling without problems by the end of the semester. At the Intermediate levels, however, the main concerns were the difficulty in meeting Spanish friends in the target community and in finding opportunities

to interact with NSs outside of the classroom. Overall, learners experienced more linguistic gain in the SA setting than in the AH setting. However, the differences in proficiency of the two groups, though significant, seem lower than expected because learners abroad surpassed learners at home by only one third of a level of proficiency.

Several reasons can be offered for these problems. First, SA learners in general reported difficulty in meeting NSs, and SA learners living with families reported that their opportunity to interact with NSs in natural conversations was reduced to meal times. These factors led to less time interacting in Spanish than students expected when they arrived. Second, the quality of the conversations during meal time may vary widely among different families, and they sometimes might be reduced to simple routine exchanges. However, learners regarded these interactions as the most valuable aspect of their SA experience. The learners also reported that the *intercambios* had not been very beneficial because they often felt that they were paired with people who had nothing in common with them. Only one participant made a positive comment about her *intercambio*.

In related studies, Moyer (2006) found that not only the quantity but also the quality of interactions are significantly related to accuracy and confidence in listening comprehension. A similar result was discussed by Isabelli (2000) regarding language accuracy. She established a relationship between wider social networks and language accuracy, and also with the development of discourse functions. Her study showed that learners with high motivation were able to establish wider and denser social networks, which she correlated to acquisition of discourse functions. According to Isabelli (2000, p. 173), “learners who incorporated themselves into social networks were the ones who aligned themselves to the new culture”. Archangeli (1999) had previously reported that more out-of-class contact would reflect positively on language confidence. However,

other studies show reservations about the quality and opportunities for out-of-class contact as connected to acquisition. Freed (1995), for instance, could not establish a direct relationship between out-of-class language contact and language gain. Like the present study, Mendelson (2004a) reported that learners valued interaction with NSs as the most valuable tool for language learning, but they missed opportunities to meet more NSs. Her study also shows that learners who lived with families missed opportunities to interact with other NSs outside of their host families. The results found in the present study are very similar, since only one learner (Suparna) expressed that her program expectations about being able to interact with the host mother and NSs outside of the host family were met. The rest of the learners valued the program but regretted not meeting more Spaniards, and two of them decided to keep studying abroad one more semester (Ryan in Sevilla and Mollie in Costa Rica). Mollie regarded her living arrangement as detrimental to her language acquisition because she had not lived with a family and, by the end of the semester, she felt that it was the only way to truly immerse oneself in the culture.

Regarding the advantages of the homestay, all of the learners who stayed with families, except for John, put a high value on the interactions that they had with their family members. John reported that he did not get along with his host family and, as Wilkinson (1998) had found in her study, he challenged the popular belief of a homestay advantage. However, the majority of findings show an advantage of the homestay over other living arrangements. Better scores in proficiency, less NS correction, less negotiation for meaning, and more language production and confidence can account for this advantage. Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004, pp. 259, 261) reported this same advantage of the homestay, showing in their interviews with the host families that “the *señoras* saw themselves in the role of surrogate mothers, offering personal advice...

increased interaction with the family would be a key factor in the students' language and cultural experience". It is noted, however, that Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004) did not carry out any quantitative research.

Therefore, although the research shows that the homestay with a family yields better linguistic results, the SA programs could still be improved. Mollie, an Intermediate SA learner, reported that she valued her stay with a family, but she thought she could have taken more advantage of her program by living with other Spanish students because she would have been able to do more activities with them. Michael, a Novice SA learner, also expressed his preference for more contacts with those of his own age group, not just the host family. Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004) advocated for more exhaustive pre-departure orientations for both the learners and the host families in order to maximize the cultural, interactional, and adjustment opportunities. These sessions could help learners by anticipating some cultural differences and plans of actions that learners need to do in order to pursue more out-of-class contact. The data show a host family stay advantage but support this affirmation.

As reported by Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004), the programs that have most success in connecting students to the native perspective outside of the family are those that require student participation in an organization tailored to their interests. Given that the majority of the learners had been able to interact with their host family members during meal times, the researcher also finds it necessary to engage learners in other types of activities that are more task-oriented. Because the majority of programs base the success of their experiences on the quality of the intensive classes and the excursions offered as a means of cultural immersion, not all SA programs put as much emphasis on the homestay. Very few offer interactive and task-oriented opportunities such as working in summer camps with children, or participating in community service work. Many

programs try to provide interactive opportunities through conversational exchanges with NSs known as *intercambios*. As our subjects reported, these activities are not always well-designed and conversation partners often stop meeting after a short period of time. The data reveal that there was only one learner who continued to have regular meetings with her conversation partner.

The recommendations given here are proposed to maximize learners' opportunities for interactions:

- The placement of learners in a family setting and the provision of preparatory information thorough orientation sessions should be given not only to the learners, but also to the host family members. An alternative would be to make living arrangements with other NSs of similar age, but not with other American or European students who are also very likely to interact in English with the learners.
- One goal should be to help learners develop strategies and activities to improve their opportunities to interact through pre-departure orientations. For instance, a weekly task of meeting a new NS to interview and reporting it in a journal, or reporting how they have been able to interact when traveling or buying tickets should be emphasized in pre-departure orientations.
- Another goal is to prepare students to reflect on their language gain and their personal growth. Learners should keep track not only of their language gain, but also of the cultural differences they encounter.
- Engaging learners in *required* activities that force them to complete a task is proposed. One activity would be to require learners to perform community service in such a way that the primary goal of the interaction is communication to complete their goals and duties, and not only to focus on the grammatical accuracy of their utterances. Other options could include sports or organizations

that would promote a continued shared activity with NSs, such as athletics, art, or volunteering in a local church.⁶

- Finally, advisors should prepare learners to reflect on their progress after their stay abroad, and develop strategies to continue their linguistic and interactional growth upon their return to their home country.

The aspect of SA that has most improved are pre-departure and post-arrival recommendations and orientations. Mendelson (2004b), for instance, emphasized the importance of orientation aspects of SA programs that aim at maximizing the opportunities to interact with NSs. According to Mendelson's subjects (2004b: 366), SA programs should aim at satisfying the following aspects: *information*, learn about SA and adapt expectations; *integration*, acknowledge and avoid the third culture; *interaction*, pursue target language contact and communication; *intention*, make a plan and push the comfort zone; and *introspection*, continually reflect on experiences to put them in perspective. Isabelli (2000, p. 174) recommended that in the orientations "it is important to inform numerous study abroad organizations about unrealistic goals that they may promise to the learners to recruit them. It is also important to inform the programs of the other elements that need to be fostered during a study abroad, such as the need for successful ways to create social networks".

Nonetheless, a continued pattern of SA programs is that these learners experience difficulty in breaking through barriers to interact with NSs, despite strong orientation programs, *intercambios*, and good diary records where learners can note their expectations and reflections about their experiences. Pre-departure handouts and manuals

⁶ This recommendation has been included as tentative. However, the practicality of the recommendation might make it difficult to be implemented. How learners view their goals about SA differ, and these recommendations have been made bearing in mind that the motivation of the learners is to learn a second language in a foreign country. There might be other motivations which do not fit learners' expectations. For instance, their primarily goal might be to have fun and spend a year traveling, in which case it would be difficult to implement the recommendation.

to prepare learners to maximize their experiences abroad are a common practice in SA programs. Comprehensive resources can be seen in materials produced by organizations such as CIEE (Council on International Educational Exchange), the Association of International Educators, and the SA offices of each individual college and university. However, many of the assumptions listed by Wilkinson (1998) are still being challenged, such as the fact that contact with NSs is inevitable in a foreign country, a host family is preferred, or the belief that deep cultural understanding and integration results from SA. The experience of SA as a miraculous panacea for SA language learners can be diminished if the organization and structure of the program are not well planned. Pre-departure and re-entry information are being improved every year in the SA experience, as shown by researchers in the field, although more research should be conducted on the types of housing and activities offered, such as service learning-oriented language programs. Freed (1993) noted that those learners who had been interacting in work programs abroad scored higher in proficiency than those who had been placed in SA language programs in a number of measures. Currently, most of the agencies that are dedicated to the promotion of SA (e.g., Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), Academic Programs International offer numerous opportunities for service learning in SA programs for students who choose to participate. These types of programs allow a task-oriented language interaction that can allow learners to increase interaction with NSs. The programs offer rationale such as

...service-learning allows students the wonderful opportunity to practice the theoretical components of service and volunteerism and, in return, utilize experiential learning to augment classroom dynamics and discussions, thus creating a continuous learning cycle... it is my hope that this program will awaken the student's appreciation and comprehension of service work, community development, and cultural adaptation through coursework, practicum, homestays, and a challenging social environment" (cited from the CIEE director of the Costa Rica program at <http://www.ciee.org/programs>).

Lee and VanPatten (2003, pp. 77, 53) have promoted the use of more interactive and task-oriented teaching methodologies, arguing for the notion of a proficiency goal in the form of an information task that requires students to exchange information. In the same way, if the communicative goals of SA programs are aimed at doing tasks, learners will achieve communicative goals once they have performed the required tasks, be it participating in a theater play or helping a medical organization read data for a patient. As they point out, “the two most common purposes of communication can be described as psycho-social and informational-cognitive. The psycho-social purpose of language involves using language to bond socially or psychologically with someone or some group or to engage in social behavior in some way...The informational-cognitive use of language involves communication for the purpose of obtaining information, generally for some other task”.

Porter (1986) finds it necessary to have contact with NSs in task-centered discussions as part of the social process of acquisition. She found that sociolinguistic competence cannot be developed without NS interlocutors. These findings, and the findings of the present research, support the validity of the IH, and also point to the use of tasks to engage the learners actively in the co-construction of discourse. Jacoby and Ochs (1995) have also remarked on the importance of interaction and co-construction as the basis of cognitive development in reference to NS communication.

Beyond theoretical observations about negotiation and corrective feedback, the results observed in the current study shed light on some of the questions posed by Wilkinson (1998, 2000) and Freed (1998). The importance of out-of-class contact during SA has been shown in previous studies. Isabelli (2000), for instance, showed the importance of students’ persevering to extend their social networks during SA. When learners start living in a new culture, they go through different stages of acculturation that

may hinder their motivation and desire to expand their social networks and interaction with NSs. Learners start the programs at Bennett's (1986) acculturation stage of ethnocentrism, and all of Isabelli's subjects showed some degree of preserving the hegemony of their culture over the host culture. Because of the personal differences of motivation, willingness to participate in local customs and activities, different rates of acquisition, and different levels of proficiency at the beginning of the program, among other factors, it would be risky to recommend a specific way in which all learners should take advantage of interactions with NSs. It has been shown in the present data and in previous research (Segalowitz *et al.*, 2004; Segalowitz and Freed, 2004) that no single specific factor is a determinant for the general language improvement of every learner. It would be superficial to establish a direct and simple correlation between interaction and acquisition. Nonetheless, many studies (Isabelli, 2000; Segalowitz *et al.*, 2004; Segalowitz and Freed, 2004; Mendelson, 2004b) show the positive influence of interaction in particular aspects of SLA.

Orientations in SA programs should continue to inform learners about the stages of acculturation and the difficulty of interactions at the beginning of the SA experiences, not only linguistically but also interactionally and culturally. Because interaction is a two-way street, it is difficult to establish a general scenario in which all learners will benefit. For instance, it is possible that learners may be rejected by new acquaintances or that different friends may give comprehensible input or corrective feedback in very different ways. Due to variables of personality on the part of both the NSs and the learners, varying levels of learner motivation, and the different nature of every interactional situation, it would be advisable to design SA programs in such a way that every learner would interact and participate in task-oriented activities with NSs. Even though the full value of the learning experience and motivation is ultimately dependent

on the individual learner, the proposed SA program design could increase the opportunities for learning and overcome the frustrations found in the present study and in previous research (Mendelson, 2004b).

In order to overcome numerous individual differences, SA programs should be more versatile and should consider reducing the number of classroom hours required in the program in order to expand and promote service learning and/or other task-oriented activities in the community. Guntermann (1992) conducted a research study on the effect of the Peace Corps context over the acquisition of Spanish copulas *ser* and *estar* and prepositions *por* and *para*. She claimed an effect of the experience abroad on accuracy in the use of these particular lexical items. Nonetheless, not much research of this type has been carried out, and it would be useful to compare the results of the SA setting in a language-based program versus a work-oriented or task-oriented program, in order to observe the quantity and quality of the interactions and to be able to apply those findings to the improvement of SA programs. The study of the specific linguistic gains produced during a task-oriented program is necessary in hopes of improving the current structure of standard language SA programs. Annette (2004, p. 83) also supports the development of service learning programs in order “to engage reflective learning activities which enable a student to develop key skills and capabilities”.

However, not every study has yielded positive results. Tonkin and Quiroga (2004, p. 139) conducted a research on the assessment of service learning abroad, and reported some of the frustrations of the participants: “Some of the frustration was due to language differences: communication breakdowns are perhaps more frustrating when there is work to be done than when students are sitting in a classroom or riding the bus”. Their study shows that SA in a working experience places a different set of communicative and pragmatic pressures on the learners.

Another issue concerning the effectiveness of SA programs is the length of the program. As shown in the data, significant differences in proficiency development did not become noticeable until the third and fourth months of the program; for that reason, a minimum of four months is advisable.

7.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the limitations of this dissertation is the number of participants in the study. The researcher personally recruited the learners by visiting classrooms and asking for volunteers. The study began with approximately twenty-five learners per group, but the attrition rate left the final number of subjects at sixteen subjects in the SA setting and eighteen subjects in the AH control group. Even though the value of the study resides in the qualitative research of the conversational practices observed, it is recommended that a broader study be carried out comparing not only SA learners enrolled in a language immersion program, but also learners in different natural settings.

The works by Lafford (2004) and Segalowitz *et al.* (2004) represent the type of research that is most needed in order to document the gains in learners' conversations while studying abroad.

One of the issues that arose from the sampling parameters chosen for the present study is the age of the NS participants in Spain. Most of the NSs were in their 30s except for one participant, Carmen, who was in her late 50s and interacted with all the learners. The age of this participant might have influenced the quality and dynamics of conversations. In other words, the learners, who were in their early 20s, might have felt more comfortable talking to younger NSs, and also the types of topics that might have arisen in a conversation with an older NS were probably different qualitatively.

The basis of the present study is to observe interactional practices in natural conversations between NSs and learners. The researcher videotaped interactions that may

have been somewhat “forced” or not exactly natural, and this fact might have affected the outcomes of the data. The results were limited by logistical/ethical difficulties of obtaining the data in a more natural environment. In other words, it would not be reasonable or ethic to tape real natural conversations without the acknowledgement of the participants. Nonetheless, an effort was made by the researcher to not interfere in the conversations and let participants interact in a ‘natural’ conversation to the best of their ability.

Due to the difficulty of finding NS in the AH setting, many of the NSs participants were language teachers, which might have created some bias on the quality of corrections given to the learners. However, they all were instructed to converse naturally with the learners in order to get to know them and to promote natural, unstructured conversations.

Finally, the use of a full Language Contact Profile in the personal interviews might have given a more detailed portrait of the extent of language contact and social networks of the learners. Personal interviews with the learners did not strictly follow the Language Contact Profile as designed by Freed (1990), in which learners answer a list of specific questions specifically related to the number of hours spent interacting in Spanish. For this reason, even though learners expressed their frustrations about the quality and quantity of their interactions, and gave an estimated number of hours spent speaking Spanish daily, it is difficult to determine the extent to which they actually interacted in Spanish and the extent of their social networks.

Despite these shortcomings, this dissertation has contributed to the field of SLA, particularly in the context of SA, by supporting a correlation between interaction and the acquisition of interactive and communicative features, illustrating the effect of housing

type on SLA during SA, and shedding light on the conversational practices that are developed during SA.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN PROJECT FOR NNSS

I am requesting your participation in a study of Spanish second language acquisition. My name is Alfonso Abad. I am a graduate student in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Texas at Austin. This study is being conducted as part of my dissertation. Through this study, I hope to learn more about how adults learn and use Spanish as a second language. You were selected to participate in this study because you are a learner of Spanish in a study abroad context. T

If you decide to participate, you will be videotaped in conversation in Spanish with a native speaker of Spanish. I will arrange 6 meetings and I will set up the recording equipment, then leave the room. The times will be arranged at your convenience. You will speak with native speakers (4) times throughout the semester, for fifteen (15) minutes each time. The other two meetings will be used for a proficiency test at the beginning (January 2004), and end of the study (May 2004).

The study will entail a total time commitment of approximately four (2) hours throughout the semester:

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will be kept securely, remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In the present study, you will be identified with a pseudonym. Upon completion of the study, the audiocassettes and the videotapes will be destroyed in order to further protect your confidentiality.

Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your future relations with the University of Texas at Austin or your Spanish instructor.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time.

If you have any questions, please ask me. If you have any additional questions later, you may email me at alfonsoabadmancheno@hotmail.com or alfonso.abad@mail.utexas.edu . My faculty sponsor is Dr. Dale Koike. She may be reached at (512) 232-4508 or d.koike@mail.utexas.edu .

I will provide you with a copy of this cover letter.

Thank you for your willingness to participate. Your contribution is vital to the success of this study.

Name of student Signature of student Date

APPENDIX 2

ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES AS DESCRIBED BY OMAGGIO HADLEY, 1993.

Novice: The Novice level is characterized by the ability to communicate minimally with learned material.

Novice Low: Oral production consists of isolated words and perhaps a few high-frequency phrases. Essentially no functional communicative ability.

Novice Mid: Oral production continues to consist of isolated words and learned phrases within very predictable areas of need although quantity is increased. Vocabulary is sufficient only for handling simple, elementary needs and expressing basic courtesies. Utterances rarely consist of more than two or three words and show frequent long pauses and repetition of interlocutor's utterances. Some Novice Mid speakers will be understood only with great difficulty.

Novice High: Able to satisfy partially the requirement of basic communicative exchanges by relying heavily on learned utterances but occasionally expanding these through simple recombination of their elements. Can ask questions or make statements involving learned material. Shows signs of spontaneity although this falls short of real autonomy of expression. Speech continues to consist of learned utterances rather than of personalized, situationally adapted ones. Vocabulary centers on areas such as basic objects, places, and most common kinship terms. Pronunciation may still be strongly influenced by first language. Errors are frequent, and in spite of repetition, some Novice High speakers will have difficulty being understood even by sympathetic interlocutors.

Intermediate: The Intermediate level is characterized by the speaker's ability to: create with the language by combining and recombining learned elements, though primarily in a reactive mode; initiate, minimally sustain, and close in a simple way basic communicative tasks; and ask and answer questions.

Intermediate Low: Able to handle successfully a limited number of interactive, task-oriented and social situations. Can ask and answer questions, initiate and respond to simple statements and maintain face-to-face conversation, although in a highly restricted manner and with much linguistic inaccuracy. Within these limitations, can perform such tasks as introducing self, ordering a meal, asking directions, and making purchases. Vocabulary is adequate to express only the most elementary needs. Strong interference from native language may occur. Misunderstandings frequently arise, but with repetition, the Intermediate Low speaker can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors.

Intermediate Mid: Able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated and basic communicative tasks and social situations. Can talk simply about self and family members. Can ask and answer questions and participate in simple conversations on topics beyond the most immediate needs; e.g., personal history and leisure time activities. Utterance length increases slightly, but speech may continue to be characterized by frequent long pauses, since the smooth incorporation of even basic conversational strategies is often hindered as the speaker struggles to create appropriate language forms. Pronunciation may continue to be strongly influenced by first language and fluency may still be strained. Although misunderstandings still arise, the Intermediate Mid speaker can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors.

Intermediate High: Able to handle successfully most uncomplicated communicative tasks and social situations. Can initiate, sustain, and close a general conversation with a number of strategies appropriate to a range of circumstances and topics, but errors are evident. Limited vocabulary still necessitates hesitation and may bring about slightly unexpected circumlocution. There is emerging evidence of connected discourse, particularly for simple narration and/or description. The Intermediate High speaker can generally be understood even by interlocutors not accustomed to dealing with speakers at this level, but repetition may still be required.

Advanced: The Advanced level is characterized by the speaker's ability to:

Converse in a clearly participatory fashion; initiate, sustain, and bring to closure a wide variety of communicative tasks, including those that require an increased ability to convey meaning with diverse language strategies due to a complication or an unforeseen turn of events; satisfy the requirements of school and work situations; and narrate and describe with paragraph-length connected discourse.

Advanced: Able to satisfy the requirements of everyday situations and routine school and work requirements. Can handle with confidence but not with facility complicated tasks and social situations, such as elaborating, complaining, and apologizing. Can narrate and describe with some details, linking sentences together smoothly. Can communicate facts and talk casually about topics of current public and personal interest, using general vocabulary. Shortcomings can often be smoothed over by communicative strategies, such as pause fillers, stalling devices, and different rates of speech. Circumlocution which arises from vocabulary or syntactic limitations very often is quite successful, though some groping for words may still be evident.

Advanced Plus: Able to satisfy the requirements of a broad variety of everyday, school, and work situations. Can discuss concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. There is emerging evidence of ability to support opinions, explain in detail, and hypothesize. The Advanced Plus

speaker often shows a well developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms with confident use of communicative strategies, such as paraphrasing and circumlocution. Differentiated vocabulary and intonation are effectively used to communicate fine shades of meaning. The Advanced Plus speaker often shows remarkable fluency and ease of speech but under the demands of Superior-level, complex tasks, language may break down or prove inadequate.

Superior: The Superior level is characterized by the speaker' ability to: participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, professional, and abstract topics; and support opinions and hypothesize using native-like discourse strategies.

Superior: Able to speak the language with sufficient accuracy to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, professional, and abstract topics. Can discuss special fields of competence and interest with ease. Can support opinions and hypothesize, but may not be able to tailor language to audience or discuss in depth highly abstract or unfamiliar topics. Usually the Superior level speaker is only partially familiar with regional or other dialectical variants. The Superior level speaker commands a wide variety of interactive strategies and shows good awareness of discourse strategies. The latter involves the ability to distinguish main ideas from supporting information through syntactic, lexical and suprasegmental features (pitch, stress, intonation). Sporadic errors may occur, particularly in low-frequency structures and some complex high-frequency structures more common to formal writing, but no patterns of error are evident. Errors do not disturb the native speaker or interfere with communication. (Ommagio-Hadley, 1995, p. 502-504).

APPENDIX 3: OVERVIEW OF THE TOPT

Overview of picture Section of TOPT

Picture 1	Give directions Level: Novice. Control of directions vocabulary (commands); naming of landmarks; Logical order important; simple map with dotted line showing route (map)
Picture 2	Describe a place and activities Level: Intermediate Vocabulary needed to describe objects and activities in familiar school or home settings. Response need not be sequential but should show logical organization. (American Suburban House)
Picture 3	Narrate in present Level: Advanced Sequence of pictures used to guide your description of everyday activities that take place at home or at school. Need transition words to display organization and cohesion. Sequencing and smooth delivery important. (School librarian's duties)
Picture 4	Narrate in the past Level: Advanced Retell a slightly unusual incident that occurred in the recent past. Control of preterit and imperfect and good organization are important. Use of emotion. (Mistake at the Cleaner's)
Picture 5	Narrate in the Future Level: Advanced Describe a future event of activity to a third party. Cohesion and use of near future and subjunctive for pending actions are important. (Surprise party plan)

Overview of topics section of TOPT

Topic 1	<p>Giving Instructions Level: Novice This item requires the learner to give step by step instructions. The ability to present ideas clearly and in logical order is crucial. Control of imperative verb forms is important. (Taking attendance)</p>
Topic 2	<p>Advantages/Disadvantages Level: Intermediate Higher level impersonal vocabulary is necessary; simple present tense. Simple organization can be accomplished by first stating the advantages and then the disadvantages. (Public school vs. Private school).</p>
Topic 3	<p>Brief Factual summary Level: Advanced This is a monologue in which the learner presents information in the form of a short summary to a specific audience. Organization and smooth delivery are important. (Summary of curriculum, extra curricular projects, recent historical events, etc.)</p>
Topic 4	<p>Support and Opinion Level: Superior In this item, the learner must state, support and defend a personal opinion about an educational or political issue. A high degree of organization and an extensive vocabulary are necessary. (Correcting grammar errors when students speak).</p>
Topic 5	<p>Hypothesizing Level: Superior What would happen if... In this item organization is important and control of the conditional and the subjunctive is necessary. (Having 15 vs. 25 students in the class)</p>

Overview of situations section of TOPT

Situation 1	<p>Apologizing, Complaining, Declining Level: Advanced</p> <p>This item requires the learner to deal with a delicate social situation. Appropriate courteous expressions are necessary. Control of the present perfect and conditional is important. (Hotel Reservations)</p>
Situation 2	<p>Speak to Persuade Level: Superior</p> <p>This task requires the learner to choose a plan or course of action from among several and then clearly and persuasively convince the listener to follow the plan. The learner must use language appropriate to the audience and must have a high degree of organization. (Cheating on exams)</p>
Situation 3	<p>Propose and Defend Level: Superior</p> <p>In this item, the learner must demonstrate ability to propose and defend a course of action after being presented with at least two possible choices. This task requires the learner to show a high degree of organization, sensitivity to convincingly persuade the audience to accept the proposal. A clear presentation of the reasons is crucial. (Rain on school camping trip; propose alternatives)</p>
Situation 4	<p>Professional Talk Level: Superior</p> <p>For this task the learner must address an audience with the appropriate level of formality using professional language and technical vocabulary. A good introduction sensitive to the specific audience and a clear beginning to the talk are required. (How to increase student participation).</p>
Situation 5	<p>Give Advice Level: Advanced</p> <p>This item requires the learner to give advice to a friend or colleague who is faced with</p>

	making a difficult choice. This task is more personal than the advantages/disadvantages topic. (Teacher exchange program)
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APPENDIX 4

Language Contact Profile for interviews with the researcher

1. How many years of Spanish have you taken in College or High School?
2. Have you lived outside the U.S.?
3. What is your impression of your language progress during your stay abroad?
4. What was your living situation?
5. What percentage of a normal day did you spend speaking Spanish?
6. Have you made Spanish friends?
7. When do you interact in Spanish?
8. What factors do you think would be beneficial in order to improve the SA program in which you participated?
9. When you have language difficulties, how do you manage to communicate?
10. Can you tell me an episode in which you encountered a language problem which you were able to overcome?

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Vita

Alfonso Abad Mancheño was born in Alicante, Spain, on November 1, 1972, the son of José Luis Abad Montes and María Consolación Mancheño Segarra. After graduating from Instituto de Bachillerato Jorge Juan in Alicante, Spain in 1990, he entered the Universidad de Alicante. He received his Bachelors of Arts in English (Licenciado en Filología inglesa) from Universidad de Alicante in 1995. In the Fall of 1995 he entered Arizona State University where he completed a Master of Arts degree in Applied Linguistics in 1998. He worked as adjunct faculty at Arizona State University and Mesa Community College, and in the Fall of 1999 he entered the graduate program in Romance Philology and Linguistics at the University of Texas at Austin. After successful completion of course work and doctoral exams in 2003 he spent a year collecting data. He completed the program in the Spring of 2008 in the area of Spanish Second Language acquisition.

Permanent address: 9b Quakeridge Drive, Greensboro, NC, 27410

This dissertation was typed by Alfonso Abad Mancheño.