

**LEARNER ACTIVITY SYSTEMS AND INVESTMENT IN A VIRTUAL
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: A STUDY OF FIVE FOCAL
PARTICIPANTS IN AN ONLINE, INTRODUCTION TO SPANISH
LINGUISTICS COURSE**

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ABSTRACT

The onset of the COVID-19 crisis in March 2020 gave way to a precipitous transition to online learning in colleges and universities across the globe. Learners and teachers alike were forced to adapt to new procedures and norms within a matter of days. Among the many questions regarding the development of rigorous courses that can adequately replace face-to-face learning, there was a need to examine and understand the complexities between identity and second language (L2) classroom discourse in the ever-expanding sphere of online learning. Thorne et al.'s (2015) study demonstrates that there is a considerable body of work that sheds light on the role of L2 identity in online contexts, with some studies focusing on platforms that are not entirely synchronous but that contain synchronous capabilities (Thorne et al., 2015). Despite this, few studies have focused on the manifestation of learner identity using exclusively synchronous video communication for L2 instructional purposes in educational contexts.

The present study aims to fill this gap in the literature on L2 identity in synchronous online courses that utilize video web conferencing platforms using qualitative methodological approaches. This study relied on data from one-on-one interviews with five focal participants, classroom transcripts, and weekly written reflections to demonstrate relationships between recurring themes in their data to theoretical constructs that were relevant to the research questions being examined. The theoretical constructs that were used to interpret the data were activity theory (Engeström, 1987, 2001), Lave and Wenger's theory of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), and Norton's theories of identity and imagined communities (Norton-Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000, 2001, 2013; Norton & Toohey, 2011).

Activity Theory was used to understand how learners made use of the affordances of the online classroom to accomplish their individual goals of learning about Spanish linguistics. The communities of practice (CoP) framework was used to examine how learners negotiated their identities within this community and how their identity or role within the online classroom community impacted their participation. Regarding investment and imagined communities, this research focused on how learners were able to draw connections between class activities and their personal and professional goals. Theoretical and practical implications for this study outline how instructors can constructively negotiate the use of technological affordances for communication in the online classroom to meet the learning goals of their courses.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a significant departure from the traditional ways of the in-person classroom and accelerated the adoption of new technologies in educational institutions across the United States and many parts of the world. Due to these extraordinary circumstances, it was necessary for both teachers and students to adapt to the new methods of instruction and learning that this online environment demanded. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that nearly 84% of undergraduate students in the United States experienced some or all of their university courses moved to online instruction during the spring of 2020 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021). This widespread adoption of online learning called for a closer look at the ecology of the L2 online classroom environment, particularly regarding the manifestation of learner identity and how learners were able to make use of the affordances for learning in the online environment for their use of the L2. Many institutions delivered their courses through synchronized computer-mediated communication applications (SCMC) that included live chat and videoconferencing so that students could still interact from a distance. A multitude of L2 studies have demonstrated that computer-mediated activity and face-to-face interaction in a traditional, in-person setting similarly favored L2 development (e.g., Bueno-Alastuey, 2013; Lai & Zhao, 2006; Shekary & Tahririan, 2006; Rassaei, 2017). However, since there are limited studies on the role of identity in SCMC L2 classrooms, the present study aims to expand the line of research on the manifestation of learner identity in L2, SCMC environments.

Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory (SCT) affirms that developing the brain's higher-order functions is contingent upon the material and social reality of the learner. Learners can go beyond their existing knowledge by utilizing mediating artifacts or affordances in their environment, relying on their prior experiences, as well as through interaction with their instructor and more knowledgeable peers. Engeström's (1987; 2001) iteration of Vygotskian activity theory argues that the relationship between individuals, their actions, and their environment is dynamic, and that each of these elements is constantly influencing the others as the individual works toward accomplishing their goals and objectives. When an element of the activity system changes (e.g., transitioning from an in-person learning environment to an online one) new contradictions and tensions can surface, which in turn, can influence the goal of the activity by either aiding or impeding its accomplishment. These contradictions can potentially be a source of growth and innovation for the activity system in that they can prompt learning (Engeström, 2000; Schröder et al., 2020; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).

Penuel and Wertsch (1995) assert that identity formation ought to be regarded as a process "being shaped by and shaping the forms of action" that the learner is engaging in (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 84). Further, identity formation involves an intricate relationship among mediational tools used to carry out the action, the "sociocultural and institutional setting" in which the action is taking place, and the object that motivates the action (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 84). In the present study, the novel affordances of the online classroom gave rise to new ways for learners to engage in valued classroom activities and to use these new, mediational tools as a means of not only expressing

aspects of their identity, but also for achieving their individual objects and goals for learning about Spanish linguistics.

A key element for individual L2 learners to take up agency in the classroom community has to do with how they view their unique role within the group. Lave and Wenger's (1991) sociocultural-based Community of Practice (CoP) framework was first developed to explain relationships among workers in diverse industries, but it has since become a paradigm used to analyze social dynamics beyond the workplace. Wenger et al. (2002) describe a community of practice as a "group of people who are concerned with a set of problems or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (p. 4).

When individuals want to gain entry to a given community of practice, they must first prove themselves as valuable additions to the community that will contribute to its continuity. Throughout this process, the newcomers' roles and identities within the community are constantly negotiated (Wenger, 1998, p. 150-151). Their chance of becoming respected community members increases when the community views their participation, however minor, as legitimate. The more that newcomers feel their participation is legitimized by their fellow community members, the more likely they will be to invest or engage in the valued activities of the community. Over time, as the newcomer becomes more integrated into the community through engagement, their participation becomes increasingly more complex and refined. Within the L2 classroom, learners bring with them their own unique experiences and worldviews (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 23). Therefore, it is paramount that the instructor and/or more expert

members of the community of practice validate their unique identities so that learners feel welcomed and secure to participate in class.

The concept of identity in the field of SLA has been articulated in both the cognitive and social paradigms. Among the earliest within the cognitivist paradigm is Gardner & Lambert's (1972) early work on integrativeness with regard to language learning motivation, which proposed that learners take up additional languages to become accepted or integrated into their desired target language community. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Dörnyei and Csizér began to reexamine this work, and developed it into a framework that had less to do with the idea of integration and more to do with a process of identification "within the individual's self-concept" (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002, p. 453). Dörnyei (2009, p. 27) further developed this concept of motivation to include the *ideal self* which encompasses the qualities and attributes that an L2 learner hopes to acquire. Dörnyei (2009) asserts this within L2 Motivational Self System is also the construct of the *ought-to-self*, which consists of the actions and behaviors one thinks they should be doing in order to become closer to their ideal self. If learning an additional language is part of an individual's concept of their ideal self, their desire to become closer to the ideal version of who they want to be will serve as an important motivator for them to learn the language (Dörnyei, 2009).

Current cognitivist perspectives on identity in terms of L2 motivation are complemented by Norton-Peirce's (1995) social approach known as *investment*, which is one of the frameworks that will be used in the present study. Investment as a theoretical construct tends to be measured qualitatively. For example, a researcher could study investment in a community or classroom setting by conducting interviews with focal

participants or analyzing participant diaries or questionnaires (e.g., Norton Peirce, 1995). Both motivation and investment can be studied together, with investment providing an additional layered insight into how learners may be inspired to learn additional languages due to their unique personal histories and perspectives. Investment, like motivation, takes into account the learners' desire to access different communities as a result of acquiring an additional language. However, investment is more of a fluid construct that is "constantly changing across time and space" (Norton-Peirce, 1995, p. 12)

The importance of the future communities or *imagined communities* that are significant to the L2 learner was outlined by Norton & Toohey (2011) and is described as "a reconstruction of past communities and historically constituted relationships, but also a community of the imagination, a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 415). A learner's *imagined community* of target language speakers could be what compels them to move toward their language learning goals.

Looking to the postmodernist turn in sociology, Norton & Toohey (2011) assert that learners bring their own unique life experiences that shape their ideas of what L2 groups or communities they want to belong to in the world outside of the classroom. When classroom activities and practices coincide with personal goals of language learning and their imagined communities, learners will tend to be more invested in the target language. When a learner's investment in classroom practices or learning an additional language is low, it does not mean that the student is unmotivated. If learners believe that a connection between their personal goals and class activities is absent, or if their respective identity is not welcomed within the classroom community, they will

likely not be as invested. Norton and Toohey (2011) describe investment in the following terms:

A language learner may be highly motivated, but may nevertheless have little investment in the language practices of a given classroom or community, which may, for example, be racist, sexist, elitist, anti-immigrant, or homophobic. Alternatively, the language learner's conception of good language teaching may not be consistent with that of the teacher, compromising the learner's investment in the language practices of the classroom. Thus, the language learner, despite being highly motivated, may not be invested in the language practices of a given classroom. The learner could then be excluded from those practices, or choose not to participate in classroom activities (p. 421).

This dissertation contains five chapters. Chapter one introduces the main theoretical concepts that were used to interpret the findings of this research. Chapter two advances these concepts and how they connect to the findings of the study. Chapter three provides a description of the data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter four presents the results or findings of this research. Chapter five includes the discussion and conclusions of this research along with its theoretical and practical implications for teaching.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This present study analyzes the experiences of individual learners taking an Introduction to Spanish Linguistics course online during the Spring 2021 semester. The purpose of this research is to highlight the diverse experiences of using the affordances of the online classroom to navigate their individual roles as members of this community of practice. Additionally, I sought to understand how learners viewed the affordances of the technology of the online classroom in terms of their class participation and engagement in whole-class discussions. Finally, I studied how class activities in this unique setting seemed to align or misalign with the learner's long-term personal and professional goals for taking this course. The following chapter begins with a review of the literature and offers a detailed explanation of the theoretical concepts of Activity Theory, Communities of Practice, and Investment and Imagined Communities, as well as an overview of some of the research that relates to language classrooms within these paradigms.

Sociocultural Theory: Vygotsky, Mediation, and Activity Theory

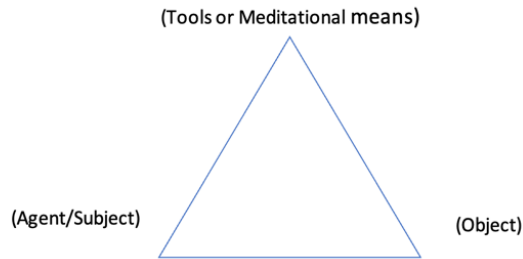
Sociocultural theory is rooted in the scholarship of Lev Vygotsky, an educational psychologist whose work was developed throughout the 1920s and 1930s in the Soviet Union. His approaches to learning were novel to the field of psychology during his time in that they sought alternate explanations for intellectual development that moved beyond cognitive theories. Vygotsky (1978) affirmed that human learning and cognitive development are intrinsically social processes that are mediated by the people and objects

in the learners' surroundings. Vygotsky's (1978) theories gained international prominence during the 1960s and 1970s as his works were translated into other languages and expanded upon by his followers. Vygotsky posited that the student does not solely acquire knowledge but instead internalizes it through participating in meaningful activity. The extent to which the learner internalizes knowledge is determined by the quality of interactions and support that a learner receives through mediation from the people and objects in their surroundings (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's original first-generation activity theory model is a part of sociocultural theory that articulates the "core of an activity" (Hasan & Kazlauskas, 2013, p. 9). Swain et al. (2015, p. 134) explain that the first label of "subject" (see Figure 1) symbolizes the individuals engaging in an action or an activity in order to accomplish their goal or what is also referred to as their "object". The "meditational means" label indicates the tools or affordances the subject uses to accomplish the goals or objectives of the activity they are engaged in (Swain et al., 2015, p. 134).

To address the cognitive processes required to complete the "object" component of Vygotsky's theory, Leont'ev advanced Vygotsky's incomplete work by proposing a more concrete framework for activity theory (Greenhow & Belbas, 2007, p. 366). According to Swain et al. (2015), Leont'ev's definition of an activity includes three components: the motive for the activity, the actions taken to accomplish the activity, and the conditions or circumstances under which the actions are carried out. Leont'ev conceptualized activity as something that pertains to the cultural or social forces at large that will ultimately correspond to an individual's existential needs (Swain et al., 2015, p. 134).

Figure 1

First Generation Model of Vygotsky's Activity Theory



Note. This model represents Vygotsky's original interpretation of activity theory (Swain et al., 2015, p. 133).

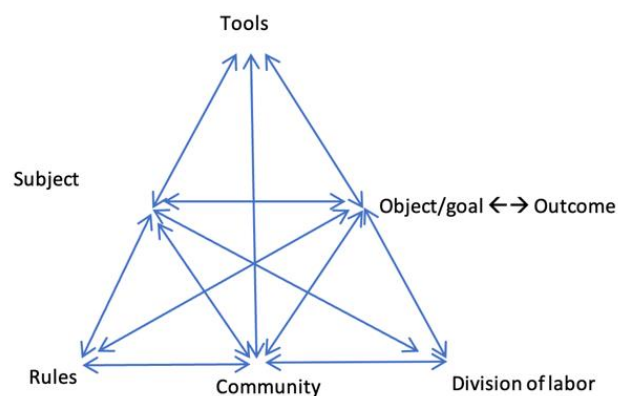
By the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, Vygotsky's work had become known outside of Russia and was being used across diverse industries to explain organizational dynamics. Yrjö Engeström (1987; 2001), further extended activity theory to explain how culture and history impact the behavior of the individual and the community at large. Engeström (2001) has applied this framework in longitudinal studies of organizational "redesign" in medical institutions across Finland (Engeström, 2001, p. 139). Activity theory differs from conventional "cause-and-effect" theories of learning in that it is dynamic and nonlinear, focusing on the interactions of various activity systems and the stakeholders involved, rather than on solely what is happening in the individual's mind (Swain et al., 2015, p. 145).

Activity theory has received some pushback as a theoretical framework due to the fact that understanding it has been perceived as a complicated endeavor that requires great commitment (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). According to Swain et al. (2015), the lack of order and regularity in how these various components of the triangle influence one

another, indicates not only the chaos and intricacies of activity theory but also its “power” (p. 136) in how it explains complex systems. Engeström’s (1987) model proposes the concept of an *activity system*, which not only considers the interaction between subject, object, and tools, but also argues that the *community*, the *rules*, and the *division of labor* are important factors in how activity systems are mediated. The community area of the triangle is comprised of individuals that are engaging in comparable action. The rules area of the triangle refers to the norms or practices of an activity that have been agreed upon implicitly or explicitly by community members taking part in a shared activity. The division of labor refers to the roles and actions that are carried out by the subject within the community, with the goal of achieving the object. The object of the activity is tied to the outcome of the action (Swain et al., 2015). The rules of the activity, the subject, the aims, and the mediating artifacts, according to Engeström's (1987) model (see Figure 2), both form and are influenced by the division of labor.

Figure 2

Engeström’s Model of Activity Theory



Note. Engeström’s third-generation model of Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987).

Activity Theory in the L2 Classroom

Activity Theory is relevant to the L2 classroom because all language use within the classroom is to achieve an object. Through engagement in meaningful activity with members of the classroom community, learners prepare for engagement with their anticipated communities in the world outside of the classroom. To concretely illustrate this, we can look to Swain et al.'s (2015) research on the narratives of language instructors. Sandra's story highlights the experiences of Sandra, an Anglo-Canadian English teacher who was teaching an English for Work Purposes (EWP) class in Canada. Sandra, as the course instructor, is in the *subject* part of the activity theory triangle. Before the semester began, Sandra encouraged the students to use email interaction to supplement their in-class learning by sending her questions about the course. The computer, the English language, and e-mail communication between the students would be considered Sandra's symbolic and mediating artifacts or tools. The goal or object of this activity would be for Sandra to respond to the students' inquiries via e-mail. The formality, language, and discussion of class-related content would be considered part of the rules area of the triangle. The students in Sandra's EWP class, who correspond with her via e-mail, make up the community. The division of labor consists of the students' role to e-mail Sandra with questions, and Sandra's responsibility to respond with clarifications or answers. The outcome of this activity is that the students achieve greater proficiency in English for workplace purposes (Swain et. al, 2015).

Swain et. al (2015) notes that the division of labor in Sandra's classroom was informed by Sandra's past experiences as a primary instructor, as well as past classroom interactions among former students. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that each

student also brings with them their own experiences and expectations of a classroom routine, rules, and division of labor. All these prior experiences, from both the instructor's and learner's independent histories, may impact the division of labor in the new classroom setting, leading to the establishment of new rules and a new division of labor. Further, Swain et al. (2015) affirm that each member of the classroom community could easily have their own triangle to diagram their individual goals. In Sandra's story, a diagram could also be created to show the many subjects and agents, actions, and objectives of the email community, as well.

Regarding the present study, the experiences of the focal participants can be analyzed according to the Activity Theory framework in a similar manner. The mediational means or tools used within Zoom during synchronous class sessions were viewed as positive or negative affordances for communication among the different focal participants. In the context of the L2 classroom activity system, the rules area is usually established at the beginning of the semester or school year, as they can outline the teacher's expectations of the students of classroom discourse. The division of labor, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, was indeed influenced by some of the focal participants prior histories in language classrooms.

Engeström's (2001) work highlights the existence of contradictions when elements of a new system are introduced to an old system. According to Yamazumi (2021), the word contradiction within this context stems from the Marxian and dialectical roots of Activity Theory. Engeström (2001) affirms that contradictions do not necessarily have a negative connotation. Rather, a contradiction highlights "structural tensions" within activity systems (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). According to Engeström (2008),

contradictions present opportunities and serve as “a key to understanding the sources of trouble as well as the innovative and developmental potentials and transformations of activity” (Engeström, 2008, p. 5). This is to say that while these contradictions can be disruptive, they can potentially force the system to undergo an evolution to adapt to the circumstances that necessitate change. In the case of the massive shift to online learning in 2020, learners and teachers alike had to become accustomed to new modalities for teaching and learning in the virtual space that at times clashed with the ways of the traditional classroom.

The Meditational Tools of the Online Synchronous Classroom

On a figure depicting the activity system of the research setting of the present study—the online Introduction to Spanish Linguistics course— web conferencing technology would fall into the tools or mediational means section as it was used to facilitate communication in the classroom. The Spanish language would be considered a symbolic means as the class was conducted primarily in Spanish. Moreover, the mass switch to online learning in 2020 ushered in a new lexicon, or symbolic means, to go with the technology that instructors and students all throughout the world had to become acclimated to. "Zoom fatigue" has become one of the most well-known terms, referring to the physical and mental weariness that can result from utilizing videoconferencing technology for long periods of time (Bailenson, 2021). To provide some background knowledge about this term, “Zoom” (Zoom, 2022) essentially became the standard videoconferencing platform across professional fields (Bailenson, 2021). Its user base grew from roughly 10 million users in December 2019 to 300 million users in March

2020 (Iqbal, 2020). This widespread usage resulted in its “genericization”; thus, the brand name “Zoom” has become synonymous with the category of videoconferencing software (Bailenson, 2021, p.1).

Bailenson (2021) explained the effects of video conferencing for hours a day by looking at preliminary research in nonverbal human behavior to explore the connection between using videoconferencing platforms and exhaustion. To give a clearer understanding of how non-verbal behavior works in human psychology, Bailenson (2021) provides the example of standing in an elevator with strangers, explaining that when in an elevator, humans are forced to break nonverbal behavioral conventions by standing in proximity with others. To diminish the sense of awkwardness caused by encroaching on the personal space of others—and by others encroaching on our personal space— it is common for people to break eye contact (Bailenson, 2021). Argyle & Dean’s (1965) work on this concession between eye gaze and personal space informs this assertion, illustrating that humans will give more physical space during interactions when they are forced to make eye contact with others. On Zoom, users are not able to make either concession, as all users are directly within one another’s line of sight (Bailenson, 2021).

Web-conferencing platforms with video have also made interpreting nonverbal cues more convoluted, as users need to exert extra effort to “send and receive” communicative signals (Bailenson, 2021, p. 3). On the other hand, in traditional, face-to-face language classes, instructors can take advantage of available social and contextual cues to create an environment that allows for communication to occur as smoothly as possible. In addition to the concerns about Zoom fatigue, it is worth noting that many

students find this type of technology to be intrusive and may not want to reveal their living space to their classmates or instructor (Center for Teaching Excellence at Boston College, 2023). As a result, many students choose to disable the webcam capability to safeguard their privacy (Kozar, 2016).

Web conferencing platforms also require learners to participate in “procedural and technological negotiations,” or discourse that is used to rectify issues that occur in synchronous virtual spaces (Junn, 2023, p. 25). According to Junn (2023), an example of a procedural negotiation would be clarifying task instructions in the L1 in small- or large-group discussion and negotiating whose turn it is to speak. While these types of negotiations can also occur in a face-to-face class, they are especially necessary to web conferencing sessions to ensure that everyone understands the object of the task at hand (Junn, 2023). This clash between the old ways of the in-person classroom and new ways of the online classroom coincides with Engeström’s (2001) theory of activity systems, and how introducing one new element to a system can cause other elements within the system to conflict with one another. In online classrooms that use web conferencing technology, the instructor, as well as the students, need to make an extra effort to make themselves understood due to the lack of cues that are available in an in-person environment.

These discrepancies in the in-person versus online classroom led to the need for different rules when communicating, as well as different mediating artifacts that can make communication and the co-creation of knowledge a smoother process. The online classroom can also impact the division of labor, depending on how the instructor and the students adapt to the new mediating artifacts of the online environment. Junn (2023)

asserted that communicative interactions can be “restricted” on video conferencing platforms due to the lack of social and contextual cues (Junn, 2023, p. 25). For L2 exchanges to be successful in a virtual space, Junn affirms that it needs to be “mutually communicative” in order for messages to be adequately conveyed and for negotiation of meaning to occur (Junn, 2023, p. 19).

Bannink & Van Dam’s (2021) research in a Dutch university setting showed that both teachers and learners initially tended to behave in a way that was similar to how they behaved in an in-person, face-to-face classroom, particularly with regard to gestures or trying to look at one another. Many of these gestures have materially become obsolete in the online classroom. The researchers reported that the move to online learning during the pandemic made them aware of a demand for a “repertoire of nonverbal and multimodal cues” in order to have discourse in the online classroom (Bannink & Van Dam, 2021, p. 2). Bannink & Van Dam (2021, p. 2) refer to Luff et al.’s (2003, p. 1) term of “fractured ecology” to describe how the shift to online learning forced them to reconcile any difficulties with the conditions of online learning. For example, not being in the same location, turn-taking, and difficulty with scaffolding (Bannink & Van Dam, 2021).

Over time, however, teachers and learners developed new norms for the classroom in a protocol that functioned as a kind of “Zoom etiquette” (Bannink & Van Dam, 2021, p. 12). This study is demonstrative of the clash or “tension” that Engeström (2001) refers to between two distinct systems. However, from this “tension”, new rules to achieve the object or goal of the community emerged, leading to a new outcome. Bannink and Van Dam’s (2021) research demonstrated that once this new protocol was developed, learners that took part in this study were supposed to have their cameras and

microphones on and were expected to be prepared for the lesson from the beginning of class. To prevent learners from becoming disengaged or leaving the virtual session before the class ended, learners were required to follow specific rules such as following the “attendance throughout” policy and remaining signed-in to the online class for its entire duration (Bannink & Van Dam, 2021, p.18).

Regarding class participation, the teacher was quite flexible. During class, the teacher allowed multiple avenues for participation and did not solely rely on verbal communication. If a learner wanted to make a comment verbally, they were encouraged to use the different modalities on the platform, such as the “raise hand function”, but it was not necessary. Due to the lack of need to “mirror” one another’s behavior and pick up on social cues on Zoom as needed in the in-person classroom, the teacher allowed learners to speak without raising their hands on camera or using the “raise hand” feature, “you can shout it out” (Bannink & Van Dam, 2021, p. 5) The instructor was also open to the students participating via text and let them know they could type their responses to the class in the chat window, which provided an additional means for the students to engage with lessons. (Bannink & Van Damm, 2021).

Cheung’s (2021a) case study of online EFL classrooms in Hong Kong revealed that although interactions between teachers and students were reduced, there were more opportunities to use aspects of technology to confirm that learners understood the lesson. Factors such as the instructor’s personal teaching philosophy, educational context, and institutional support affected the extent to which the teacher incorporated the technology into lessons. Results indicated that it may be beneficial for instructors to adopt more “process-oriented” pedagogical tools so that they can further utilize technology in their

classrooms (Cheung, 2021a, p. 55). These findings reflect the modifications to the “division of labor” regarding teacher responsibilities that occurred due to the mass transition to online learning.

In Zhang and Wu’s study (2022), the researchers used semi-structured interviews to understand the learner’s perspective on synchronous online learning in EFL virtual classrooms at a Chinese university. The researchers found that some of the main challenges that the students faced concerned the “lack of a learning climate”, which impacted their ability to acquire knowledge (Zhang and Wu, 2022, p. 4) Learners had to cope with home environments that were perhaps incompatible with learning, as well as having to acclimate to the new learning conditions of the online classroom. The changes in how the classes were conducted were also reported to be a challenge for students, as the classes became more monologic, and teacher-centered once classes moved to fully synchronous and online. Although students reported that some of their instructors encouraged the use of the chat box and breakout rooms, technological difficulties such as lack of internet connection or increased “de-motivation” among students regarding class participation essentially contributed to a decreased amount of interaction among teachers and students (p. 5). Students in this study also reported fewer opportunities for the instructor to correct pronunciation and other speaking-related errors than they would have perhaps been able to in person. Finally, for the senior students, the format of course assessments changed from a closed-book exam format to a final term paper format, which some students felt required less application of the material they had been learning (Zhang & Wu, 2022).

From an activity theory perspective, Zhang & Wu's (2022) findings suggest that learners in this study had to adjust to the new rules of interaction in the online classroom, as the class became more teacher-centered online and moved away from the student-centered approach they were used to. Another potential reason for the decrease in class participation was due to technical difficulties that students encountered. This marked a change in the division of labor of the class. Additionally, the way assessments were administered in this course also changed once it was moved online; for some students, closed book exams were changed to research papers. There were also less opportunities for corrective feedback in this setting (Zhang & Wu, 2022).

On the other hand, Cheung's (2021b) study of a synchronous EFL classroom based in Hong Kong revealed that both the teacher and the students were able to make use of the affordances of the online classroom, taking advantage of the different modalities for communication. The researcher analyzed 80 lesson recordings of whole class and small group discussions which revealed that the teacher was able to draw out participation from students who used both verbal and nonverbal communication to express themselves. With regard to nonverbal communication, the instructor encouraged students to use the chat window to answer his questions before calling on students to answer verbally. Once most students answered the question in the chat, the instructor would then ask the students to explain their own answers or respond to a comment from one of their peers. The gesture buttons were also part of these non-verbal affordances. The instructor asked students to type their answers in the chat an average of 9 times per lesson. This strategy of obtaining verbal and non-verbal responses seemed to be effective

in getting students to engage with the lesson. Students seemed enthusiastic about the integration of the non-verbal affordances of Zoom (Cheung, 2021b).

The learners in Zhang & Wu's (2022) and Cheung's (2021b) research demonstrated that students responded distinctly to the web conferencing technology. This response was determined by many factors but was especially reliant on how the instructor managed classroom interaction among the students. In Zhang and Wu (2022), the rules for communication in the online classroom were different than in the in-person classroom, as the online classroom became more monologic and teacher-centered. In Cheung (2021b), the instructor was encouraging student participation, and motivated students to make use of the different non-verbal affordances or mediational tools on the platform such as the chat feature.

Other research studies or instructor accounts that emerged from experiences teaching online name successful strategies to get learners to engage and feel connected to the learning environment. Hagler (2019) discussed the learning opportunities and obstacles of teaching on Zoom and noted that the interaction between students tended to be strained if they were not already acquainted with one another. This observation connects back to the importance of using the affordances of technology to build a community among learners who may not already know one another. From a CoP perspective, creating a sense of community and belonging among learners is what will ultimately motivate them to take chances in participation. Without the same sense of belonging, students may be concerned that their participation will be rejected by their peers and may refrain from taking any risks.

Additionally, modifications to the tools, division of labor, and rules used for classroom interactions have an impact on students' sense of belonging. Expertise in the ways used to conduct a community's fundamental operations is highly valued in a CoP. In 2020, students and teachers had to adapt to new procedural negotiations that the web conferencing technology required in order to participate successfully. This was due to the way in which the new mediational and symbolic tools that were available altered the way conventional classroom interactions were carried out. In both an in-person and online context, the topics that classroom CoP members talk about remain the same— whether it be about personal matters or the course material. However, the importance of discussing personal matters may increase when participants must contend with the new means of accomplishing interaction in online courses. For instance, to increase bonding among classmates, one teacher in Bannink and Van Dam's (2021) study dedicated the last several minutes of class for students to talk about the course without the teacher present on the Zoom call. At the end of each class, the teacher would make another student the host of the meeting and would leave the meeting so that the students could speak candidly about the course. In this way, the instructor was open to incorporating these new tools as affordances for carrying out the goal of exchanging meaningful information. The teacher received comments from a student stating that these informal discussions led to the creation of a separate group chat so that the students could discuss course topics and help one another alleviate their worries about the course (Bannink & Van Dam, 2021).

Technical difficulties that both the instructor and learners encounter from one day to the next can also disrupt communicative interactions among members of the online classroom. Some examples of a technological negotiation from the learner's perspective

as seen in Junn's (2023) research during the COVID-19 pandemic include letting classmates or the instructor know when their microphone is not turned on, and confirming that others are able to see their presentations when they are using the share-screen feature in Zoom (Junn, 2023, p. 25). Teng & Wu (2020) delved into the impact of online learning from the teacher's perspective in an EFL classroom based in Hong Kong. After conducting interviews with two teachers and analyzing journal entries about their experiences during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers found that both teachers responded very distinctly to the stresses of online learning and its impact on their teaching. Liz, a first-year teacher, had great difficulty with this transition during the early days of the switch to online learning as she was unfamiliar with the technology and was unable to read gestures and cues as she did in a face-to-face setting.

On the other hand, the other focal participant, Colin, a sixth-year teacher, was enthusiastic to discover the new possibilities for teaching and learning afforded by the new virtual environment. Although he reported difficulties with getting the students to engage by turning on their microphones and cameras, and feeling like he was doing a "one-man show", he tried to incorporate the multimodal aspects of the platform into his teaching as much as possible, using the text-based chat feature and breakout rooms to foster bonding and relationship building among his students (Teng & Wu, 2021, p. 291). Moreover, Colin noted that the students' low participation could be linked to the upheaval of the pandemic, in conjunction with the students' desire to avoid the intrusive parts of videoconferencing, such as revealing their homes and personal environments on camera.

The instructors that were featured in this study vacillated between “passive and proactive agency” during the initial months of the transition to online learning (Teng & Wu, 2021, p. 292). The researchers’ important finding from this study is that teachers need “professional, collegial, and principal support” in order to enact their agency during global crises, particularly when facing new professional demands such as undertaking online teaching and classroom management (Teng & Wu, 2021, p. 292).

Similar concerns were found in Jeon et al. (2022). Initially, the teachers had to adjust to Zoom and plan their lessons accordingly, which was much more time consuming than for an in-person class. Despite this, some teachers found many of the affordances of Zoom to be positive and helped to facilitate the synchronous online learning experience. For instance, the “share-screen” feature was found to be useful by one of the teachers, who used it to teach target expressions that were difficult for the students. All the teachers found the “mute” function to be a useful mediational tool for them, as they worked with very young students, and it was easier to eliminate distraction noises. One teacher would also use the mute/unmute function to call on students to participate to evenly provide speaking opportunities to the students. However, for some teachers in Jeon et al.’s (2022) research, teaching online was not without its limitations. Many students did not use the affordances of Zoom as the teachers would have preferred. For instance, one teacher mentioned the difficulty of getting students to turn on their webcams. This created a “psychological distance” (p. 8) and made it much more difficult for the teacher to interact with their students as compared to a face-to-face class. In addition to the webcam issues, another teacher spoke about how mute control in Zoom could be problematic, as students would not unmute themselves when called on by the

teacher. If the student had their webcam off, it was hard for the teacher to discern if the student was not answering because of problems with the audio, if they simply did not want to speak, or if they needed further clarification (Jeon et al., 2022, p. 8)

One of the primary ways that the teachers overcame these technological constraints was through using breakout rooms (Jeon et al., 2022). At first, one of the teachers used the breakout rooms sparingly because she was not entirely familiar with them. However, through watching YouTube videos on how to use them, she was better able to incorporate them into her lessons. She found that some students were more receptive to the use of breakout rooms and felt more comfortable participating in small groups than in whole-class discussions. In summary, the teachers in this study were spurred to take up their own agency in providing an optimal classroom experience. In order to make up for some of the shortcomings of online learning due to the ecology of the online environment, the teachers adapted to the diverse mediational tools of online learning. Their confidence in their students' "communicative competence" and their implementation of a student-centered approach to teaching "mediated their enactment and activation of their agency" in the space of the online classroom (Jeon et al., 2022, p. 11).

Communities of Practice and Learner Identities

The communities of practice (CoP) framework was first coined by Lave & Wenger (1991) to describe social phenomena within diverse workplace settings. The authors place particular emphasis on the concept of "apprenticeship" (Lave & Wenger, p. 30). Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss examples from various communities across the world regarding their unique traditions of learning, with a particular focus on the

“variation in the forms of apprenticeship” (p. 67) and how knowledge is transmitted from experts to novices. Within a CoP framework, a learner’s intellectual growth and development is not solely a cognitive process. Learning takes place as a mediated activity within the community by way of social interaction and diverse cultural mediational means (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The key to facilitating a *newcomer*’s membership within the community in question is through positive relationships between longtime members or *old timers*. Through these interactions, newcomers are presented with opportunities for “legitimate peripheral participation,” where they can learn practices that are most valuable to the group (p. 29). Gaining acceptance from important community insiders is what will lead newcomers to feel secure enough to participate as members of the group, despite their initial lack of proficiency or knowledge of the ways of the community. For instance, if we take the Introduction to Spanish Linguistics course as an example, there were students in the course who had prior knowledge of the content due to having taken linguistics courses outside of the Spanish department. Learners who may be more capable or advanced in their knowledge of linguistics can help their less proficient classmates accomplish the goals of a task.

Within the community of practice, participation involves actively engaging in the valued activities of the group, and forming “identities” that are proximal to our membership to that community (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). Through continuous engagement with the community, learners become increasingly more knowledgeable and progress further in their journey to becoming a legitimate member. It is pertinent to highlight Wenger’s (1998) assertion that members of a community of practice have more than just similar interests in common, rather, as the name implies, they also share a practice. This

shared practice is rooted in “shared language, routines, tools, and stories” (Degn et al., 2017, p. 234). Newcomers that are participating within the community of practice will achieve a sense of belonging as they negotiate their identities and become proximal to a more competent identity (Wenger, 1998). The old-timers of a community are indeed learning alongside the newcomers and are able to reify their identities as experts by helping newcomers learn the ways of the CoP.

Learning is interplay between social competence and personal experience. It is a dynamic, two-way relationship between people and social learning systems in which they participate (Wenger, 2000, p. 227).

Wenger (1998 p. 151) affirms that newcomer competency in community practices, or lack thereof, is central to the newcomer’s self-image and conception of their own identity. Through continuous engagement with the L2 in instructional contexts or in the real world, L2 learners recognize that their sense of identity and competence can waver. Often, the deciding factor for the learner to continue to pursue membership in the L2 community has to do with how their participation is received by the respected old-timers of the community. Some argue that membership to a desired community of practice is not a guarantee and can come from “a matter of sanction” from more senior members (Davies, 2005, p.1). Moreover, newcomers must demonstrate some degree of competence to the more seasoned members of the group, and failure to do so will ultimately result in their rejection from the group (Wenger, 1998).

Conversely, positive reception of their participation will lead to further engagement. Wenger (1998) affirmed that the learner’s use of their imagination is crucial to this process of gaining membership, as it helps them to reflect on their place in the community, see themselves from the vantage point of other members, and orient

themselves accordingly: “My use of the concept of imagination refers to a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves. Imagination in this sense is looking at an apple seed and seeing a tree” (Wenger, 1998, p. 176). This is to say that as learners become more established in the ways of the community, they eventually fall into “alignment” with its norms and practices, and they can begin to collaborate with the old-timers on developing a vision for future endeavors that will benefit the community (pp. 173-184). It is through imagination that they will be able to envision themselves as competent members of the community in question and contribute to the reproduction of the community. The role of imagination in motivating engagement or non-engagement with a CoP will be discussed in more depth in a subsequent section.

The L2 Classroom as a Community of Practice

The CoP framework has been applied in the broader field of language education to explain the process by which newcomers to a particular community achieve membership and become familiar with the norms and practices of their target language community. There are two relevant definitions of CoPs within the study of the L2 classroom (Glisan & Donato, 2017; Hall, 2019). The first definition pertains to learning the practices of the classroom community that learners are a part of. The second definition relates to the target language community that learners wish to engage with outside of the classroom. Wenger (1998) affirms that communities of practice “can be thought of as shared histories of learning” where participation and reification are “forms of memory” and “sources of continuity and discontinuity and thus as channels by which one can influence the evolution of a practice” (Wenger, 1998, pp. 86-87). It is through

reification (establishment and reinforcement) of each individual's role and responsibilities in the CoP that members enact their participation. Essentially, reification is the process by which learners “give form” to their experiences (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). Viskovic (2006) concurs with Wenger's definition of learning, affirming that this mutual learning can occur within the CoP, or in one's life outside of the CoP through daily interactions and exchanges with other communities of practice.

Within the classroom, socialization consists of the plethora of opportunities for interaction in the L2 within the lesson design that become familiar to the learners over time. This is usually accomplished discursively through classroom language that is indicative of the task at hand and what learners are being asked to do. Taking all of this into account, it is important to recognize that with respect to classrooms as CoPs, the instructor is the leader, and the instructor's intentional activity can either support or impede the development of a cohesive community where members hold a shared vision and sense of belonging (Kapucu, 2012). The primary responsibility of the instructor as the leader of the classroom CoP “is to initiate, develop, manage, and monitor community activities” to ensure that such activities match up with the community's long-term goals for learning (Kapucu, 2012, p. 587).

On the other hand, instructor identity is negotiated and formed through their practice by way of interactions with their students. In these interactions, the teachers “talk, act, and feel like teachers” (Barkhuizen & Mendieta, 2020, p. 7). A “good teacher” identity is essentially formed of positive experiences and feedback from the teacher's past and their own beliefs about their practice. Indeed, a teacher's identity is also comprised of who they want to be in the future and the actions they take to fulfill this vision of their

future selves as a good teacher (Barkhuizen & Mendieta, 2020, p. 1). This notion recalls Dörnyei's (2009) construct of the *ought-to L2 self* which reflects "the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 42).

Identity is integrally linked to the CoP framework in that the learner's identity is shaped by learners' successful or unsuccessful acquisition of new skills and competencies. For instance, Wells asserts that there is an "affective charge" of common gratification when a learner's contribution is deemed adequate by the desired community, thus leading to the group's achievement of its goals and ultimately strengthening bonds among community members (Wells, 1999, p. 122). The CoP framework is closely related to sociocultural theory and Vygotsky's concept of mediated activity in that a student's intellectual development and learning are closely related to social, cultural, and historical interactions. Through acquiring relevant skills for the community and subsequently getting validation from the community that these skills are valuable, the newcomer's identity as a community member is strengthened, as well as their sense of belonging. This sense of belonging reinforces the importance the newcomer attaches to being part of the community.

It is important to note that there are some limitations to using a CoP framework within an L2 classroom context. As mentioned earlier in this section, the theory was first developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) to describe unique traditions of apprenticeship across diverse contexts (p. 30). Some researchers argue that a CoP framework alone cannot encompass the totality of the social influences that impact an L2 learner. For instance, Zappa-Hollman and Duff (2015, p. 334) contend that applying a CoP

framework to a classroom setting may not be sufficient to understand the significance of other communities they may belong to; CoP theory as applied to the classroom only takes into account the influence relationships formed within the classroom on the students' learning. Moreover, Haneda (2006, p. 811) points out that CoP theory should be developed to provide more nuance regarding participation: "No distinction is made between different types of participants except that between newcomers and old-timers, and the picture of apprenticeship offered is limited to that of newcomers' centripetal movement toward becoming expert participants". Zappa-Hollman & Duff (2015) mention the framework of Language Socialization (LS) theory as potentially complementary to a CoP analysis of the classroom. They affirm that LS looks at how learners "negotiate" and "co-construct" their "identities" and "participation" in a classroom context and seeks to demonstrate the influence of "relationships" and "practices" in the classroom and in the outside world (Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015, p. 335).

An example of research that takes an LS approach is Morita's (2002) doctoral study on academic discourse socialization. This study demonstrated how newcomers with diverse L2 learning backgrounds navigated questions of membership in their graduate-level seminars. Using a case study approach, the researcher interviewed six international students studying at a Canadian university, and ten of their instructors. Additionally, focal participants filled out a weekly reflection report that asked them to evaluate their own class participation. The study found that one of the greatest challenges for learners was negotiating discourse, their competency in English, power dynamics within the classroom, and their respective identities. As learners expressed their own agency and navigated their evolving "positionalities", they were able to define personal goals for

their learning and participation in whole class discussions (Morita, 2002, iii). The author highlights the importance of understanding the unique roles and identities of their students and implementing “dialogic and transformative” classroom practices (Morita, 2002, iii). Concepts from the CoP framework will be applied in the present study to demonstrate how learners negotiated their roles within the Introduction to Spanish Linguistics online course.

Virtual Communities of Practice as Activity Systems

Historically, communities of practice (CoPs) have depended on in-person contact and engagement (Wenger, 1998). However, in-person meetings during the height of the pandemic were an occupational hazard. Synchronous communication technologies such as Zoom allowed real-time face-to-face CoPs to become virtual. However, the methodologies or rules utilized in the physical classroom may not be seamlessly applicable or transferable to the online classroom. Returning to the discussion on activity theory and Engeström’s (1987; 2001) concept of activity systems, when an activity system introduces a new element, such as a new mediational tool for completing the activity, it often gives way to an additional contradiction. This contradiction reaches a critical point when an established element of the triangle, such as the rules or the division of labor, clashes with the new element. However, it can also give way to new approaches to accomplishing the object of the activity (Engeström, 1987; 2001).

Due to the increased affordances that enable learner collaboration in the online classroom environment, it has become easier for community-based learning to emerge in virtual settings (Garrison & Akyol, 2013). O’Rourke and Stickler (2017) refer to

synchronous communication as “dialogic communication that proceeds under conditions of simultaneous presence (co-presence) in a shared communicative space, which may be physical or virtual” (O’Rourke & Stickler, 2017, p. 2). Within the activity theory paradigm, the online space and its affordances are the material and social tools for activity. The term *virtual communities of practice* (vCoPs) is used to refer to communities that are situated in the online space (Dubé et al., 2005). The basis for this concept is derived from Lave and Wenger’s (1991) CoP model, but it differs in that the members of the vCoP cannot meet in a physical space due to geographic or circumstantial limitations, and therefore they must use virtual platforms (e.g., video conferencing or messaging platforms) to connect (Dubé et al., 2005).

Early research findings on virtual learning environments that used text-based synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) demonstrated that the amount of participation, which corresponds to the rules node of an activity system triangle, became more equal among learners (Fitze 2006; Kern, 1995). Similarly, Chun’s (1994) study found that L2 learners were more likely to communicate directly with one another in synchronous online environments instead of mostly with the instructor. Students in the online classroom environment demonstrated more of a willingness to engage with one another when compared with students in face-to-face classroom environments. From an activity theory perspective, the mediational tools of the virtual classroom facilitated participation among the learners. Moreover, this setting made the students feel “freer” to take risks in leading or managing class discussions (Chun, 1994, p. 18). This sense of freedom likely compelled them to ask more questions, voluntarily express their opinions,

direct the class discussion to topics that pertain to their interests, or express their uncertainty regarding a topic being covered in class (Chun, 1994).

The multimodal material affordances of virtual interaction are changing the way learning objects are achieved in that learners are offered multiple different contexts for participation. Stockwell affirms that textual synchronous communication via a PC or mobile phone offers a buffer between the learner and the task (Stockwell, 2010). Text communication as a modality is relevant to the present study in that many of the focal participants viewed the chat window in Zoom as a useful mediational means to achieve their individual objects for class participation.

Investment by learners in online class participation may be poor if they do not consider the possibilities for participation in class as important to their personal goals for L2 use, which is needed for the learners to gain access to their desired target-language communities. Some researchers in the field have come to this conclusion through unsuccessful attempts at building community in a variety of online learning settings. The difficulty of building a community of practice was evident in Petersen et al.'s (2008) study on a community blog project involving 33 Norwegian L2 learners of French. Of the 33 students who took part in the study, 19 were spending a portion of the semester in France. The blog project was started at the beginning of the semester, and was created with the object of building community among the learners who went abroad and those who stayed behind in their home country. It was thought that the learners who were studying abroad in France could provide the learners in Norway a glimpse into what it was like living in France, and those who remained in Norway could provide recent news about life at home. In addition to monitoring the weekly blog, the researchers collected

weekly diaries from two participants—one who was studying abroad in France and one who remained in Norway.

At the end of data collection, the researchers conducted interviews with three students to better understand how they viewed the use of the blog in maintaining relationships with their classmates. Ultimately, all the learners—both those who went abroad and those who stayed in their home countries— did not invest in the project or made little to no contributions to the blog. The students’ disinvestment suggests that they did not see the blog as relevant to long-term objects as French speakers. Although the learners were technically part of the same course, the researchers concluded that the sense of community of the original class had become fractured due to the geographical separation. This perhaps led to a reduced sense of “connectedness” to their classmates who were not in their immediate surroundings, and therefore they did not feel compelled to contribute to the blog (Petersen et al., 2008, p 377).

Investment, Identity, and Imagined Communities

The study of the role of identity and learner agency in applied linguistics research emerged in the late 1990s, coinciding with Firth and Wagner’s (1997) call to incorporate social and situational perspectives in the study of second language acquisition (Firth & Wagner, 1997). This period is often described in second language acquisition (SLA) as the “social turn” and has led to today’s general acceptance of the validity of “interdisciplinary and socially informed approaches” in SLA research (Block, 2003, p.1). Norton-Peirce (1995) is one of the most influential exponents of the emerging social vision of the field with her conceptual framework of *investment*, looking to account for

not only the various components of the learners' identity but also the language learning context and its impact. *Investment* was developed as a way to obtain a more profound understanding of a learner's motivation to learn an additional language. Norton-Peirce (1995) affirms that "an understanding of motivation should therefore be mediated by an understanding of learners' investments in the target language-investments that are closely connected to the ongoing production of a language learner's social identity" (p. 20). Looking at the construct of motivation in isolation may place learners into rigid categorizations such as good/bad language learner, introverted/extroverted learner or motivated/ unmotivated learner and may not consider the social factors that influence a learner's decision to participate or not in class activities (Norton Peirce, 1995; Darwin & Norton, 2015, 2016).

For Norton Peirce (1995, p. 9), a more holistic analysis was needed to sufficiently capture the totality of the learner's experience in relation to the target language in order to understand possible explanations for a learner's ambivalence toward learning an additional language. Norton's Peirce's (1995) seminal study on investment featured the narratives of five immigrant women in an ESL classroom in Canada. One of the key implications of this study is the importance of engaging the social identities of learners so that they will "claim the right to speak" (p. 26) outside of the classroom. Norton Peirce (1995) explains that it is important for learners to understand speaking opportunities are "socially structured" (p. 26) and how to create opportunities for L2 exchanges with target language speakers.

In developing this theory, Norton looked to the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and his economic metaphor of symbolic capital. Building upon this notion of capital,

Norton's concept of investment affirms that learners who take on additional languages do so to gain access to symbolic or material resources (e.g., relationships, and education). Their desire is that these resources will eventually increase their cultural capital and social power (Norton-Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000; Norton, 2013).

Darvin and Norton (2016) argue that the need to belong to a community, in conjunction with individual agency, is what incentivizes learners to take risks in participating in classroom activities. These incentives, along with the learner's actual decision to take the risk and participate in class, effectively encompass the idea of investment. As established in the earlier discussion on CoPs, newcomers to a community need to adapt to the ways of the community in order to gain acceptance. However, even if newcomers are treated as legitimate community members, they may decide that community practices are not in alignment with their personal goals. This is where the notion of investment enters into the current study. Through the lens of investment, the learner's identity is viewed as subject to "constantly changing across contexts in time and space" (Norton-Peirce, 1995, p. 12). Gee's (2000) assertion that identity is being seen as "a certain kind of person in a given context" coincides with this notion (Gee, 2000, p. 99). This is to say that identity is something that is built through interactions with other people, and through knowing how other people perceive us. This process of identity negotiation is closely related to the learner's investment in acquiring the target language, their use of the target language inside and outside the classroom, and even to the possibility of studying in a place where the language is spoken (Kinging, 2013). Although it is through language that individuals obtain access to symbolic resources, "the

identity positions available, claimed, and recognized” are what afford learners the opportunities for participation in classroom discourse (Hawkins, 2005, p. 66)

The various facets of people’s identities are closely related to the communities to which they belong. In a similar vein, Blackledge & Pavlenko (2004, p. 250) affirm that identity formation and negotiation is a situational, dynamic process that is dependent on the individual's surroundings or period in history. Additionally, Norton (2013) partially conceptualizes identity as a “possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2013, p. 4). Darwin and Norton (2016) affirm that imagination plays a key role here, as learners envision the possibilities for the future and move toward their language learning goals to make these possibilities a reality: “Whether it is because they want to be part of a country or a peer group, to find romance, or to achieve financial security, language learners invest because there is something that they want for themselves” (Darvin & Norton, 2016, p. 19). Darwin & Norton’s (2016) theoretical proposals suggest that a learner's desired identity and ambitions for the future will influence their involvement in a language classroom's valued practices and goals. In summary, students may be more inclined to invest in a new community when its activities—including those of the classroom—resonate with those of an existing one or with communities in which they anticipate taking part in the future.

Duchêne and Heller (2012) discuss the transformation of the role of language and culture in the modern era, arguing that learning a given language has become closely linked to the economic opportunities it can provide (i.e., profit), as well as a national affiliation (i.e., pride). Darwin and Norton (2016) add that while material incentives for learning a language are important, the sense of belonging that comes from identifying with an imagined community is an additional reason for learners to take on an additional

language (Darvin & Norton, 2016). Pavlenko and Norton (2007) acknowledge that “new political and economic futures” bring new opportunities, and with them, a greater interest in studying a foreign language, especially for those who want to identify as global citizens (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007, p. 673).

The term *imagined communities* originates in Anderson’s (2006) seminal endeavor to reconstruct the idea of nationhood. According to Anderson (2006), the current parameters of what constitutes a nation are imaginary and should not be based on physical borders and boundaries but rather envisioned as a community with shared interests and goals: “The members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). This concept has been readapted for SLA contexts to explain how learners may identify with or feel connected to groups they belong to such as the L2 classroom, or any imagined groups that are appealing to a language learner (e.g., Norton & Toohey, 2011). Coryell and Clark (2009) demonstrate in their research that “intercultural competence” and “respect” compelled Spanish Heritage Language Learners to study Spanish, and helped them overcome language learning anxiety in order to be able to “participate meaningfully in diverse cultural communities” (Coryell & Clark, 2009, p. 1).

Norton’s (2001) interpretation of imagined communities is essentially an extension of identity theory and investment (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2001; Pavlenko & Norton 2007). The role of identity in the learners’ imagined communities is key to L2 investment because learners pay close attention to how classroom practices are in alignment with the practices of their imagined communities of the future (Kanno &

Norton, 2003; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Moreover, language learners engage more fully with language learning opportunities in the classroom when these practices coincide with their current and future identities as future members of the target language community outside of the classroom (Darvin & Norton, 2015). The resonance between learners' existing CoPs, their prospective CoPs, and the CoP that develops in the classroom at the start of each semester should also be highlighted. Their identities must be connected to the CoPs they already participate in, and those future CoPs they envision. When a new CoP is relevant to both their current and desired future sense of community belonging, learners are more likely to invest in it.

Investment and Imagined Communities in the L2 classroom

An important implication presented by Norton-Peirce (1995) is how learners affirm their right to speak within and outside of the classroom. Looking to Bourdieu's (1977, p. 648) notion of "the power to impose reception", Norton-Peirce asserts that a learner's awareness of their right to speak should be taken into consideration with communicative competence (Norton-Peirce, 1995, p. 18). When classroom practices are relevant to the social identities of students, they will claim the right to speak because they will feel incentivized to connect with other learners in the classroom and exercise their own agency to use the L2 in the classroom as well as beyond the classroom. Norton affirms that it is the instructor's role to make learners aware that "opportunities to speak are socially structured" and how to recognize and take advantage of these opportunities with target language speakers (Norton, 1995, p. 26). The importance of this notion is highlighted in Jiménez-Guamán (2012), whereby the instructor of an L2 English class at

a high school in Bogotá, Colombia designed tasks that allowed learners to express various facets of their social identities in a class Facebook group. For the purposes of this project, learners were encouraged to upload photos, make posts expressing their opinions, and comment on one another's posts in English, providing them with a space to express their identities through interacting synchronously and asynchronously with their classmates.

Jiménez-Guamán's (2012) study demonstrated that while each learner demonstrated their individuality and unique interests through their posts, the results showed that the participants in this study tended to gravitate toward classmates who "represented a social identity similar to their own selves" (Jiménez-Guamán, 2012, p.187). This could be attributed to the fact that learners with a similar social identity could have analogous goals in mind regarding using the target language in the classroom and engaging with the target language community outside of the classroom (Jiménez-Guamán, 2012).

Kanno and Norton (2003) discuss imagined communities as both temporal and spatial constructs. In a temporal sense, imagined communities can refer to learners' idealizations of their identity and the actions they will take in the future toward their membership to their envisioned community. The future holds all the possibilities and potential for the learner to realize their goals in the L2 and can be the inspiration for the learner to continue moving forward in their L2 acquisition. Regarding the spatial aspect of imagined communities, this is related to "national ideologies" and "learners' identities" in dialogue with one another, with the reality of globalization bringing people closer together through language. (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 248).

A clear example of an imagined community leading a student to invest in their language learning goals is the case of Rui and his narrative as presented in Kanno (2003). Rui was a Japanese teenager who immigrated with his family from Japan to Australia and Canada throughout different periods in his life. Due to having spent so much time outside of Japan, Rui very much wanted to remain connected to his home country so that his Japanese identity would remain intact, and so that he could return to Japan to live in the future. The community of Japanese students in his Japanese language school in Canada kept him in touch with this part of his identity. For years, he worked to be able to speak Japanese fluently while he lived outside of Japan. What propelled Rui forward to do this was his imagination and the idea of Japan that he had in mind prior to returning.

Rui's story is relevant to the context of the present study in that each of the focal participants, whether they are L2 learners of Spanish or Heritage learners of Spanish, had a goal for how they wanted to integrate the Spanish language into their identity, and how it would help them gain memberships to the communities they wanted to be a part of beyond the linguistics course. In sum, regardless of what the outcome is, imagination is a key factor in helping learners move forward in their path to language learning by allowing them to create in their minds an idealized version of themselves being a part of a desired community in the future (Kanno & Norton, 2003).

The Present Study

Social approaches to learning affirm that identity is constructed and negotiated through our interactions with other people (Gee, 2000; Norton, 1995; Wenger, 1998). The present study explored how learners in an online Introduction to Spanish Linguistics

course negotiated their identity and unique roles within this community of practice. Looking to Engeström's (1987; 2001) notion of activity theory, I also sought to understand how learners used the mediational tools of the online classroom to facilitate their participation and accomplish their individual goals for taking the Introduction to Spanish Linguistics online course. As affirmed by Norton (1995), a learner's engagement in the classroom is often a reflection of their sense of belonging, and if the classroom practices are in alignment with their goals for learning. Using the theoretical frameworks of investment and imagined communities, I sought to understand how learners viewed classroom practices as in alignment with their overall goals for learning about Spanish linguistics.

The following research questions will be addressed in this study:

- (1) What aspects of a participant's identity become relevant in the virtual community of practice of the online Introduction to Linguistics course?
- (2) How do participants' goals influence their participation in the online Introduction to Spanish Linguistics Community of Practice?
- (3) How has online learning affected L2 investment in class participation, and how do learners see the connections between online tasks and their imagined communities?

Summary of the Chapter

This section has reviewed some of the seminal concepts in sociocultural theory that have to do with learner identity in terms of their relationship with the classroom community, imagined communities, and investment in an L2. The social turn in the field has shown that in addition to considering cognitive processes involved in language

learning, it is also of interest to consider the impact of historical, social, and ecological factors that impact participation in the L2 classroom. Sociocultural approaches to L2 learning such as the communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) emphasize the importance of the group dynamic on the learners' sense of belonging and their ability to contribute to the community. How the learner's participation is received by more senior members of the community of practice often determines what their role will be.

Vygotskian-inspired theories such as Activity Theory also advocate for understanding the impact of social interaction on one's ability to acquire knowledge. Human action taken to fulfill psychological needs is seen as socially mediated, rather than just as autonomous behaviors carried out within a given social context (Swain et al., 2015). It also considers the affordances of the material world as a part of the way in which learners can acquire an additional language. With the switch to online learning after March 2020, both teachers and learners had to make use of the novel affordances of the online classroom to accomplish their communicative goals. In the case of the online Introduction to Spanish Linguistics course, I observed that the communication styles of the face-to-face classroom frequently clashed with the new, online classroom modes of communication. However, in the case of the Introduction to Spanish Linguistics course, this tension led to a unique outcome regarding the affordances for class participation that were agreed upon by both the teachers and the students. The present study sought to understand how learners used the mediational tools of the online classroom to facilitate their participation and accomplish their goals for taking this course.

The dynamic tendencies of activity theory correspond to Norton-Peirce's (1995) work on identity and how identity is a fluid "site of struggle" that can change and evolve

across time and space (Norton-Peirce, 1995, p. 1). Connected to the theme of identity is the concept of imagined communities, or the idea that learners become invested in learning additional languages through future membership in the community where the target language is spoken (Norton, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2011). We saw this in Rui's case of studying Japanese (Kanno 2003). Rui, who had immigrated to multiple anglophone countries at a very young age, wanted to reconnect with his country of origin. Through studying Japanese at a Japanese language and culture school in Canada to maintain his language skills, he was eventually able to move back to his home country to live and work. Rui's investment in the practices and norms of the various Japanese language CoPs that he belonged to abroad demonstrated that he saw them as useful in helping him belong to his imagined community of the future.

The present study looks at five focal participants with diverse linguistic backgrounds and how their identities and unique roles manifested in the online Introduction to Spanish Linguistics community of practice. The following chapters entail an explanation of how learners are adapting to the new system of online learning and how the multimodality communication affordances are changing rules, the division of labor, and outcomes within the online classroom. It also considers how they view these practices in terms of their long-term goals for belonging to target language communities beyond the classroom. In the next section, I discuss the methodology of the present study. I introduce the research site, the participants, as well as the data gathering and analysis procedures.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study addresses how the focal participants' learner identities manifested in the online classroom through their participation within the community of practice of an Introduction to Spanish Linguistics online course. Moreover, it examines how learners made use of the mediational tools and affordances of the online classroom to achieve their participation goals for this course. Using the conceptual framework of investment (Norton, 1995) and imagined communities (Norton, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2011), the third research question seeks to understand how learners viewed classroom activities as relevant to their personal or professional goals beyond the classroom.

I looked to several data sources of qualitative data including interviews, classroom transcripts, and written reflections. Croker (2009) affirms that the purpose of a qualitative study is not to provide generalizable findings, but rather to comprehend the “particular” and “distinctive” (p. 9) phenomena of a given context. While it is possible for qualitative research to be applied to other contexts, it is common for researchers to allow the reader to determine what takeaways will be useful to their unique circumstances (Croker, 2009, p. 9). This chapter discusses the research design and methodology for this dissertation. I provide a description of the research setting, the data-gathering procedures, a description of the data-collection instruments, and the purpose of the study. I introduce the five student focal participants as well as the course instructor and discuss their academic and linguistic backgrounds. I also outline the analysis procedures for each research question. The first research question sought to understand

how learners viewed their identity within the classroom community of practice (CoP). The second research question is addressed from an activity theory perspective and looked to understand how learners view their class participation in the online classroom in terms of their individual objects. The third research question is examined from the lens of investment and imagined communities to understand how learners view the connection between classroom activities and their future goals. I close this chapter with a summary of these details.

Researcher Positioning

The commonalities I had with the focal participants helped me to pursue a more *emic* or insider approach to this study because I shared a comparable educational background with most of the focal participants, allowing me to better understand their perspectives. Each focal participant was working toward a degree in Spanish and had an interest in Spanish-speaking cultures. I have both my BA and MA degrees in Spanish and will graduate with my PhD in Spanish Applied Linguistics. Another reason for my *emic* perspective was that the course instructor was also my dissertation advisor, therefore we had an established working relationship prior to beginning this research.

Research Setting

The University

This research took place at a public research university in the northeastern United States. From the middle of March 2020 to the spring semester of 2021, most courses at this university, with the exception of courses in the health professions, were held online

due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data for this study, including class observations and interviews, was collected virtually in March and April of 2021.

The Introduction to Spanish Linguistics Online Course. Introduction to Spanish Linguistics is a course that is designed for advanced learners of Spanish, many of whom have declared a major or double major in Spanish and are in their third or fourth year of undergraduate study. This course was cross-listed at the master's level. There were 16 undergraduates enrolled in this course and one graduate student. Although no language background surveys or placement tests were administered, I observed that Spanish language proficiency in this course varied. Most learners appeared to have at least an intermediate-high proficiency within the ACTFL framework (ACTFL, 2012). The course provides an overview of various topics in linguistics as they pertain to the Spanish language including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. The course followed the 16- week semester structure and met from January 2021 to May 2021, every Tuesday and Thursday from 2:00 pm to 3:20 pm on Zoom. Data collection began during the week of March 8 2021 and ended on April 22, 2021.

Class Activities. Class time was distributed consistently throughout the semester in accordance with the instructor's routine (See Figure 3). Each class, the instructor would begin with an 'Opening Discussion' in which he would call on each student and ask them if they had any recent personal news that they would like to share with the class. Most L2 classrooms, whether in person or online, seek to mimic conversation that the learners will encounter in the target language community (Princeton, 2020). This usually involved an exchange of some personal information with questions (e.g., How are you?

What did you do over winter break?). It could also involve learners being asked to give their thoughts or opinions on something (e.g., What did you think about the novel?).

Class openers lasted anywhere from nine to fifteen minutes on a given day. It was during these openers that there were many opportunities for vocabulary learning, as the topics were miscellaneous and non-academic. The instructor opened each class with these types of inquiries and would often ask follow-up questions. For instance, in Excerpt 1, the instructor asked a student who was attending class from her family's home in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, about her life there during the pandemic. This example reflected typical patterns in the conversational part of class, as students would share personal news.

Excerpt 1, April 20th, 2021

Instructor: Muy bien, muy bien. ¿ [Jan], cómo está todo en dónde vives?
En Addis Ababa.

Very good, very good. How is everything where you live? In Addis Ababa.

Jan: Eso casi, casi. Hay un poco de más covid del que teníamos antes.
That almost, almost. There is a little bit more covid than we had before.

Instructor: ¿Es difícil? ¿Tienes que quedarte en casa?
Is it hard? Do you have to stay at home?

Jan: Sí, no salimos de la casa muchas veces, solamente con mi madre para ir al supermercado.

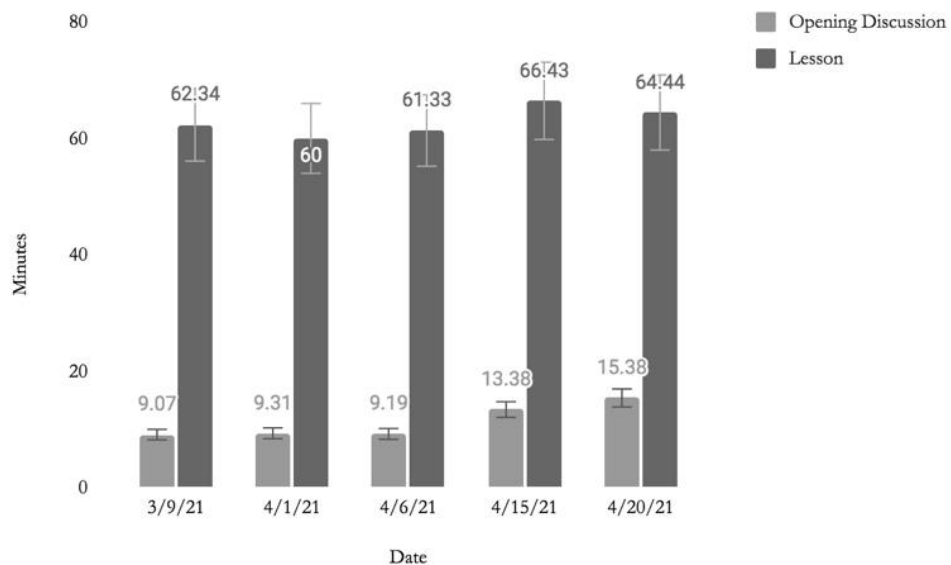
Yes, we don't leave the house very much, only with my mom to go to the supermarket.

In the second part of the class meeting, the instructor would begin the lesson of the day and would use the 'Share-screen' feature on Zoom to share his 'Class Notes' (Toth, 2021) Microsoft Word document (See Appendix B). The instructor's approach to lesson design was to build each lesson around the units and themes of the course textbook. Depending on the length of the prior opening class discussion, the lesson

component of the class usually lasted between 60-70 minutes. Figure 4 demonstrates how the Class Notes document was projected to the students during each class meeting using the ‘Share-Screen’ function on Zoom. The instructor would teach the lesson and update the document during class with key concepts from the lecture. In addition to the notes, the document included the homework assignments due for the next class, as well as which students would be doing a presentation on the readings that week.

Figure 3

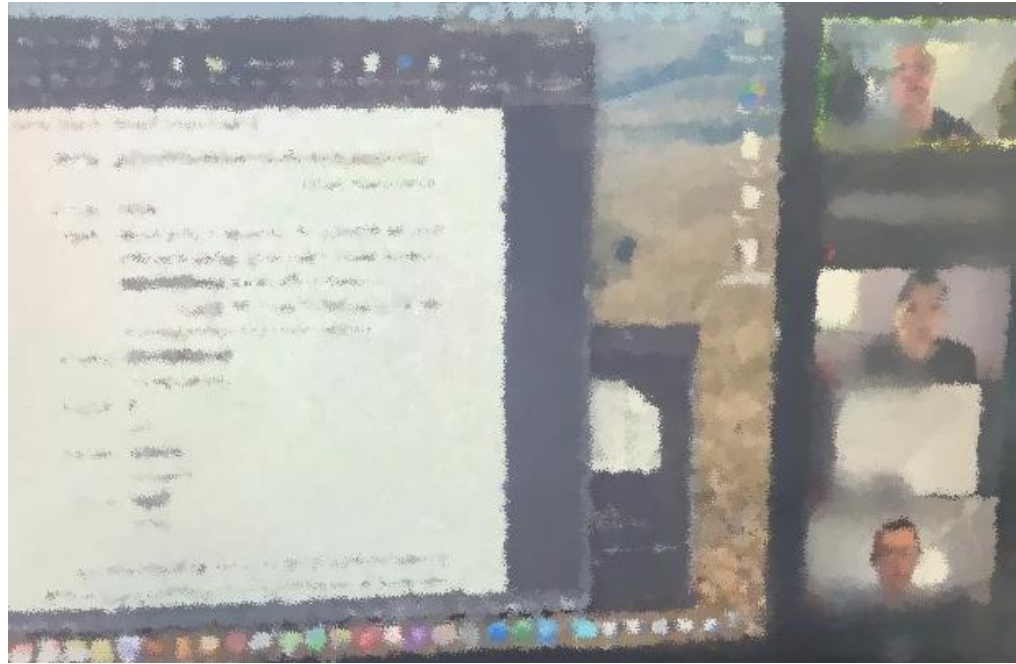
Opening Discussion vs. Lesson Discussion



In addition to the textbook and class notes document, the chat window was an additional mediational tool that was frequently used by the students in both the opening discussion and the lesson activities. The instructor also put students in breakout rooms when he wanted them to collaborate on class activities using ancillary software such as GoogleDocs. Learners recorded their answers from discussions in the breakout rooms on a GoogleDoc that was later shared with the class.

Figure 4

Image of Lesson Discussion During Introduction to Spanish Linguistics Course



Zoom protocol. On the first day of class, the instructor uploaded a video to the course Canvas page that indicated a Zoom protocol, or expectations for how learners should navigate participation on Zoom. He reviewed the various features in Zoom that would facilitate participation for the students such as the raise hand function, the thumbs up and thumbs down buttons, as well as the chat window. As the semester went on, the instructor realized that many students were anxious about having their cameras or microphones on during class. The instructor clarified in a comment on an earlier draft of this chapter that at the beginning of the semester, “it was strongly suggested that students

keep their webcams on during the class for the sake of clear communication, but I said they could turn them off if they were highly anxious about this.”

Focal Participants

Eight participants from this course were interviewed for this study. After listening to each interview and reviewing the reflection data, five participants were chosen to be included in this research. Their data was chosen to be included based on their unique perspectives of the online classroom, their diverse linguistic backgrounds, and their long-term goals for using Spanish in the future. Participant background profiles were obtained through interviews. Three were females and two were males. Their ages ranged from 18 to 25 years. Two of the participants were third-year students and three were fourth-year students. Four of the five focal participants had studied Spanish during their K-12 years prior to coming to university, although their Spanish learning histories varied greatly. One participant began studying Spanish during her freshman year of university. All focal participants were informally estimated to have at least an intermediate-high level of Spanish.

Data collection began during the week of March 8, 2021. Permission for data collection was received by week 6 of the semester and data collection began on March 9th. I observed this class on a weekly basis until April 20, 2021. By this time, I was working within a classroom where most interactional norms were already established, but some were still being modified. I recruited participants by putting an announcement about my study on the course’s webpage. Prior to beginning data collection, I visited the

class and explained the purpose of the study. All the participants who consented to be interviewed were provided with a link to sign up for an appointment for the interview.

Regarding the individual language background of the focal participants, there was one Heritage Learner of Spanish and four L2 Spanish learners, two of whom were Heritage Learners of other languages, as described in the participant profiles later in this chapter. All the focal participants were majoring in Spanish; one learner was majoring in just Spanish and four were double majoring in Spanish and another subject; all were taking the course as an elective toward their Spanish degree. Additionally, the instructor was included as a focal participant and his background information was obtained during his interview. The specific topics presented in the participant profiles have to do with each individual's language background (L2 vs. HL background), their prior classroom and out-of-classroom experiences with Spanish, and their majors.

Of the 17 learners enrolled in the course, 16 consented to have their class participation be audio and video recorded. Five classes (the classes of March 9, April 1, April 6, April 15 and April 20) were recorded and transcribed completely. One student declined to be audio and video recorded but consented to complete the interview component as well as the weekly written reflection component. Twelve students consented to completing the interview and reflection component of the project in addition to being audio and video recorded. Of these 12 students, eight of them signed up for an appointment to be interviewed and participated in both interviews at the beginning and end of data collection. The final five focal participants were chosen based on their perspectives on the online classroom, as well as how they enacted their roles in this CoP

based on their prior experiences, their membership to other linguistic communities of practice, as well as their professional goals.

The Instructor

The instructor was a 52-year-old Associate Professor of Spanish Applied Linguistics at the university. He was a nonnative speaker of Spanish who began learning Spanish in high school at age 14. He graduated in 1997 with PhD in Spanish Applied Linguistics from the University of Pittsburgh. Typically, he teaches courses at the intermediate to advanced undergraduate level and seminars at the graduate level. At the time of data collection, he was teaching one intermediate undergraduate course in addition to this one, both fully online. I met with the instructor over Zoom during the data collection period for a 45-minute-long interview. We spent a considerable amount of time speaking about the adjustments that both teachers and learners had to make to get acclimated to online learning.

The instructor said that he began each semester with a statement on the importance of community and respecting one another in the classroom as the students try to improve their language skills. He explained to the class that acquiring a language is a lifelong process and that no one should feel ashamed of making mistakes as they develop their second language skills. Although he felt that this speech set a positive tone, it seemed that many students were still hesitant to participate in class. The low level of whole-class participation made it difficult for the instructor to be certain of whether the students understood what was being asked of them and whether they understood the pedagogical goals of having whole-class discussions in order to (1) improve their expression in Spanish and (2) to learn about Spanish linguistics:

Example 1, The instructor on class participation

When I try to get them to participate [as a class], a lot of it is do they understand what I'm asking them to do? ... [The] three steps to participating in a whole class [discussion] are one, what does the teacher want me to do? Once I understand what the teacher's asking, what could I say? And then number three, how do [I] say what I want to say? (The instructor, 21-04-08)

The instructor's intention was to build a community through informal conversation at the beginning of every class. As mentioned, the purpose of the instructor's inquiries into whether students had any novel anecdotes or life updates was to build a sense of community where whole-class participation in the linguistic activities that followed would flow more smoothly. The instructor also wanted to make the class as student-centered as possible and tried to make it a dialogic experience for the students instead of a teacher-centered, monologic experience.

Aiden

Aiden was an L2 Spanish speaker whose history with Spanish began at a young age when he was enrolled in a K-5 bilingual Spanish program. When he graduated from elementary school, Aiden continued taking Spanish classes until he graduated from high school. Although most of his schooling was not Spanish-English bilingual past the age of 10, this provided him with a very solid foundation in Spanish. At the time of the interview, Aiden was a junior double majoring in Spanish and biochemistry and was studying abroad in Oviedo, Spain when the pandemic began. The study abroad program was cut short after 7 weeks, and Aiden returned home and spent the remainder of the

semester taking asynchronous online classes. After he graduated, Aiden wanted to attend medical school.

Diana

Diana was a fourth-year student in her mid-twenties. She was an L2 learner of Spanish with English being her primary language. Diana was a senior double majoring in psychology and Spanish. She had never lived or studied in a Spanish-speaking country but planned to study abroad in Oviedo, Spain during the summer of 2021. Diana explained that she chose to study Spanish over French because Spanish came easier to her. The link between Diana's identity and learning Spanish is very clear based on the excerpt below from her participant interview, where she suggests that her fluency in Spanish is the key to finding her place in the world. She would like to reach native fluency in Spanish:

Example 2, Diana's identity and studying Spanish

I liked the language, I liked how it sounds. As I get older, I appreciate being more connected with others that don't just speak English. I feel more deserving to exist in the world when I can speak another language. I want to reach fluency, like local, native, fluency. (Diana, 21-03-19)

Diana's goal was to work with children in therapeutic settings. After she graduated, she planned to move to the southwestern United States "where there is more of a predominantly Hispanic population". She wanted to be prepared to work with children that "mainly speak Spanish." She recalled a presentation given in her Spanish classes a few semesters ago about how being bilingual could increase one's earning potential, which she described as a "professional motivation" to continue studying the

language. She was also considering living abroad in a Spanish speaking country for some time after graduation.

Andrea

Andrea was a third-year student in her early twenties. Andrea was an L2 speaker of Spanish and began learning in elementary school. In addition to being proficient in Spanish, Andrea was a heritage speaker of Mandarin. Andrea described herself as very familiar with many of the concepts being covered in this course, as she had taken many linguistics courses with the English and Anthropology departments. In her first interview, Andrea explained that she wanted to declare a major in Linguistics, but that there was no program at the university that offered this major:

Example 3, Andrea's academic background

In the university, I'm considered a Spanish major because that's what I signed up for. I do not want to be a Spanish major. I actually want to be a linguistics major. And I changed my major a bunch of times. I came in as English and then I was like speech path, anthro, neuroscience, stuff like that. So, I've been jumping around a lot. (Andrea, 21-03-18)

Andrea started consistently learning Spanish in the eighth grade. In seventh and eighth grades, Andrea's school offered exploratory electives in different languages such as French and Spanish. College-level "Advanced Placement" (AP) courses were offered in both languages, but Andrea decided to continue with Spanish. Andrea took first-year Spanish in eighth grade but had previously been exposed to the language in pre-school, and again in the third grade. She noted that the classes were not consistent and that she did not "count them" as having helped develop her Spanish proficiency. At the time of the interview, Andrea noted that she often would watch TV in Spanish to listen to native speaker accents and practice her listening comprehension in Spanish. Andrea often

practiced speaking Spanish at home with her sister, who was taking Advanced Placement Spanish in high school at the time.

Eliza

Eliza was a fourth-year student was in her early twenties. She was pursuing a double major in TESOL and Spanish secondary language education. She was a heritage speaker of Vietnamese. Eliza began taking Spanish classes in the second semester of her freshman year at the university. In high school, she studied French and Latin, which helped her acquire Spanish. When she entered university, Eliza had declared a major in nursing, but then switched to education. Her rationale behind studying Spanish was to understand the linguistic background of many ESL students in Philadelphia whose L1 is Spanish. She also wanted to teach Spanish to L2 learners in high school.

During her sophomore year, Eliza was enrolled in the Latin American Studies Semester (LASS) at the university. This unique program gives students who are enrolled the opportunity to take one full semester of classes entirely with the Spanish department. At the mid-point of their Spanish language semester, students spend three weeks in Ecuador living with a host family and taking their classes. In the middle of Eliza's trip to Ecuador, the students were sent back to the US due to the pandemic. Despite the short-lived experience, Eliza described her time in Ecuador as very impactful. She recounted that the most challenging aspect of the experience was communicating with her host family in everyday interactions. She characterized herself as more confident in using

“academic” Spanish and discussing topics in literature and history but felt that she lacked the vocabulary for “everyday words” in Spanish.

Leo

Leo was a fourth-year student in his early twenties and graduated in the Spring of 2021. Leo is a heritage speaker of Spanish and grew up in an English-Spanish bilingual household. Leo’s mother was from Mexico and his father was born in the United States and both are fluent in Spanish. He characterized his Spanish as a child as “not great”, having lived most of his early life in the United States. He noted that visiting his grandparents in Mexico every summer helped him develop his fluency in Spanish. When Leo was nine, his parents decided to leave the US and move to Veracruz, Mexico, where they stayed for four years. It was during this period that Leo said his Spanish improved greatly. When his family moved back to the US, Leo did not want to lose the language skills he gained there. He took as many advanced International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) classes as he could in high school, which initially sparked his interest in South American Literature

When Leo started university, he entered as an English major, wanting to develop his writing skills. However, he said he realized that he could continue to develop his writing skills without majoring in English and wanted to find a major that aligned more with his interests. He described that this abrupt change to his academic plans occurred when he returned from spending a semester in Japan and studying Japanese. This experience inspired him to study the “mechanics” of one of his primary languages—Spanish. After he returned from Japan, he switched his major to obtain a degree in Spanish. The course offerings in the department for the Spanish major require students to

take both literature and linguistics classes. In addition to the Spanish major, he was also completing a certificate in Linguistics.

Procedures

Data Gathering

Interviews. The interviews were the primary source of data collection for this project. Weiss (1994) affirms that interviews are central to qualitative research, as they shed light on the inner worlds and perceptions of the research participants. Although one interview with one participant alone may not be sufficient to corroborate a particular phenomenon or make a generalization, interviews provide us with enough depth of a given situation, that may be corroborated with the accounts of others who are in the same situation (Weiss, 1994). Participants in this study were interviewed twice—once at the beginning and once at the end of data collection. Interviews for this study were semi-structured and conducted over Zoom. All interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were conducted in English. All the interview data was recorded and filed under aliases that I assigned to the participants.

During the interviews, I asked focal participants about their 1) language learning backgrounds, 2) their impressions of the class in the online setting, 3) their views on their own class participation, and finally 4) participants were asked to comment on the role of Spanish and their identity. During the second interview, participants had the opportunity to 1) take stock of their class participation for the semester and 2) reflect on how this

course helped them get closer to their personal and professional goals as they pertain to Spanish.

Online Classroom Observations. To avoid recording the learner who declined to have their participation video and audio recorded, I organized the participants in the gallery view in Zoom and blocked the nonparticipant on the laptop from the view of the camera with a piece of cardboard, as per Institutional Review Board (IRB) instruction. The class on March 9, 2021, was video recorded on my iPhone, following the IRB protocol. However, because Zoom shuffles the order of the speakers in gallery-view throughout a Zoom session, this required me to move the piece of cardboard several times to cover the non-participant. Therefore, the subsequent four lessons that were observed were audio recorded on my iPhone, but not video recorded. In addition to the class recordings, I also took pictures of the discussions in the chat window. A class participation tally and word count (see Tables 2 & 3) were also kept for the focal participants to corroborate their interview and reflection responses. I reviewed the classroom data transcripts and noted the instances of participation for each focal participant both verbally and in the chat window. All throughout the online observations, I kept my camera and microphone off so that my presence would not interfere with regular classroom operations.

Course Documents. The instructor gave me access to the course materials and documents through an online course management system. These included the syllabus, the instructor's class notes, homework assignments and grades. The 'Class Notes' (see Appendix B) master document was especially central to the course, as it served as a guide for students regarding the lesson objectives, the topics that would be covered on a weekly

basis, as well as deadlines for homework assignments and class presentations (Toth, 2021). As stated earlier in this chapter, this document was projected to the learners in each class using the ‘Share screen’ feature in Zoom and updated live by the instructor during lectures with relevant course material pertaining to the grammar topic of the day, and reminders about upcoming due dates.

Student Reflections. Each focal participant was asked to submit a written weekly reflection report, which was adapted from the written reflection questions from Morita’s (2002) study on academic classroom discourse. The purpose of this report was to have students think about their engagement in class and what motivated them to participate or not participate in class. The report itself contained thirteen questions that ask the focal participants to write two to three sentences for each prompt on how often they participated in class and if they were able to express everything that they wanted to in the instances that they did participate (See Appendix A). The reflection report forms were sent to the students via a weekly survey link that was emailed to them. Once students filled them out and submitted the reflections, they were then downloaded to my laptop and kept in a folder. Participants were asked to submit these reports on the days that class sessions were observed and recorded. Not all the focal participants consistently submitted reflections each week. Table 1 demonstrates the reflection submission record for each participant. There were some gaps in the data regarding these reflections as not every participant submitted a reflection every week.

Table 1

Weekly Reflection Report Submissions

Participant	Weekly Reflection Report Submissions					
	Week of 03/15/21	Week of 03/22/21	Week of 03/29/21	Week of 04/05/21	Week of 04/12/21	Week of 04/19/21
Aiden	Submitted	Submitted	No	No	No	No
Diana	Submitted	No	No	No	Submitted	Submitted
Andrea	None	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted
Eliza	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted
Leo	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted

Data Analysis and Coding

Once data collection ended and interviews were transcribed, I reviewed each student’s interview transcripts and reflections and began to look for patterns and identify codes. According to Saldaña (2016) many qualitative coding methods are not “discrete” and can be combined as needed (Saldaña, 2016, p. 69). I used two methods outlined in Saldaña (2016) in order to consolidate and include the information that I felt would be useful to my study. These included: (1) Attribute Coding: This method was used to label participant information markers such as their year in school, their academic background, and any demographic information they may have disclosed. and (2) *In Vivo* Coding. Attribute coding allowed me to consolidate information on the participants’ backgrounds.

For instance, in Leo's interview on March 19, 2021, I noted that he was a senior and that he used to be an English major:

Example 4: Leo's academic background

I am a senior at [omitted] University. I will be graduating soon. I started out as an English major and I think I continued that way for about two years. And my purpose for the reason I wanted to do an English major was just to improve my writing skills (Leo, 21-03-19).

In vivo coding was used specifically for the interview transcripts to understand the participants' vantage points about a variety of topics. As noted by Saldaña (2016), *in vivo* has also been referred to as "literal coding", "verbatim coding", "inductive coding", "indigenous coding", "natural coding" and "emic coding" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 105). Saldaña (2016) affirms that *in vivo* codes come from words or phrases that are in the qualitative data, and not "generated" by the researcher (Saldaña, 2016, p. 105).

Example 5 Leo's comments about online learning

A lot of the anxieties that you normally have being in a classroom setting or on a university campus just kind of disappear when you're in front of your computer at home. And social anxiety is awful. So, you know, when that disappears, that's great. It really helps with absorbing information, paying attention... there's also just general anxieties, like your personal appearance or...are people looking at you? Just things that you think of in the back of your mind (Leo, 21-03-19).

In Example 5 Leo is discussing why he prefers online learning to in-person learning. He discusses how his social anxiety improved in his online classes, and that he was able to focus more. Thus, I highlighted the phrase "helps with absorbing information". From an activity theory perspective, this example might be interpreted as Leo finding the mediational tools of the online classroom to be a positive affordance for his participation and for learning about Spanish linguistics. After the *in vivo* codes were identified, I organized the data into broader categories (e.g., Spanish learning history;

participating in-person vs. online; positive affordances in the online classroom; negative affordances in the online classroom). I connected these excerpts to the theoretical concepts (CoPs, Activity Theory, Investment/Imagined communities) used for this study.

I also made notes about repetitive themes or ideas that emerged from the data. Then, I listened to the interview recordings multiple times and began to put together a narrative or an *analytic memo* for each participant with any noteworthy information that was relayed. According to Glaser (1978), an analytic memo is essentially the researcher's way of making sense of the data in order to understand "What is actually happening in the data?" (Glaser, 1978, p. 57). These memos can consist of a summary of the researcher's observations during the analysis process and what themes they are seeing in the data that will help them address their research concerns. For instance, the theme of Zoom fatigue and burnout due to online learning was recurring in Andrea's interviews and reflections. I observed that activity theory could be used here to understand how the mediational means of Zoom were impacting her class participation:

Example 6, Researcher's analytic memo about Andrea's data

In Andrea's weekly reflections, a common theme that appeared was burnout and fatigue. In both interviews, Andrea expressed feeling "burnout" or Zoom fatigue that was common among learners during the pandemic. At the time, Andrea was taking all 6 of her courses synchronously online. On April 6, she noted in her reflection that she and her classmates "are burning out faster than before".

Analysis and Coding for Communities of Practice. To address the first research question, using an *in vivo* coding procedure, I looked for examples from the interviews and reflections where the learners discussed their identity in terms of this classroom community of practice. I was looking for examples of *old-timer* and *newcomer* identities, as well as identities that were influenced by their professional goals. Taking this into

account I looked at each focal participant's involvement in whole class discussions, whether it was verbal or through the chat feature, to see how aspects of their identity emerged to understand their role within this CoP. At this point, it is pertinent to clarify that identity in this study is a theoretical construct. Moreover, within the CoP framework it can refer to inherent characteristics, but it can also refer to contextually relevant characteristics. A CoP member's identity is referred to as a *role* that demonstrates aspects of the identity they carry with them through their interactions with others in the communities of practice that they belong to. For example, Eliza mentioned in her interviews that she was intimidated by having to participate in whole-class discussions online because she felt that there was a lack of community in the online classroom, as the example below demonstrates.

Example 7, Eliza's comments on whole-class discussions

Big group discussions are a lot more scary to have to speak. The lack of community, not being able to get to know my other classmates. The lack of community makes it scarier to have to speak in front of others (Eliza, 21-04-19).

However, the example below reflects aspects of her identity that were evoked in the CoP and lead her to take on a more participatory role than her reservedness may suggest. For example, Eliza noted in one of her reflections that long periods of silence during class discussions made her want to help the instructor move the class along. This also demonstrated that she felt empathy for the instructor, which could be indicative of her identity as a future language teacher:

Example 8

I was mostly concerned about the silence in class today. I wanted to create more conversation in class, but when I was giving out my ideas, I was genuinely curious to know if I was on the right track (21-03-30).

Analysis and Coding for Activity Theory. When coding for data that was pertinent to activity theory, I looked for responses from the interviews and reflections that illustrated how learners made use of the technological affordances on Zoom to facilitate their participation. Additionally, I considered how each learner made use of verbal discursive affordances on the platform and how they were distributed across learners' contributions to whole-class discussions. I read over their interview responses and looked over the classroom transcripts and constructed a model for each participant based on Engeström's (1987; 2001) activity system model. I outlined an individual triangle diagram for each focal participant based on their responses and attitudes toward taking this class online and what their individual objects or goals were. The three social points at the bottom of the triangle were similar for each focal participant. For the other areas of the activity triangle, I considered each student's apparent identity/role (subject) as well as their individual goals (objects), and the mediational tools that they used to accomplish them. Leo's responses indicated that he found the mediational tools of Zoom to be positive affordances for his participation which led to an outcome of increased verbal participation in class discussions as well as less social anxiety in the online classroom.

Figure 5

Leo's Activity Theory Triangle

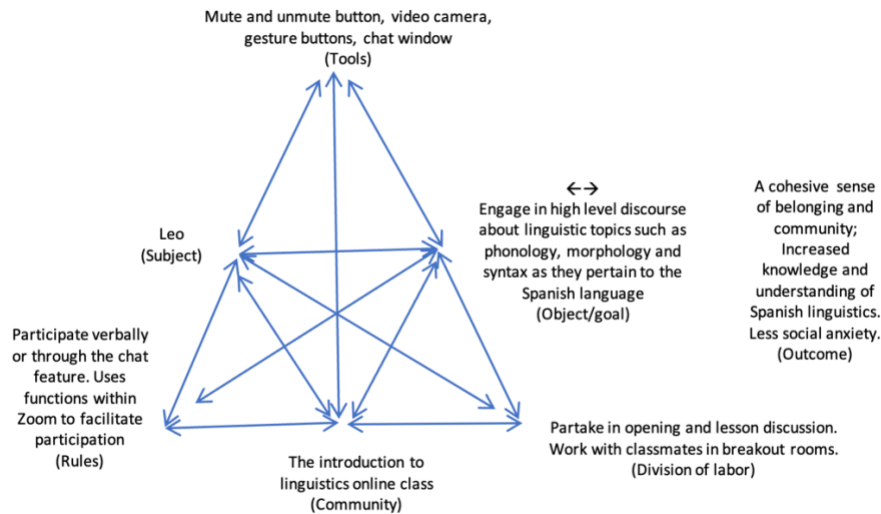


Figure 5 illustrates how Leo made use of the affordances of the online classroom to facilitate his participation and accomplish his goals for taking this course. The bottom portion of the diagram (Rules, Community, and Division of Labor) is similar for all of the focal participants, but the *subject*, *tools*, *object*, and *outcome* areas vary among the participants. In Leo's case, he operationalized the mediational tools of Zoom to facilitate his class participation. His individual object was to learn about Spanish linguistics in order to be prepared for an academic career as a Spanish professor. The outcome for Leo was that he reported a stronger sense of community, increased knowledge and understanding of Spanish Linguistics, and less social anxiety.

Analysis and Coding for Investment and Imagined Communities. When coding for the construct of investment for each subject position of the activity system, I considered the focal participants' interview responses to understand how they saw connections between class activities and their personal goals. The following example

comes from Leo's interview on April 19, 2021. Here, he describes being highly invested in whole-class discussions, particularly because of the opportunity to learn from his classmates. He noted that his classmates' participation was as important as what the instructor was teaching:

Example 9, Leo's investment

So, the contributions from my classmates were just as important as everything [the instructor] taught, because I tend to learn by example kind of see examples. And my classmates were finding plenty of examples. Be it speaking or in the chat. Either way, though, it's very helpful (Leo, 21-04-19).

For the construct of imagined communities, I looked at learner's responses as they pertained to their future goals and the communities that they envisioned themselves belonging to in the future. These goals or objects in activity theory served as underlying motivations for each learner's activity. A clear example of this was in Aiden's second interview on April 19, 2021, where he discussed his object of becoming a physician.

Example 10, Aiden's investment

I really like being able to communicate with people in Spanish, especially if it's something that they're more comfortable in...wanting to go into the medical world... I feel like [speaking Spanish is] a relatively accessible and easy way to [do that] (Aiden, 21-03-23).

I took the above excerpt from Aiden's interview and connected it to my exploration of imagined communities. As can be seen, Aiden's long-term object was working with a diverse population of Spanish speakers. Aiden wanted to use his Spanish skills to communicate with patients to make them feel at ease. I observed that his investment in majoring in Spanish and in this course is strongly tied to his imagined identity and communities of the future.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter discussed the methodology used for the present study. Data was gathered over a six-week period from March 2021 to April 2021 in an online Introduction to Spanish Linguistics course. The data sources came from interviews with five students and the course instructor. Additionally, I observed and recorded five class sessions. The final data source was weekly written reflections from the focal participants on class participation. These were analyzed in conjunction with the interview data. The approaches to data and analyses that were outlined in this chapter led me to the interpretation of my results, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of identity in the synchronous online classroom and how learners used the affordances available to them to participate in whole class discussions. In terms of identity, this study explored how invested the learners were in class activities and how they perceived these activities to align with their goals for learning Spanish. This chapter addresses the three research questions presented in Chapter 1: (1) What aspects of a participant's identity become relevant in the virtual community of practice of the online Introduction to Linguistics course? (2) How do participants' goals influence their participation in the online Introduction to Spanish Linguistics Community of Practice? (3) How has online learning affected L2 investment in class participation, and how do learners see the connections between online tasks and their imagined communities?

To address Research Question 1, I looked to the Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) framework as well as identity theory to demonstrate how each of the focal participants viewed their individual roles within the classroom community. In Research Question 2, I used Engeström's (1987; 2001) activity theory model to analyze each of the participant's object, or goal-oriented actions, and its relationship to the various areas of the collective activity such as rules, community, and division of labor. Finally, in Research Question 3, I looked to Norton's (2001) theory of imagined communities to understand how learners view the link between the classroom activities and their personal and professional goals beyond the classroom.

Research Question 1: Participant Identities

The Instructor

As the leader of this classroom community of practice, the instructor explained in his interview that he aimed to create an interactive community of practice within this classroom, based on his understanding of well-established instructional practices within the larger community of researchers and educators in Hispanic linguistics. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the instructor consistently divided the class meetings into two separate groups of activities: the opening class discussion and the lesson discussion (See Figure 3). For the instructor, increased class participation among the students was a mechanism for achieving one of the instructional goals of the course— L2 development. During the opening discussion, the goal was to encourage students to share an interesting anecdote or a recent update about their lives with the class. For this course, the instructor's practice aimed to create a sense of community so that each student felt secure to contribute something to the discussion. This specific instructional practice is reminiscent of Dörnyei's (2009, p. 42) construct of the *ought-to-self* in that the instructor wants to lessen the potential of any negative outcomes for students as they take the risk to participate.

The classroom observations revealed that the challenges with a lack of student participation applied less to the conversational activities than to the lesson discussion. For the lesson component of the class, which was more teacher-driven in terms of the discussion, the instructor would present the goals of the lesson, introduce a new linguistic topic, and then give the learners time to do practice examples. The instructor would then review the examples with the class. One of the findings from my observations was that

participation took place both verbally and through the chat window. By the time data collection had begun, the chat was already integrated as a mediational tool in both the opening discussion and lesson discussion. Table 2 demonstrates the word and turn counts for the focal participants and the instructor in verbal and chat interactions in the opening class discussions across five observed classes. Table 3 demonstrates the word and turn counts for the lesson discussion verbal and chat interactions across the same five observed classes. Although one of the personal instructor's goals for the course was to foster L2 development, in both the opening class discussion and the lesson discussion, Tables 2 and 3 show that he spoke significantly more than the students.

Table 2

Opening Class Discussion Word and Turn Count

Focal Participant Turn Count and Word Count-Opening Class Discussion				
Participants	Verbal Interaction		Chat Interaction	
	No. of words	No of turns	No. of words	No. of turns
Diana	93	6	8	1
Andrea	41	3	37	3
Aiden	43	4	1	1
Leo	205	8	0	0
Eliza	12	2	1	1
Teacher	5224	138	0	0
Whole Class	7238	256	217	22

Note. Verbal interaction and chat interaction during opening class discussion

Table 3

Lesson Discussion Word and Turn Count

Focal Participant Turn Count and Word Count-Lesson Discussion				
Participants	Verbal Interaction		Chat Interaction	
	No. of words	No of turns	No. of words	No. of turns
Diana	0	0	11	3
Andrea	0	0	52	9
Aiden	16	2	0	0
Leo	249	6	0	0
Eliza	62	4	1	1
Teacher	22,179	216	24	1
Whole Class	25,900	421	130	25

Note. Verbal interaction and chat interaction during lesson discussion

Conveying the course material and establishing a community where there was social cohesion, and a sense of belonging was what the instructor described was the most straightforward part of being the leader and facilitator of the classroom community. However, making sure that the class understood what he wanted them to do with the conceptual linguistic knowledge was much more challenging. According to the instructor's interview data, it was difficult to get a sense of the students' engagement in the online setting using the mediational means of the web conferencing platform, as the students were often not as responsive to his questions as he had hoped. When asked how he was dealing with the lack of participation from the students, he explained that there was no easy solution to increasing student participation:

Example 10, The instructor's perspective on student participation

I want [the students] to sort of problem solve the reasons that you would, I don't know, use the subjunctive here, or can you identify structures that are like this one here [or] match, synthesize this kind of information?

Then they would engage in that activity. [But] it's not totally straightforward as to how you do that (The instructor, 2021-04-08).

One of his primary concerns was how well he was optimizing the technology for the benefit of the learners. In Chapter 1, we saw that identity is a dynamic construct that can change and develop over time. Barkhuizen and Mendieta's (2020, pp. 3-7) work on "good language teacher" identities affirms that a teacher's *practice* is indeed a "social process" and that a key element of their identity is situated in this process or the way they carry out their role. The hurried switch to online learning in March 2020 was an entirely novel experience for many teachers. Given that this was a novel experience for the instructor of this course, he was still negotiating how to enact his identity as a "good" language teacher in this new paradigm of learning.

The instructor was concerned about what the students were getting out of the course and if the more teacher-centered instruction was helping them achieve their individual objects for taking this course. This recalls to Gee's (2000) notion that identity consists of our interactions with others and their resulting perceptions of us. The instructor explained that he felt disappointed with himself in not being able to tell if students understood him or not. At the beginning of the semester, the instructor noted that many students kept their cameras on and were more noticeably engaged. However, halfway through the semester, at least a third of the class on a given day did not have their cameras on.

The instructor wanted to give the students more opportunities to practice and develop their proficiency. However, this left him with less time to cover a wider range of topics. The instructor wanted to be sure that with each topic covered in class, learners would be able to use the concepts accurately and be able to demonstrate their

understanding. The instructor noted that phonology and morphology were particularly challenging sections due to the complexity of these units. The amount of time that was spent on these topics prevented the class from moving on to syntax right away. When I began observing the class, the class was concluding the unit on morphology and beginning the unit on syntax. This delay required the instructor to make some adjustments in the course schedule to accommodate the needs of the learners. Instead of covering syntax “tree” diagrams and other more theoretical parts of that unit, he decided to cover more practical information. For instance, they covered the differences between simple and complex sentences and embedded clauses because he felt it would ultimately be more useful to the students to help them improve their L2 development. Once again, the teacher’s ongoing challenges with managing this online course recall Dörnyei’s (2009) concept of the L2-ought to self which consists of what one thinks they *ought to be* or what they *ought to be doing* in order to prevent a “negative outcome” (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 42). In particular, the instructor’s feelings toward what often became monologic classroom discourse were indicative of this.

Aiden

In his interviews, Aiden stated that it took many years for him to realize how integral Spanish was to his sense of self, as he felt that he took his bilingual education for granted as a younger student. As a freshman, he was mostly taking STEM courses and started to become concerned about losing his Spanish-speaking abilities. When he finished his first semester, he decided that it was best to take at least one Spanish course a semester and enrolled in the university’s study abroad program in Spain. After completing most of his Spanish coursework during the semester in Spain, he only needed

to take two classes to finish the major in Spanish, so he officially declared a double major in Spanish and Biochemistry.

As an L2 speaker of Spanish, school had always been the place where he could practice the language on a consistent basis. Aiden appreciated the sense of community that his Spanish major classes provided. He essentially described the Spanish department as a community of practice where he could connect with people based on a shared interest in Spanish language and culture. In fact, many of the students in Introduction to Linguistics class had studied abroad in Oviedo with him the previous Spring semester. These connections were valuable to him as he noted that most of his friends outside of the department did not speak Spanish. He appreciated having friends in class that could understand his experience as an L2 Spanish speaker. He noted during our interview that he missed interacting with these people in person and having people to practice Spanish with more regularly. This finding is especially noteworthy because it demonstrates how learners form relationships within a CoP that are centered on common goals and interests. These analogous goals are what compel learners to engage in joint activity. In terms of the classroom CoP, this explains how class participation emerges and evolves, leading to desired learning outcomes.

Example 11, Aiden's on the importance of community in the L2 classroom

Especially when things were in person...when people would have run into each other, we would just default to speaking in Spanish... the opportunity to get to practice with someone and someone who's learning it and someone who's on a similar level as me. So, we sort of understand each other and the mistakes that we make. I really like having that connection (Aiden, 21-03-23).

As mentioned, he had spent most of his formative educational years in a setting where Spanish was one of the primary languages. Aiden spoke with a very marked

Madrilenian accent. His experience studying abroad in Oviedo, Spain during the Spring 2020 semester was decisive in solidifying his bilingual identity and helped him realize his passion for the language and culture of Spain.

Example 12, Aiden's affinity for the culture of Spain

I find myself understanding and relating a lot to the particular Spanish because of the culture of Spain. It's something that I just understand very well. I understand the culture, the way that people live, the food that people make... (Aiden, 21-03-23).

Although Aiden did not participate very frequently in whole class discussions, he explained that due to his educational background and having studied Spanish in school for so long, he felt secure in his abilities to communicate his ideas and had little to no anxiety when speaking in front of a large group. Within the Introduction to Linguistics community of practice, I observed that the identity of old-timer tended to emerge with Aiden with respect to the valued classroom practice of self-expression in Spanish. He accomplished this by often sharing personal anecdotes at the beginning of class. In the excerpt below, he discusses his self expression in English and Spanish, highlighting that they are two unique communication systems that he liked having access to.

Example 11, Aiden's view of Spanish and his identity

There are just certain ways of speaking in Spanish that are different from English. They each have different ways of expressing things in a way that the other can't. And so to have that as another option of expressing the way that I'm thinking I really like having and using (Aiden, 21-03-23).

Diana

The data from her interviews suggest that Diana's identity in the online classroom was contradictory. There was a clear tension between Diana's fears of making a mistake in class and wanting to take a more active role in discussions. From the interviews, I

observed that she viewed herself as a newcomer or novice in terms of her abilities to express herself in this course, despite having taken many upper-level courses in the Spanish department. Her reluctance to speak suggested that Diana was hesitant about engaging in the valued activities of this CoP. She described the linguistics class as being her “worst” Spanish class because it was challenging to understand the subject matter. From a CoP perspective, Diana’s answers to my interview questions suggest that she did not view herself as a competent member of this community of practice. This was due to her unfamiliarity with the vocabulary and content knowledge needed to contribute to the discussions. It seemed that Diana’s self-doubt did not pertain to the regular use of Spanish, but rather from using Spanish in the content area of linguistics.

Example 12, Diana on class participation in the Intro to Spanish Linguistics CoP

Linguistics is honestly my worst Spanish class that I have ever taken. I don’t understand pretty much any of it. And when I speak Spanish in that class I’ve found that my normal conversational skills are lesser because I feel less secure in what I’m saying. I don’t know how to say it without sounding like self-deprecating...But then in other classes...I can speak completely fine. I don’t fumble for simple words...(Diana, 21-03-19)

Although Diana had many reservations about participating in this synchronous online course due to the difficult material, she acknowledged that she appreciated the sense of community that was formed among her classmates throughout the semester through the conversational activities at the start of class. Despite her reluctance about engaging in whole-class discussions, she indicated that she would go out of her way to help her classmates with their Spanish or with the course material. This finding seemed to contradict her opinions about whole-class interaction. In her interviews, she discussed how she often used the chat feature to privately message her classmates if someone was

called on and they did not understand what the instructor was asking them: “if the teacher is asking a question and they have no idea what the professor is trying to say I will secretly direct message them and be like this is what they're asking.” This hidden participation was noteworthy because it emerged from her feelings of non-expertise in the linguistics content. Although she expressed not wanting to participate in whole-class discussions, the sense of community that she felt in this course motivated her to engage with her classmates in a covert manner.

Diana also appreciated when her classmates would help her in return. She felt she could rely on her classmates for guidance and support when she had questions about the material they were learning. She mentioned a ‘GroupMe’ chat that Aiden and Andrea also discussed during their interviews. The GroupMe chat was a mobile text chat that served as an additional means for the students to communicate with one another outside of class. Diana described it as an extension of the linguistics course and as a kind of virtual extra help group that allowed the students to study and learn the material together. She and her classmates used the GroupMe chat as a tool for obtaining insights into where the rest of the class was in terms of their understanding, instead of measuring their progress against what the teacher expected the class’s level of understanding to be. Again, this finding is noteworthy from a CoP perspective in that Diana sees her membership and expertise within the Intro to Spanish Linguistics course as very peripheral. However, her account of her participation in the outside, sub-CoP of the GroupMe chat indicated that her status in that group was perhaps less peripheral. She mentioned that she connected with Andrea through this sub-CoP and was able to get

linguistics tutoring from her. Diana expressed her appreciation for Andrea's assistance and that she would look forward to seeing her in future Spanish classes.

Example 13, Diana's perspective on the Intro to Spanish Linguistics sub-CoP

We were kind of pushed into an external extra help group just because we couldn't really do that physically in person. I also got extra help from Andrea who was super helpful and I wouldn't say we're friends, but, I would be excited to see her in another Spanish class (Diana, 21-04-19).

Although she described feeling uncertain contributing to discussions in Spanish on the advanced subject matter, her participation history (See Table 2 and Table 3) shows that she contributed to whole-class discussions both verbally and through the chat feature. She often spoke during the opening class discussion when she had an anecdote or personal story that she wanted to share. Diana also noted that she would feel compelled to participate out of empathy for the instructor if no one was responding to him. In her interviews, she also discussed how she would volunteer to speak for her group after a breakout room session in which her classmates may not have been very enthusiastic to speak. From a CoP perspective, Diana's role in this community was perhaps demonstrative of her future identity as a human services professional:

Example 14, Diana's participation in whole-class discussions

...If no one else is answering I'll start feeling bad, so I'll start answering. And sometimes if I'm in a group and we have the breakoff groups and I know the other people aren't super motivated I'll just speak for us (Diana, 21-04-19).

This finding shows that despite the reservations she has about her competence in linguistics, she is prepared to take initiative and use her agency when necessary, demonstrating that her position in this CoP is not as peripheral as she perceives it to be. Recall from the discussion in Chapter 1 of the concept of legitimate peripheral

participation within the CoP framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger 1998). The old-timers within the community (e.g., the instructor, and the peers with more expertise) try to encourage the participation of newer members whose expertise may not yet meet the standard for full-fledged membership to the CoP. Yet, it is important that the experts validate the participation of newcomers to help them develop proficiency in the valued practices of the community. Through receiving positive acknowledgment of their participation from more senior members of the CoP, newcomers can establish themselves as adept in the ways of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Andrea

When Andrea spoke about identity and how it relates to learning Spanish, her answers indicated that as an L2 learner of Spanish and as a heritage speaker of Mandarin, her personal history and experiences in other language courses were relevant to her preference for predominantly using the chat window for her contributions. In our interviews, Andrea highlighted her desire to navigate cultural boundaries sensitively. She recounted problematic experiences in her Mandarin courses, where Andrea felt closed off from a sense of membership in her Mandarin classroom community. As a heritage speaker of Mandarin, Andrea felt that the white, L2 learners were crossing boundaries in a space that she felt was also meant for heritage learners of Mandarin to connect. In the quote below, Andrea noted that while her classmates showed a genuine interest in Mandarin and the Chinese culture, she felt that they seemed to want to claim Mandarin as something that had “always” been a part of their identity:

Example 15, Andrea’s Mandarin class CoP

I don't want to throw white students under the bus, but sometimes, at least in Mandarin, I've noticed that they will try really hard to just pick everything up and,

pretend like this is their main culture. I'm glad you're taking interest, I'm glad that that you appreciate the culture, but there's a line. And you can't really... some spaces are just to feel safe, like, hey, I feel safe here. I feel respected here. I understand the culture here (Andrea, 21-04-22).

Andrea stated that these experiences in Mandarin class ultimately impacted the way in which she approaches her class participation in Spanish language courses, as well as her engagement with Spanish-speaking spaces outside of the classroom. This was evidenced in her class participation, which will be discussed later, where her contributions often demonstrated her linguistic expertise and typically did not include cultural knowledge of Spanish-speaking communities.

Example 16, Andrea on the importance of cultural sensitivity

I do kind of feel like I'm intruding. I haven't picked up any specific accents cause I'm like, then they're going to think I'm making fun of them. But also I do want to experience the culture...I really do want to learn about the culture, but in a respectful way (Andrea, 21-03-18).

It feels unfair for me to just, again, walk into any Spanish-speaking establishment and be like, all right, I'm here. You guys all have to deal with me. I speak Spanish too...(Andrea, 21-04-22)

The Introduction to Spanish Linguistics online course had L2 Spanish speakers, Spanish heritage learners, as well as native speakers enrolled. The examples above demonstrate that Andrea did not want to be an imposition on the heritage and native speakers in her Spanish courses, or in any space in the outside world that may be culturally significant to their communities. Andrea's concerns recall Dörnyei's (2009) concept of the L2 *ought-to-self* in that she is seeking to prevent a "negative outcome" for others by modifying her own actions. For Andrea, this was especially important in the way she presented herself in Spanish. She noted that she tried to not adopt a particular variety of Spanish, a particular accent, or as she said in her own words, "use Spanish

slang.” Andrea expressed an interest in learning about Hispanic cultures through studying the Spanish language but also said that she wanted to demonstrate her interest in a respectful way, and not replicate the dynamic of her Mandarin course. Andrea’s case is particularly salient because it demonstrates how language learners bring their prior language learning experiences with them to the classroom. As instructors, it is important to be conscious of learners’ past experiences in language classrooms in order to understand why they may be ambivalent about participating.

As mentioned in her participant profile, Andrea had an extensive background in linguistics, having taken many classes across departments that focused topics such as morphology, semantics, and other relevant topics that were being covered in this course. Her knowledge positioned her as an old-timer within the group. In her interview on March 18, 2021, she explained that she learned most of the material from Intro to Spanish Linguistics in another general linguistics course she took during her freshman year. She discussed how earlier in the semester, some of her classmates were struggling with the content on phonology, and how she enjoyed helping her classmates who may not have encountered this information before: “I kind of like to contribute...I have something helpful for people.”

Through sharing her prior linguistic knowledge, Andrea created a distinctive role for herself within this community of practice by taking on the role of “co-teacher”. The mediational tool used to convey her linguistic knowledge was the chat window in Zoom, which was where her roles of old-timer and co-teacher manifested. I observed that Andrea’s utilization of the chat window was perhaps her way of preventing the replication of the dynamic of her Mandarin courses. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, she

made contributions throughout both the opening class discussion and the lesson discussion via the chat, and was the CoP member who helped it to catch on in this course. This was corroborated by other focal participants who were interviewed. For instance, Leo mentioned Andrea as someone who was always willing to share her knowledge through the chat feature, make jokes, and contribute to the group's understanding of various linguistic topics. Diana also indicated that Andrea held an old-timer status when she mentioned that she received outside tutoring from Andrea throughout the semester.

In her interviews, Andrea also reported that since switching to online instruction, she had greater nervousness when speaking Spanish and felt worse about her language skills overall. She added that her classes became more teacher-centered and that there was less of an expectation from professors for students to participate. This was perhaps another reason for Andrea's use of the chat, as the instructor of the course did most of the talking (See Tables 2 and 3)

Example 17, Andrea's burnout

I don't think I've been using my Spanish really. Cause it's just like, oh, it's online and they're just lecturing us. I don't need to say anything. And you just sit there, and your brain burns out, and nothing happens (Andrea, 21-04-22)

Andrea's contributions in the chat tended to build upon the teacher's explanations of a given linguistic topic. The chat window was where her role as co-teacher emerged. This is evident in the excerpt below from the lesson discussion on March 9, 2021, where the instructor was explaining the morphological process of reduplication, where a word or a morpheme may be repeated to convey a grammatical meaning. He says that it is not very important for them to know for the course and provides an example in Spanish with "*café café*" to indicate pure coffee. However, it seemed that Andrea was redirecting the

conversation back to the topic of reduplication and was beginning to co-teach. Although the instructor is not soliciting a response, we see an initiation from Andrea when she provides the example of “like” versus “like-like” in English. Reduplication itself can be used to indicate intensity, therefore “like-like” indicates romantic interest in English.

Excerpt 2, March 9th, 2021



Instructor: Aquí está el ejemplo, no quiero ese liquido marrón que usted me ofrece, quiero café café. Repetimos café para decir la cosa verdadera. Puede significar cantidad o grado ok, café puro. Y en ingles hacemos lo mismo.

And here is the example, I don't want that brown liquid you are offering me, I want coffee coffee. We repeat coffee to say the real thing. It can mean the quantity or quality of pure coffee. And in English we do the same

In the chat window, we can see that Andrea gives an example of the verb *to like* in English versus the meaning of the reduplication of the verb (like like). Daniela, a native Spanish speaker, and graduate student enrolled in the course, also emerged as a co-teacher of the class through the chat by giving the class a more concrete definition of reduplication.

Excerpt 3, Chat Transcript, March 9th, 2021

Andrea to Everyone (3:02 pm): en ingles hay “like like” para indicar interesa romantica vs interesa platonica
in English there is “like like” to indicate romantic interest vs. platonic interest.

Daniela to Everyone (3:03 pm): es como para intensificar o subrayar oralmente

it's like for intensifying or highlighting something orally 

In a subsequent contribution to the chat, Andrea provides a follow-up comment to Daniela's definition of reduplication. Andrea gives an example of reduplication in

Mandarin: “In mandarin there is 小小 (small small) to indicate an especially small size”.

She uses another symbolic affordance with the carat (^) symbol to indicate that she agrees with Daniela’s definition. She then provides an additional example of reduplication that exists in Samoan languages, to which the teacher affirmatively responds: “Bora Bora. Yeah, yes, the Island of Bora Bora”.

Excerpt 4, Chat Transcript, March 9, 2021

Andrea to Everyone (3:03): en mandarin hay 小小 (pequeno pequeno) para indicar un tamano especialmente pequeno@daniela ^^
“bora bora” ?

*In mandarin there is 小小 (small small) to indicate an especially small size
@daniela^^
“bora bora” ?*

Excerpt 5, March 9, 2021

Instructor: En la lengua de signos. Bora Bora. Yeah, sí, la isla Bora Bora.

In sign language. Bora Bora. Yeah, yes, the island of Bora Bora.

The instructor responded affirmatively to these contributions, thus validating Andrea’s role as the co-teacher. In the following excerpt, the instructor reads both of their comments comment out loud and explains that reduplication is a type of inflection and gives an example of another type of inflection in Spanish. Finally, he circles back to Andrea’s initial example of “like versus like like.”

Excerpt 6, March 9th, 2021

Instructor: Oh like like. Andrea dice en inglés se dice like like para indicar interés romántico versus...oh yeah do you like me or do you like like me. Es como un tipo de intensificar el significado de la raíz. Es un marcador de grado que hemos

visto para las otras clases léxicas, un tipo de inflexión.

Oh like like. Andrea says in English you say like like to indicate romantic interest versus...oh yeah do you like me or do you like like me. It's like a way to intensify the meaning of the root.

In the following excerpt from the same day, I observed another example of Andrea redirecting the lesson to the teacher's brief mention of infixes. The teacher provides a short explanation of infixes, and states that they will not be covering it because Spanish does not use infixes.

Excerpt 7, March 9, 2021

Instructor: Y no vamos a mencionar infijos—that's— other languages do this. Infijos es cuando—tienes la raíz e insertas el morfema en la raíz y el español no lo hace.

And we are not going to mention infixes—that's—other languages do this. Infixes are when you have the root and you insert the morpheme into the root and Spanish doesn't do that.

Andrea then writes a message in the chat and poses a question to the instructor about infixes, and then provides an example of an infix in English. The instructor acknowledges the chat window and says that there are some interesting comments but that the comments could get them off track a little bit. Then, he reads Andrea's comment about infixes and provides another example of an infix in English and goes into further depth on how infixes are constructed. This is another example of how Andrea's turn initiating an example is positively received by the teacher. This positive response of the part of the teacher demonstrates the "negotiation" part of the role of co-teacher that Andrea is assuming in this course. Perhaps, had the teacher been less receptive in these instances, Andrea would not have taken up this role.

Excerpt 8, Chat Transcript, March 9, 2021

Andrea to Everyone (2:38 pm): no tenemos infijos en español como “los de ingles” como “fan-frickin-tastic”?

we don't have [sic] infixes in Spanish like “those in English” like “fan-frickin-tastic”?

Excerpt 9, March 9, 2021

Instructor: Ok um...[laughter]. Estoy mirando la ventana de comentarios. Um yeah hay algunos comentarios interesantes, pero we'll get off track a little bit. [Reads chat] Andrea dice “no tenemos infijos en español como los de inglés “fan fricking tastic”. Or abso fricking lutely. Um that's an example of an infix. Pero no sé, no creo que el español los use.

Ok umm....[laughter]. I'm looking at the comment window. Um yeah there are some interesting comments but we'll get off track a little bit. [Reads chat] Andrea says “we don't have [sic] infixes in Spanish like those in English “fan fricking tastic”. Or abso fricking lutely”. That's an example of an infix. But I don't know, I don't think Spanish uses them.

As can be seen from Andrea's participation, she can be considered an old timer or an expert in this community of practice due to her prior conceptual knowledge of linguistics. Andrea's account of her experiences in previous linguistic CoPs suggests that the ways in which she approaches class discussions in this CoP with are determined by several factors such as questions of identity, cultural sensitivity, and feeling that there was a lack of opportunities for participation in Zoom classes. Thus, the chat is a vehicle for participation for Andrea, who uses it to showcase her linguistic knowledge and demonstrate her engagement within the Introduction to Spanish Linguistics community of practice.

Eliza

Eliza's interview responses indicated that her role in the online classroom is very much tied to her future professional identity. As an education major and future teacher, Eliza described wanting to "help out the professor sometimes" and would try to move the class along by raising her hand and contributing something to the lesson discussion, even if she did not feel one hundred percent sure of herself. Moreover, she was receptive to the instructor's feedback and wanted to know if her contributions were accurate. We see evidence of this in one of Eliza's weekly written responses from March 30, 2021.

I was mostly concerned about the silence in class today. I wanted to create more conversation in class, but when I was giving out my ideas I was genuinely curious to know if I was on the right track (Eliza, 21-03-30).

Despite the initiative she often took to help the instructor, Eliza acknowledged that participating in this class involved taking a risk. She attributed this to not only to being unsure of the difficult course content, but also to not knowing many of her classmates. She said that she had never seen many of them since they would not turn their cameras on. Eliza felt that the sense of community in this online Spanish class was not the same as her in-person Spanish classes of previous semesters. She described not having the same "classmate connection" that she was accustomed to in-person.

Eliza had typically found it very easy to form friendships with her classmates because of their shared experiences learning Spanish together. However, since the switch to online learning, Eliza mentioned only having a brief window of time during virtual class sessions to get to know her classmates. These opportunities mostly took place during breakout room sessions. Eliza described that her fellow classmates would often disengage in the breakout room setting and would not partake in the activity at hand. To

Eliza, feeling disconnected from her classmates made class participation challenging as she did not feel that her classmates knew each other well enough to overcome the fear of making a mistake.

Examples 18, Eliza's perspective on class participation

I think that's the hardest thing. And then like finding the courage to speak in front of them makes it harder since you don't get to know them (Eliza, 21-04-19).

Example 19, Eliza on the classroom CoP

Big group discussions are a lot more scary to have to speak. The lack of community, not being able to get to know my other classmates. The lack of community makes it scarier to have to speak in front of others (Eliza, 21-04-19).

Here we see that Eliza's concerns about the lack of connection in the online intro to linguistics course and her uncertainty about her role in this community of practice. Her main worry is how her participation will be perceived and evaluated by other members of the community. However, her comments from her reflection about wanting to create more conversation in class demonstrate that Eliza is invested in achieving the goals of this CoP of (1) building proficiency in Spanish and (2) developing knowledge about concepts related to Spanish linguistics. She believed that if she takes the leap to participate, other classmates will participate, and the discussion will gather momentum.

Leo

Leo's role in the online classroom could be considered that of an old-timer with respect to the course goals of this CoP. He grew up speaking Spanish at home and had spent a significant part of his adolescence attending school in Mexico, where the primary language of instruction was Spanish. Thus, Leo's expertise in Spanish distinguished him from his peers. He noted in his interviews that he had also taken many Advanced

Placement and International Baccalaureate Spanish courses when he attended high school in the United States. Having such a rigorous academic background with Spanish, Leo had placed out of all the beginning and intermediate courses and was able to take primarily upper-level courses when he was in university. He described being able to express himself with ease in Spanish and only felt disincorporated to speak when he had doubts about content-related material, which was a rare occurrence. As Leo stated in his interviews, Spanish was very central to his identity as it “pretty much defined” his academic life and pursuits.

The switch to online learning turned out to be very beneficial to Leo’s academic life and he expressed that he preferred online learning to face-to-face learning. One of the primary reasons was due to his struggle with social anxiety, which he said seemed to be worse in an in-person setting. For Leo, the key difference between in-person learning and online learning was that the in-person environment was full of unknown variables that distracted him from the lesson at hand, including the possible perceptions of the people sitting around him. Leo explained that in an online course, it was much easier to ignore the people on the screen and focus on the lesson or class activities. Since the start of online learning in the Spring of 2020, Leo said that his social anxiety was much less. Of all the focal participants in this study, Leo seemed to flourish the most in the online setting as he had the highest verbal class participation of all the focal participants (see Table 2 and Table 3).

Example 20, Leo’s social anxiety in in-person vs. online courses

A lot of the anxieties that you normally have being in a classroom setting or on a university campus just kind of disappear when you're in front of your computer at home. And social anxiety is awful. So, you know, when that disappears, that's great. It really helps with absorbing information, paying attention...there's also

just general anxieties, like your personal appearance or...are people looking at you? Just things that you think of in the back of your mind (Leo, 21-03-19).

In terms of the course goal of language development, Leo felt that he and other students benefited the most when there are a lot of native speakers enrolled in the course who participate frequently, as they provide more authentic exposure to the language. Given his background as a second-generation heritage speaker, it was unclear if Leo considered himself as one of the native speakers in this course as he referred to himself as a “pseudo-native speaker” in one of his interviews. However, he noted that there were varying proficiencies in Spanish among his classmates in the upper-division Spanish courses at the university, as many of the students were L2 Spanish speakers. He also said that to satisfy the requirements for the major, he had to enroll in courses that covered material he learned growing up in Mexico. From a CoP lens, I inferred that it was in these instances that he felt the instructional goals of these lower division courses perhaps misaligned with his goals of having an advanced discourse about Spanish linguistics or literature. However, he noted he still learned valuable information in some of the lower division courses that he was required to take, especially regarding advanced grammatical structures that he “never really paid attention to”.

When I asked Leo if he viewed the whole-class discussions as helpful in terms of his self-expression in Spanish, Leo noted that regular exposure to students who are less proficient in Spanish and who frequently make grammatical errors had, “a little bit of a detrimental effect” on his Spanish. As a result, Leo found himself using more “Spanglish” words than he desired and remembered a recent instance where he used the word “usualmente”. When first he used it, he noted that it “felt like a word” because he had heard it used so frequently in class. However, right after he said it, he felt that it did

not sound “right”. Although “usualmente” is indeed a word in standard Spanish, Leo’s comment reflects his concerns over acquiring a non-standard Spanish through his interactions with learners of varying L2 speaking abilities. Despite noticing these idiosyncrasies in his classmates’ utterances, ultimately, he felt that he and his classmates help one another “more than not” to improve their Spanish. He noted that: “there are the ‘not’ cases” where his vocabulary has gotten mixed up due to exposure to wider ranges of proficiencies. However, he said that for the most part, “[my classmates] do help because it’s exposure regardless. Exposure is always good.” This statement suggests that Leo believes both he and his classmates are learning from one another’s strengths and linguistic abilities as well as their weaknesses and mistakes. However, I observed that for Leo, whole-class interaction was most advantageous in helping him achieve the instructional goal of learning about Spanish linguistics rather than improving his Spanish proficiency.

Although the Introduction to Linguistics class was not required for the Spanish major, Leo appreciated that the course was very rigorous and that it allowed them to explore advanced linguistic topics in greater depth. Leo explained that his classmate’s contributions to the discussions orally or in the chat were invaluable to learning the material for the course. Throughout each lesson, his classmates would put examples in the chat to help clarify some of these concepts for one another. Leo found these examples to be just as helpful as when the professor would explain them during his lectures.

Example 21, Leo on learning from his classmates through whole-class discussions

So, the contributions from my classmates were just as important as everything [the instructor] taught, because I tend to learn by example kind of see examples.

And my classmates were finding plenty of examples. Be it speaking or in the chat. Either way, though. It's very helpful (Leo, 21-04-22).

Research Question 2: Participant Goals

The Instructor

One of the biggest differences in online versus in-person learning according to the instructor was the reduced participation and verbal engagement with the lessons. When assessing the instructional affordances of Zoom, the instructor found some of them to be problematic. For instance, he highlighted the breakout rooms as not very effective in getting the learners to practice the language with their peers. After administering an informal, midterm class evaluation to the students, the instructor learned that many students believed that the breakout rooms were unproductive and that there were always a few people in the class who did not contribute to the discussions in the breakout rooms. However, having more whole class discussions did not resolve his concerns about increasing verbal participation among learners, as he noted that he seemed to dominate the discourse during class time. Overall, the instructor felt that he was falling short of the expectations he set for himself for the semester as the students were not participating as often as he would have liked. He noted that his classes had become more teacher-centered since the switch to online learning. Although the instructor acknowledged that he did most of the talking, he expected the students to take a more active role during class.

Example 22, the Instructor's view on class participation

I expect them to participate. What I'm trying to do is have a balance of time when I'm presenting something new to them...followed by whole-class activities where

they're kind of doing some problem-solving...It seems that the balance is going a little bit more on me a lot of the time (The instructor, 21-04-08).

Despite the varying obstacles to communication due to different aspects of the technology that were out of his control, the instructor was still worried about his “good teacher” identity in the online setting. Part of a “good teacher” identity for this instructor was providing the learners with plentiful opportunities to contribute to whole class discussions. Yet, he was concerned that the limitations of the technology were detracting from their experience. Regarding some of the other affordances of the platform, the instructor spoke about the ‘Share-Screen’ feature and how it hid most of the meeting participants from when he was presenting. He reported that not being able to see the students’ faces while using the share screen function made it difficult to know if the class was engaging with the lesson objectives. It was challenging to find alternative ways to convey information in a cohesive manner without using this function:

Example 23, the instructor’s perspective on the mediational tools of the online classroom

It's hard to see them while I'm looking at the outline that I'm trying to share on my screen. And then I see [that] their faces are really small and I'm trying to get everybody [to focus] on that thing. So that's hard in terms of the participation and it's harder to get the information out. I can't give them a sheet that they look at and then look up. It's all gotta be in that laptop space (The instructor, 21-04-08).

In addition to many students opting to have their cameras off, some students also chose to engage with the lectures primarily through the chat feature on Zoom. This discrepancy in the instructor’s expectations for engagement with the students and the reality of how participation in online classes occurred is indicative of the idea of contradiction delineated in Engeström’s model of activity systems (Engeström, 2001). Engeström (1987; 2001) affirms that when a new element is introduced to an activity

system, it can cause tension with the established ways of carrying out an activity. However, this tension often leads to novel ways of accomplishing the object of the activity. He explained in his interview that while he did accept chat messages as a form of class participation, he had some mixed feelings about the chat. However, he also noted that he had compassion for students who were perhaps less comfortable speaking up orally during the Zoom meeting and understood why they would choose a less anxiety-provoking way to show their engagement. Ultimately, he became accustomed to their consistent use of the chat, as well as the novel symbolic affordances that came with it as it was in alignment with his goal of encouraging student participation. By the time data collection began, the chat was welcomed as a legitimate form of participation.

Below is an excerpt from the opening class discussion on March 9, 2021. By the time data collection was beginning, we can see that the instructor had already begun to acknowledge chat contributions as a legitimate form of class participation. In this instance, the teacher is discussing an article he is writing for an academic journal. In Excerpt 10, the first comment in the chat is from Natalia, who wrote that it can take a long time to analyze recorded data. In response to Natalia's comment, Andrea adds another student-initiated comment agreeing how this process can be tedious and how she is beginning to code data in one of her lab classes.

Excerpt 10, Chat Transcript, March 9, 2021

Natalia to Everyone (2:17 pm): requiere mucho tiempo para analizar las grabaciones no?

It requires a lot of time to analyze the recordings no?

Andrea to Everyone (2:17 pm): ^^ he oído que el proceso de coding puede ser muy tedioso ☹️ estoy en un lab ahora y pienso que vamos a empezar coding nuestros materiales pronto

^^ I have heard that the coding process can be very tedious ☹️ I am in a lab now and I think we are going to start our materials soon.)

Excerpt 11, March 9, 2021

Instructor: Bueno, ah, bueno tengo algunas cosas en el chat. “Requiere mucho tiempo para analizar las grabaciones”. ¡Sí!, sí, sí! ¡Es como toda una vida hacer esta cosa! Transcripción y luego se llama codificación que tienes que decidir lo que está pasando.

Anyway, oh, well I have some things in the chat. “It requires a lot of time to analyze the recordings. Yes!, yes!, yes! It takes forever to do this! Transcriptions and then what is known as coding where you have to decide what is happening.

In Excerpt 11, we see a verbal acknowledgment by the instructor regarding the chat contributions. He responds verbally to the message in the chat, which indicates his acceptance of chat participation as legitimate. In Excerpt 12, he acknowledges Andrea’s contribution to the chat. As can be seen, Andrea uses meaningful symbols in her response such as the “caret” (^) and frowning emoji that are a part of the symbolic affordances of text messaging. As a mediational tool, the chat feature brought with it a new system of symbolic tools for mediation, which the instructor had to become accustomed to.

Excerpt 12, March 9, 2021

Instructor: Ya... y Andrea dice “he oído que el proceso de coding puede ser tedioso.” ¡Sí! Pero es muy divertido ver lo que dicen los alumnos.

Yeah...and Andrea says “I have heard the process of coding can be tedious.” Yes! But it’s a lot of fun to see what the students say.

We also see the chat as a positive affordance in Zoom for overcoming some of the technological burdens of web conferencing platforms. During class on April 20, 2021,

discussions, it was clear that whole-class interactions were impacted by the low participation of the students, as well as the lack of visibility of the students when the instructor used the share-screen function. The instructor tried to remedy this by incorporating breakout rooms more frequently during class sessions, but the feedback he received from students indicated that the breakout rooms were not very productive in achieving increased student participation. Considering the challenges with almost all of the other communicative modalities of Zoom, the instructor came to accept the chat window as a way for students to accomplish his goal of fostering student participation during whole-class interactions.

Aiden

Throughout the semester, Aiden reported challenges with Zoom that were similar to Andrea's. Although Aiden stated that he felt secure speaking Spanish in front of a group, his participation throughout data collection was quite low (See Tables 2 and 3). In our interviews, his answers offered potential explanations for why this was the case. For Aiden, taking online courses was all-consuming in terms of time and energy. Aiden expressed that this in part had to do with the technology of the platform itself and how it could disincentivize learners from verbally participating. It seemed to him that in online classrooms there was a barrier that did not exist in an in-person setting. Instead of being able to talk freely, raise your hand, and make eye contact with the professor as in an in-person class, having to unmute your microphone on Zoom "added another thing to do".

Aiden also noticed that it could be difficult at times for the instructor to elicit participation from the students in whole class discussions. The long periods of silence that emerged at times could be intimidating. To Aiden, it seemed that everyone would

rather let these awkward pauses “build” and have someone else take the risk to start the discussion than do it themselves. However, the silence often would continue to snowball. He noted that would normally take a minute or more before anyone responded to the instructor. The longer silence lasted, the more awkward it became to break it and jump into the discussion.

Aiden’s experience with group work in breakout rooms in the Introduction to Linguistics was that they tended to be more dynamic than whole class lesson discussions at times. He felt that the small group work in the course was invaluable to forming and sustaining connections with his classmates and could approximate in-person interaction. Aiden’s interview responses suggested that having the ability to practice the language with his peers was one of his primary objects for taking this course. As a member of this CoP, building friendships and connecting with his classmates were key to achieving this goal of increased L2 development (see Figure 6). According to Aiden, the breakout rooms were a useful mediational tool for group work and collaboration as he and his classmates engaged more with one another in Spanish.

Example 24, Aiden on breakout rooms

I really liked the breakout rooms the most. I think because it allows for a more intimate and smaller discussion that you can have with smaller groups of people, and it lets more people speak...in a larger setting, not everyone is willing to speak in front of so many people and here it encourages participation a lot more (Aiden, 21-04-19).

It is interesting to note the contrast between individual and classroom activity systems regarding breakout rooms. As can be seen from the quote above, Aiden greatly appreciated breakout rooms as a positive mediational tool for engagement. Conversely, the instructor tended to use the breakout rooms out of a sense of obligation to encourage

students' verbal interaction. His limited experience led him to be skeptical of their utility. Moreover, he received some negative feedback regarding the breakout rooms from students. As mentioned, the instructor's view of breakout rooms was different from the instructor's response to the chat window, which was more positive and receptive.

Many of Aiden's friends from the department were taking the Introduction to Spanish Linguistics course this semester. To make up for the lack of in-person communication, the students created the GroupMe chat, which functioned as a sub-CoP, where learners would discuss matters pertaining to the course. Aiden commented that text-based technology was a mediational tool that was important for how this course maintained its sense of community, both in class and outside of class. In class, this was accomplished through the chat feature in Zoom. Initially, in his interviews, Aiden talked about the chat as means of communicating ideas without having to navigate the difficulties of speaking in a large group discussion held on Zoom. He discussed how over time, the public Zoom chat became a highly interactive place where many people could add to the discussion of the moment or go off on tangents and have their own conversations. Considering the constraints of speaking on Zoom, Aiden noted that the chat was a tool that helped to "move the class along" during whole-class discussions. It was through the Zoom chat feature that he and his classmates could communicate with one another as the lecture was going on: "the larger setting was also really nice... more people could bounce off ideas from each other or answer questions or type things in the chat." This contributed to a stronger sense of social cohesion, which was something that Aiden valued in the online classroom. During some class sessions, he noted that the chat would "explode" with comments from students. His comments indicated that the chat

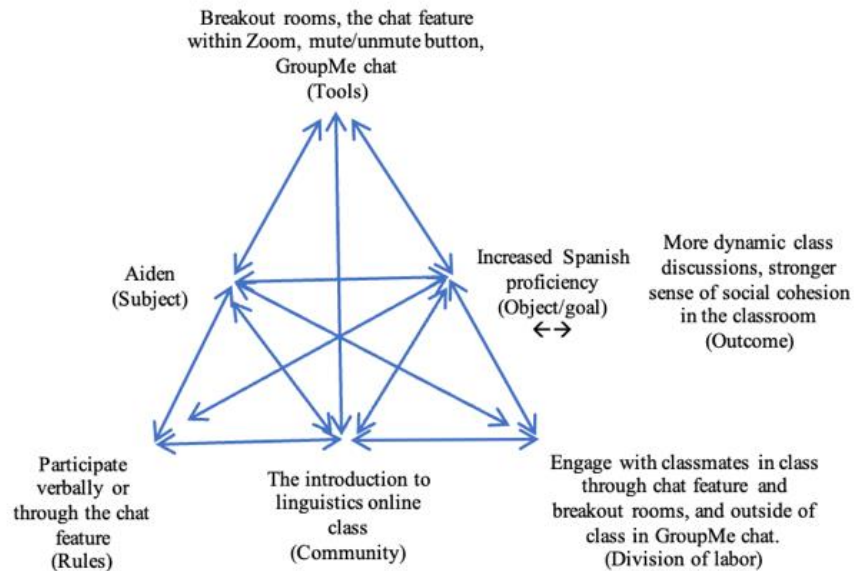
was a useful mediational tool that allowed learners to achieve their participation goals without having to verbalize what they wanted to say. Figure 6 demonstrates that for Aiden, the chat window was a mediational tool that helped to bring about the outcome of a greater sense of community in the CoP.

Example 25, Aiden’s class participation

And there [are] some days I think that people just don't feel like participating at all... And the chat is so easy to say what you want to say, but without necessarily speaking. So there [are] some days where it really does just explode. It's really funny (Aiden, 21-04-19).

Figure 6

Aiden’s Activity System



In his interviews, Aiden emphasized that he appreciated many of the communicative modalities within Zoom as they facilitated his class participation in particular the breakout rooms and chat window. Outside of class, he and his classmates interacted through GroupMe, a text-based chat application for mobile devices. These

affordances are indicated in the 'Tools' node of his activity triangle (See Figure 6). Aiden felt that regular communication with his classmates was important for their L2 development. For Aiden, the outcome of small-group and text-based communication was more dynamic whole-group discussions and a greater sense of community in the class.

Diana

Diana's goals for participation in this course were to improve her L2 abilities and develop her conceptual linguistic knowledge. Her attitude toward taking online classes was unambiguous. During our first interview, she expressed that she did not like taking synchronous online classes because it was more difficult to understand the teacher in Spanish as compared to in-person classes. She also felt that she often misunderstood the lectures due to problems with video and audio. In Diana's view, the available means for interaction and participation in the online classroom were not sufficient for meeting her participation goals. She felt there were more opportunities to participate in an in-person class and engage in more diverse activities.

Diana's answers suggested that she found the web conferencing technology to be a negative affordance for her participation. In terms of activity theory, she explained that the rules for participation in this Intro to Spanish Linguistics course, as compared to another Spanish course taught via Zoom, were more lenient. The professor of her other Spanish course expected the students to participate frequently during class sessions, or they would receive a significantly lower participation grade. In the Intro to Spanish Linguistics course, Diana seemed to contribute more frequently to the informal, opening lesson discussions where the students could speak about their lives. She said she made an effort to say something in this part of the class in order to show the instructor that she was

somewhat invested in the goals of the course, and to make up for her reduced participation during the lesson discussion: “if asks us how our weekend was or what we plan on doing this weekend, I would come in there, to kind of be like—hey, I’m sorry, I want to participate, but I don’t feel comfortable in the other context.” She explained that her “comfort level with the content being taught was indicative of her comfort level with speaking”. She noted that during the lesson discussion, her participation was less frequent because she was uncomfortable with the linguistic jargon. In terms of Diana’s role in the division of labor in the community, she felt that her participation was “non-existent”. Her reservations about participating during this part of the class came from her “insecurity of potentially misspeaking in Spanish”, especially when discussing the linguistic concepts.

Diana remarked that she noticed that other students seemed to participate less online, especially if there were no Zoom protocols enforced, such as leaving your video camera on. Although Diana noted that she preferred to leave her camera off during class, she felt that many students took advantage of being allowed to have their cameras off, and would say the minimum needed to achieve an adequate participation grade. In the Intro to Spanish Linguistics course, there was not a specific quota for contributions that the students needed to meet per day. Participation was evaluated on both quality and quantity over a 2-week period. However, Diana’s impression was that once some students contributed to the discussion, they seemed to disengage from the lesson altogether. In her interviews, it seemed that Diana did not view this class in terms of a traditional CoP where members co-create knowledge to further their understanding of the course content.

Example 26, Diana on class participation

I zone out. It seems like an assembly line of people just getting their minute to say something and then just zoning out like everyone else. It's kind of hard to stay on that track especially if the topic isn't one that interests you (Diana, 21-03-19).

Based on her interview responses, I inferred that Diana's ultimate object was to receive a satisfactory participation grade. Diana's responses suggested that the issue of decreased online participation in this course might be resolved by implementing a participation quota. She also attributed the reduced participation to features in the web-conferencing technology that disincentivized learners from speaking. Among them, she mentioned the mute/unmute button, as well as having to closely monitor the discussion and turn-taking if you wanted to say something out loud. For Diana, taking Zoom classes involved familiarizing herself with an entirely new "etiquette" or set of "rules" within the activity triangle.

Example 27, Diana's perspective on the mediational tools of Zoom

I feel like— you have to push a button to unmute yourself, and there's a whole kind of etiquette to raising your hand and waiting and knowing when to unmute and re-mute and all that. So I feel like it's another kind of etiquette to learn in terms of participation (Diana, 21-03-19).

Figure 7

Diana's Activity System

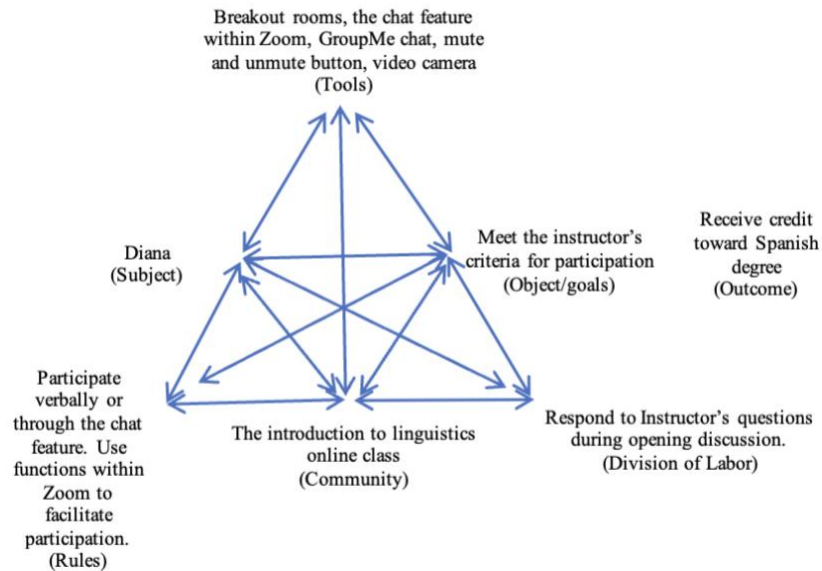


Figure 7 summarizes Diana's narrative of her activity system regarding her goals for class participation. She noted that she primarily took part in the opening class discussions to show the instructor that she was invested in the course goal of developing L2 proficiency during the opening class discussions. As can be seen in the Object/Goals node of the triangle, she wanted to meet the instructor's criteria for participation and engagement in whole-class discussions to receive an acceptable participation grade. The outcome of her object for participation was to receive credit toward her Spanish degree for having taken this course.

Andrea

Andrea's comments in our interviews stood out to me because she was the first participant interviewed to articulate the concept of burnout due to back-to-back web conferencing meetings. Andrea rarely volunteered to speak in class (See Tables 2 and 3). Instead, as noted in the previous section, Andrea became known as the most prominent user of the chat throughout the semester. She explained that part of the reason for her lack of verbal participation was because it was easier to convey her ideas in a timely manner rather than having to monitor the verbal turn-taking dynamics of the platform. She explained that if she was concerned about interrupting someone, but wanted to contribute to the discussion, she would write her comments in the chat. The chat window essentially functioned as a live stream where users would comment on the class lesson as the instructor was lecturing by providing answers to his questions or their comments on the topic of the day. Additionally, if a student made a verbal contribution to the discussion, comments from classmates would appear in the chat responding to what was said out loud. Andrea described the chat as a place to have side conversations or extend the discussion about the lesson in real time, which is not possible in any kind of verbal interaction online or in person.

Example 28, Andrea's comments on the chat window in Zoom

I feel like when you're in physical class, at least it's more focused on when you have the answer, when you want to make one of those contributions. Whereas when you're online and you're doing all the stuff in the chat, it's much easier to have little conversations. Like, "oh, ha I did that too". Oh, well this is a great

resource for something. It's a little easier to have the side conversations (Andrea, 21-03-18)

An example of this occurred during the opening discussion on April 15, 2021.

Here we see an instance of vocabulary negotiation that was mediated by the chat. In Excerpt 15, the instructor calls on Aiden to tell us his plans for the weekend. He says that he is going to watch a virtual production of a musical. However, he is unsure of how to say the word ‘musical’ in Spanish. This is significant because it tells us that the chat is very integrated into the mediation and negotiation of vocabulary. Moreover, we see that Andrea is participating by adding a comment to the chat window in an interaction that verbally only involves Aiden.

Excerpt 15, Verbal Transcript, April 15, 2021

Instructor: A ver, Aiden, ¿qué nos cuentas?

Let's see, Aiden, what can you tell us?

Aiden: Hola. Hoy voy a asistir a una... la palabra se me fue, una representación, como un performance, virtual...

Hi. Today I am going to attend a...the word escapes me, a representation, like a virtual performance...

Excerpt 15 continued, Chat Transcript, April 15, 2021

Andrea to Everyone (2:12 pm): actualizacion?
actualization?

Daniela to everyone (2:13 pm): Uso “performance” tambien, pero a veces “presentación” o digo si es una obra o un musical directamente...

I use performance also, but sometimes “presentación or I’ll say if it’s a play or a musical directly...

Excerpt 15, Verbal Transcript, April 15, 2021

Instructor: Ok. Y Daniela nos ayuda. Gracias Daniela. Nuestro diccionario viva, uso performance también, pero a veces presentación, o si es una obra, una musical. Ok. Gracias, Daniela

Ok. And Daniela is helping us. Thank you, Daniela. Our living dictionary, "I use performance also, but sometimes presentación or if it's a obra, a musical". Ok. Thank you, Daniela.

Andrea provides a possible translation for musical and Daniela, a graduate student and native Spanish speaker, puts a message in the chat to clarify the different words for a performance in Spanish: "I use *performance*, but sometimes '*presentación*', or '*obra*' or *musical*" depending on the context. The instructor responds affirmatively to the comments in the chat and reads Daniela's clarification of terminology from the chat to the class.

In her interviews, Andrea noted that part of the difficulty of using Zoom is the inability to read social cues. In the following excerpt, she compared group virtual interactions with group interactions at an in-person gathering. At an in-person gathering, Andrea explained that multiple conversations and social dynamics can occur simultaneously. On Zoom, it seems that the opposite occurs, and that all verbal interactions are one-to-one and on display, with all eyes in the meeting watching. In Andrea's view, the lack of social cues in the online classroom made speaking in class uncomfortable for some participants.

Example 29, Andrea on the difficulties of verbal communication in the online space

Zoom does not count as group interaction because you only listen to one or two people at a time. So navigating group dynamics [in-person] is definitely way different...and you can read social cues a little bit better. Online, you can't do any

of that... That just means that you're giving a one-to-one conversation with someone else with 20 people watching you. And that makes it worse (Andrea, 21-04-22).

In both interviews, Andrea expressed feeling burnout. At the time, Andrea was taking all 6 of her courses synchronously online and she related the “burnout” or Zoom fatigue to the stress of always having to be available:

Example 30, Andrea’s burnout

I have had a lot of Zooms. Yesterday I had Zooms nonstop from like [10:00 am-1:00 pm]. I had labs from [1:00 pm to 2:00 pm] and then had non-stop Zooms from [3:00 pm to 6:00 pm]. It is so much Zoom— like Zoom heavy. I'm feeling so burnt out. I don't want to put my camera on (Andrea, 21-03-18).

During her interviews, Andrea noted that the Spanish linguistics course was her last course of the day on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and she expressed that she did not always have the energy to verbally participate. However, Andrea enjoyed communicating with her classmates during class via the chat feature within Zoom: “I do like interacting with [my classmates] though. Like when I make jokes in the chat, I do think it's funny.” Overall, she noted that having to take classes from home seemed to blur the line between school life and home life.

Andrea also mentioned the GroupMe chat, where the students communicated with one another outside of class about the topics they were learning. As mentioned, this text chat served as a sub-CoP of the classroom community of practice. However, once she was finished with her classes for the day, Andrea did not always want to communicate with her classmates. She preferred to have defined boundaries when she signed off of Zoom, and did not want to feel obligated to extend the school day: “The kind of

expectation of, everything has to be available...it ends up feeling like a lot because you're doing that emotional and mental labor. I have to always be available.”

Andrea’s observations confirm many of the phenomena mentioned in Bailenson’s (2021) research about Zoom fatigue mentioned in Chapter 2. Andrea was one of the participants who submitted a weekly reflection report on several occasions. Andrea’s responses in the weekly reflection reports demonstrate the feeling of burnout she described during both interviews. Andrea noted on April 6, 2021: “I think it went okay, but I think we're all burning out even faster than before... I think everyone's trying their best” and “Perhaps burnout/lack of focus prevented me from doing more.” Again, on April 15, 2021, she mentions that the most recent class “was ok” and that she was “pretty zoned out” during the class. In an excerpt from her interview on March 18, 2021, she described this feeling of burnout in greater detail and how it can sometimes be a challenge to remain engaged during class.

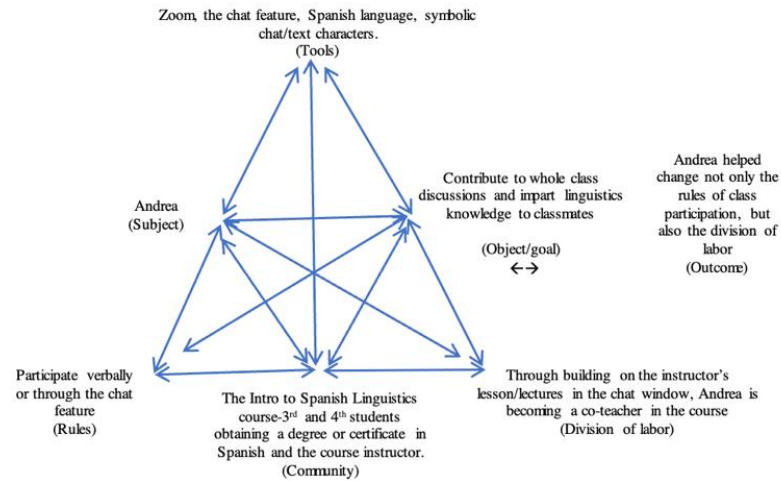
Example 31, Andrea’s burnout

I noticed like sometimes, like when I'm feeling very beaten down.... I'll participate in the beginning [of class] and I'll just kind of trail off and just kind of

be like, oh my gosh, I am completely tired. I just don't have it in me to just keep going (Andrea, 21-03-18).

Figure 8

Andrea's Activity System



In the previous section, we saw that some of Andrea's hesitation to participate was in part centered around questions of identity. At the same time, another aspect of Andrea's lack of verbal participation was related to elements of the technology in the online classroom. Figure 8 demonstrates Andrea's action in the Intro to Spanish Linguistics online community of practice. Andrea is the subject aiming to accomplish personal goals within this CoP, which was to contribute her prior knowledge of linguistics. Within this context of the online environment, Andrea seems to modify the instructor's rules of interaction by contributing to class discussions primarily through the chat feature. Andrea is also initiating a change in the division of labor in the course, as she has taken up the role of co-teacher, adding on to the professors' insights via the chat feature. This was positively received by other members of the community. Andrea's

classmates and the instructor comprise the community that is partaking in and witnessing Andrea's promotion of the chat feature. Essentially, Andrea's object or goal is gradually transformed into an outcome of the chat feature democratizing the classroom. This was because the allows people to contribute their thoughts, ideas, and opinions simultaneously, something that is not possible in an online or in-person setting.

Eliza

Eliza enacted her goals for participation by using the different modalities of the online classroom, as well as other online mediational tools. Since going fully online in the Spring of 2020, Eliza had grown accustomed to the structure of online learning and liked that she is able to access resources such as online dictionaries and translators to plan out what she wants to say, which helped her to feel more prepared. Eliza stated that her participation was less during whole-class discussions in this course because of lack of familiarity with the content. Having had no prior background knowledge of linguistics, the vocabulary in this class was almost entirely new to her, and some of the grammatical topics were challenging to master. Eliza specifically mentioned the subjunctive mood, and how it continues to be challenging to understand: "With linguistics, I'm not really familiar with the vocabulary, and the subjunctive always throws me off. It depends on the topic that we are talking about."

Eliza explained that online learning is not as "demanding for learners to speak or think on the spot" and therefore "reduces stress". In her online classes, Eliza described "a lot of awkward silence" during whole-class discussions, and tried to participate as much as possible whenever there was a lull in participation. She partially attributed these silences to fear of students "treading on each other's toes" and interrupting one another.

Eliza mentioned that she felt like participating on Zoom caused a “fishbowl effect” because all conversations on the platform are one-to-one, with many other people watching. This is not the ideal scenario for many students, especially when one is self-conscious about their L2 abilities.

At the beginning of the semester, and especially at the start of online learning in Spring 2020, Eliza described herself as more “hopeful” or optimistic about her level of Spanish. She explained that online learning showed her “the reality” of her Spanish learning and increased her awareness of how she sounds when she presents in Spanish. It also made her more aware of how people “respond” to what she says, and where she “lacks” in terms of her Spanish speaking abilities and what she needs to improve on. In the in-person classroom, she noted she was not able to see herself or her classmates’ reactions to what she was saying. However, on Zoom, it is much easier to see how people responded through their facial expressions. She highlighted her experience presenting in the online Intro to Spanish Linguistics course, where in some instances it seemed that her classmates did not understand her, particularly during the question-and-answer portion of her presentation. She noted that in the future, it is very likely that she will have to use her Spanish in an online synchronous setting where she will not be able to rely on physical and social cues such as “reading the room”. The increased role of technology in our lives as a result of global events indicated to her that she would have to become more comfortable with the communicative, mediational tools of online spaces.

Eliza's written weekly reflection from April 8, 2021, shows that she is confident in her understanding of Spanish but has some reservations when speaking, which may explain why she may feel less at ease offering to speak in class discussions as a whole:

Examples 31 and 32, Eliza's comment on her participation

I feel like I can understand a good deal of Spanish, but speaking takes a lot more time and courage to do. I feel like I speak at a much slower rate than my reading and listening (Eliza, 21-04-08).

There were some moments when I was very hesitant and took a long time to raise my hand, so someone else was called on instead. I think I was very hesitant because I wanted to have a good idea of how I was going to say what I wanted to say in Spanish (Eliza, 21-04-08).

Eliza also noted that many classes do not require students to have their cameras on, and therefore some students “are able to get away with” participating in class less than they would be able to in person. Since March 2020, Eliza had taken over 10 Spanish courses online. Eliza noted that she has become “braver” since taking classes online and will participate when there is an awkward silence in the online classroom. When she was enrolled in the in-person LASS program, she felt that her classmates were more eager to participate and that they did so often. In fact, Eliza felt that she participated less in those courses because so many other students wanted to contribute to class discussions. It seemed that Eliza preferred to take the initiative in participation when opportunities are created by less frequent participation from her fellow classmates. Eliza's experiences in other online Spanish classes were similar to Diana's in that many of the professors had a rigid participation quota that students had to meet in order to receive a satisfactory grade. This requirement falls into the rules area of the activity triangle and seemed to detract from the quality of the participation.

Eliza felt that the environment of the Introduction to Linguistics course was much more amenable to participation as compared to the other course. Eliza noted that the instructor played an important role in making her participation feel worthwhile and

helping her to meet her goal of taking advantage of the opportunities to practice the language and gain a better understanding of the course content. The professor reminded the students that it is normal to make mistakes and that the most important thing was that they take advantage of all the opportunities to practice. Eliza felt more secure in the class knowing that the instructor was there to provide corrective feedback and point students in the right direction if they had difficulty expressing themselves. She appreciated that the instructor put the emphasis on being understood, rather than on speaking perfectly.

Example 33, Eliza on the course instructor

He is always reminding us, it doesn't matter where your level of Spanish is. The whole point is to try and practice. It does lower that whole intimidation to try and if you can't figure it out he will give you pointers, even if you don't think you're right, if you're understood that's more important (Eliza, 21-04-19).

These comments are supported by one of Eliza's weekly reflection responses written on March 30, 2021, where although she said she was nervous when participating, the instructor's encouragement made her feel secure about her contribution:

"I felt like I was stammering a lot [today], but Professor X's comments also made me feel more confident."

When asked about her feelings toward large group discussions online, Eliza felt that "to hear others perspective, it does give [me] another perspective on how you can say something. However, I think it can be hard because it means less people can participate. You can hear the language, but you are not using it yourself." Here, Eliza's explanation suggests that whole class discussion on Zoom is better for improving listening comprehension, but not as effective for improving accuracy in language production.

Eliza added that while whole class discussions may not be her ideal venue for making use of opportunities to practice her Spanish, she does like to make use of the

additional opportunities for speaking that collaborative work in breakout rooms may present. She explained that she and her classmates sometimes used English in the breakout rooms to negotiate meaning and worked together to figure out what they wanted to say.

Example 34, Eliza on breakout rooms

...In breakout rooms, when I can't figure out a word or I'm not sure how to say something, we'll brainstorm with each other in English. When we don't know how to say something we will slowly try to figure it out together (Eliza, 21-03-19).

Both Eliza and Aiden's preference for the breakout rooms as a mediational tool recall the idea of tension in an activity system. As mentioned in the previous section, the instructor was hesitant about the usefulness of breakout rooms. As tension in the Intro to Spanish Linguistics activity system emerged, the chat feature became a tool that the instructor and students could agree upon as an affordance. Eliza mentioned that many students take advantage of the chat box to express themselves simultaneously but that it was not an effective replacement for spoken interaction. Eliza did find it useful, however, when it was difficult to contribute to the discussion because it could be difficult to figure out when to speak. As seen in other cases featured in this study, Eliza agreed that the chat feature made it less intimidating for everyone to participate. When trying to figure out when to say something or what to say, Eliza found it easier to express herself in the chat.

Example 35, Eliza and the chat window

It's really hard to figure out when to speak. The chat box helps make it more comfortable for everyone to participate. I know when I'm also trying to figure out

what to say, sometimes it helps to be able to write it out. If the professor likes it they can ask us to elaborate... (Eliza, 21-04-19)

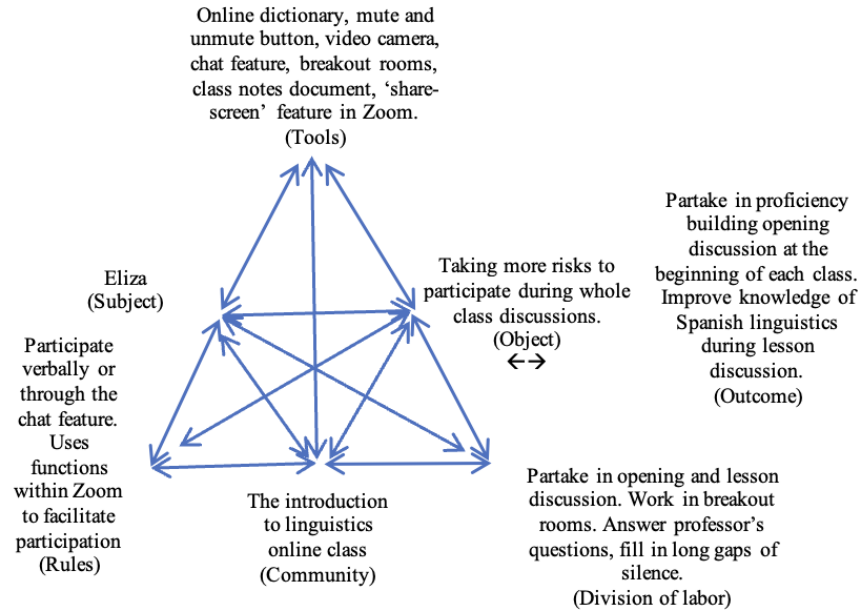
Eliza, like Leo, Aiden, Diana, and Andrea noted in their interviews, found the chat box in this course to be an instrumental mediational tool for her learning. Additionally, she highlighted the professor sharing his screen to present the 'Class Notes' document. This also served as a visual aid that she says helped her learn more Spanish than she thought she was going to. In an in-person class, if someone said a word she did not know, it could be hard to look up the meaning of the word in that moment. However, having the visual aid of the chat box, the 'Class Notes' document, and the online resources such as a dictionary or a translator available at the click of a button, made it much easier for Eliza to express what she wanted to say. Figure 9 demonstrates how Eliza used the mediational tools of Zoom to facilitate her participation and meet her goals for taking the course.

Example 36, Eliza on the mediational tools of Zoom

The most helpful things for this class was having the constant visual, for example the chat box. [Also the professor] always shares his screen. You can see what changes he would make and what he's highlighting. That visual helps a lot to see how things are changing and what he's pointing out (Eliza, 21-04-19).

Figure 9

Eliza's Activity System



As can be seen in Eliza's activity triangle diagram (Figure 9), the 'tools' area indicates the mediational tools that Eliza used to facilitate and enact her participation in the online classroom (e.g., online dictionaries, the breakout rooms, and chat feature). Using these tools, she was able to achieve her objects and goals for whole-class participation and take more risks. She felt that her uptake of the online mediational tools led to her partaking in both the proficiency-building, opening-class discussions, as well as the lesson discussions, where she was able to test her knowledge of the Spanish linguistics content.

Leo

Of all the focal participants, Leo had the most positive comments regarding taking synchronous online courses. He did express some concerns about knowing when he could take his turn to speak and acknowledged that this was something his classmates worried about as well. Leo wished more people would have taken advantage of the “raise-hand” function in Zoom as a mediational tool to remedy this issue. He said that although online learning can be “exhausting” due to having to sit in front of your computer for long periods of time, Leo felt that the benefits outweighed any inconveniences. During his second interview, Leo said his appreciation for the chat’s existence had increased since we last spoke. Although Leo was not a frequent contributor to the chat during my observations (See Tables 2 and 3), he found it to be extremely useful. Given the interface of Zoom and the difficulty for people to speak simultaneously, the chat allowed multiple respondents at the same time, which is not possible in verbal exchanges in-person or online.

Example 37, Leo’s perspective on the chat window

There’s a difficulty in...I guess of knowing exactly when to speak. Some people tend to speak over each other. It’s a problem that you wouldn’t see in a classroom setting because people just raise their hands. But, I think using the chat kind of circumvents that issue altogether (Leo, 21-04-19)

Leo described the chat being more than just a way to overcome some of the technological burdens of the online classroom. He explained that the chat became the mediational tool which facilitated the outcome of developing a sense of community in a nontraditional learning environment. For Leo, community building ultimately turned out to be an outcome in the activity system that he valued (See Figure 10). Leo mentioned several times throughout both interviews that he valued and enjoyed reading the

contributions of his classmates and the examples they provided in the chat. He mentioned Andrea specifically as one of the most frequent users of the chat. According to Leo, it was Andrea that was responsible for making the use of the chat feature commonplace. She regularly contributed insightful comments and jokes that helped to foster a sense of community in the course:

Example 38, Leo on Andrea's use of the chat

I think [Andrea]...she kind of elevated the mood of the class. I guess only because of her kind of cheesy, direct translations of English, slang and terminology into Spanish that, were fun to see every now and then...And I think everyone got a good laugh out of it (Leo, 21-04-19).

Leo also noted that over time, the chat became more integrated into the rules for communication in this course. He explained that this was likely due to the students' familiarity with the symbolic forms of communication used on social media platforms. Leo was unsure of what kind of an effect the chat window would have had on the sense of community in the class if the instructor had not accepted it as a mediational means to participate.

Example 39, Leo on the importance of the chat

In this class specifically, something kind of odd happened and it had to do with the class's reliance on the chat. I think everyone got much more comfortable with each other because of the increased use of chat function. Very similar to the social media world that we live in right now where people are constantly communicating via messaging. So I think that was an important connection there, but otherwise if chat hadn't been as supported in this class, I'm not really sure how it would have affected it (Leo, 21-04-19)

With regard to his own goals for class participation in this course, Leo wanted to be a reliable member of the classroom CoP by contributing to discussions on linguistic topics he was familiar with due to his personal and academic history. This was indicative of his old-timer status within this CoP. Leo had the highest participation count of all the

focal participants (see Tables 2 and 3), despite his battle with social anxiety. In an excerpt from Leo's written class reflection for April 6, 2021, he noted that he was eager to share his knowledge to help his classmates get a better understanding of how to identify different types of "se" in Spanish. Leo's decision to take this risk in this instance demonstrates that he wanted to contribute useful resources to this community of practice so that other members can benefit from it. Although he stated he was unsure how useful his contribution would be to them, he decided to take the risk anyway: "Since it was fresh in my mind, I thought it would be a good time to share. I had my doubts about how helpful the method would be to others. It is a bit situational." As can be seen in the excerpt below, the instructor's response of "Ok, ok, ok" provides acknowledgment that Leo's suggestion may have been on the right track.

Excerpt 16, April 6th, 2021

Instructor: ¿Cuál es, cuál es la categoría que aprendiste más... Que mejor por medio de estos ejemplos?

What is the category that you learned the most....what best through these examples?

Leo: En reflexivo, creo que había... Había usado algo como se me quemó el ordenador o algo así.

In reflexive, I think I had...had used something like my computer crashed or something like that.

Instructor: Ok, ok, ok.

Ok, ok, ok.

Leo: Como te digo, a veces se te fallan.

As I say, sometimes they don't work.

Figure 10

Leo's Activity System

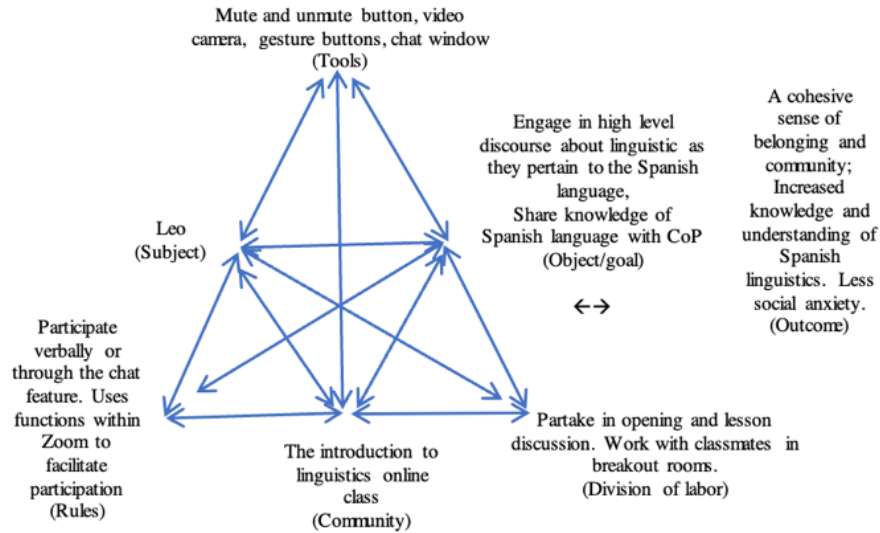


Figure 10 of Leo's activity system demonstrates his goals for participation. The tools area of the triangle provides an overview of the affordances he used to enact his participation. He used these tools to achieve his object of partaking in academic discourse about Spanish Linguistics. He noted that he also participated to share his knowledge with the Intro to Spanish Linguistics CoP. The outcome of Leo enacting his participation led to feeling a sense of community in the course, increased knowledge of the course content, as well as less social anxiety.

Research Question 3: Learner Investment and Imagined Communities

Aiden

As outlined earlier in the chapter, Aiden's coursework with the Spanish department at the university helped him to realize the importance of bilingualism to his identity and how it aligned with his future goals of becoming a doctor. In Norton &

Toohey's (2011) description of imagined communities, an imagined community implies an imagined identity. Moreover, this identity as a speaker of an additional language offers an expanded scope of possibilities for the future (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Aiden envisioned himself as a physician and as a member of a community of medical professionals who serve a diverse population of patients whose first language is Spanish. Aiden saw his bilingualism as a symbolic tool that would help his patients have a more dignified experience when dealing with the health system.

Example 40, Aiden's investment

I really like being able to communicate with people in Spanish, especially if it's something that they're more comfortable in and wanting to go into the medical world, if there's a way that I can make people feel more comfortable I feel like [speaking Spanish is] a relatively accessible and easy way to make people feel more comfortable (Aiden, 21-03-23).

Example 41, Aiden's imagined community

I want to do medicine, so I would really like to be able to speak Spanish with my patients. This course—just because it's given historical context, cultural context, and just in general, a deeper understanding of how this language works— I think [this] is knowledge that I'll be able to take really far with me (Aiden, 21-04-19).

For Aiden, the instructor's insights about Spanish dialectology were some of the most useful takeaways from the course. Learning about the stigmatization of different Spanish dialects by prescriptive approaches to language had a profound effect on Aiden. As a future doctor, Aiden felt that having a deeper cultural and historical knowledge of the language will invariably impact the way he interacts with his patients.

Diana

Diana viewed bilingualism in terms of the cultural capital that it could afford her in both a professional sense as well as being more integrated in a community that had a high population of Spanish speakers. Her interview responses indicated that the goals of this course were ultimately not in alignment with Diana's professional and long-term goals for using Spanish, particularly with regard to her imagined communities. Diana found the linguistic concepts to be very difficult and often felt discouraged from participating during the lesson discussions because she was not sure if she was able to discuss these complex ideas in her L2. She noted that she took this course to fulfill the elective requirements for her Spanish major as well as "for fun and cultural awareness and communicate with more people". As mentioned in the previous section, she often engaged in the opening class discussions, where the instructor's intended goal was for students to improve their Spanish proficiency. However, she did not view the lesson discussion part of the class as relevant to her long-term goals for using the language. Despite this, she expressed in her interview on April 19, 2021, that she was interested in improving her conceptual knowledge of linguistics in order to be able to have high-level discussions about these topics in Spanish. She noted that this course "made me realize how much more there is for me to learn. Not that I'm super motivated to learn linguistics, but I am motivated to learn enough Spanish to be able to understand a conversation about linguistics. However, she also felt that the course would not bring her closer to her

imagined target language community, “based off the content and progression of the course”.

Andrea

As mentioned, Andrea’s interest in linguistics seemed to point to a future career in academia. She said she also has an interest in reading Spanish literature in the original language, rather than reading translations. When asked how she felt this course contributed to her becoming a participant in the target language community, Andrea felt that this course was ultimately not helpful to her. Andrea’s answers suggested that she did not find that the course objectives aligned with her overall goal of becoming more proficient in linguistics because she had taken similar courses in prior semesters. The course material, therefore, did not challenge her. She explained that she had taken a similar course in English in her freshman year which covered most of the same topics: “this [class] again, it's really just for the majors. You've got to check the boxes, right? It does maybe feel like I should have taken a different class.”

Andrea explained that she felt that one can reap the benefits of taking a course through putting in time and effort, but that global events made focusing on schoolwork more difficult. Her answers in her interviews indicated that keeping up with schoolwork was similar to a causality dilemma. She explained that learners could not dedicate as much time to their courses due to being distracted by current events. This inability to devote time to their courses caused even more stress, creating a vicious cycle: “If everything else is really crumbling around us and we have everything else to keep track of...you're not getting much out of it because you're not putting much into it, because we can't put much into it.”

Andrea had been learning Spanish since elementary school and had a short study abroad experience in Argentina as a high school student. It was at 12 years of age that Andrea decided to study Spanish and Mandarin as they are two of the most widely spoken languages in the world. Andrea described in our interviews how she used to imagine becoming a part of a global community of multilingual scholars, conducting research, and collaborating with linguists all over the world in English, Spanish and Mandarin. When she was very young, she saw herself traveling to the countries where these languages are spoken. Andrea described being multilingual as essential to gaining access to a community of people with similar intellectual interests. Having a background in general linguistics, she hoped her Mandarin and Spanish I would help her expand the possibilities for conducting research on these languages, as well as connect with scholars whose research focuses on these languages.

Although these plans seemed to favor an investment in Spanish linguistics, Andrea described how the role of Spanish in her future was “dubious”. In her second interview on April 22, 2021, she expressed that her goals were changing and that she had developed a strong interest in creative writing. She noted that she chose not to change her major to creative writing because it would limit her employment possibilities: “My kind of ideal goal is to become a writer. But obviously, you couldn't major in that because what kind of job are you going to get just in creative writing? ... So here I am.” Despite this, her membership in diverse academic and linguistic CoPs indicated that she may be somewhat invested in an imagined Spanish-speaking community. However, the implications for her investment in this class as a CoP suggested that the course goals may not have aligned with goals for accessing these imagined communities; she felt that she

was not able to improve her self-expression in Spanish or expand her linguistic knowledge.

Eliza

As mentioned, Eliza was a heritage speaker of Vietnamese and has been studying Spanish since high school. Eliza expressed that she had always understood the importance of speaking more than one language, and how it can open doors to other cultures and perspectives that one may not have access to as a unilingual. The goals of the Introduction to Spanish Linguistics CoP of (1) improving Spanish proficiency and (2) developing linguistic knowledge seemed to align with Eliza's professional goals of becoming a language teacher. During our second interview on April 19, 2021, Eliza took stock of the semester and noted that the way the class was run helped to "make things feel more friendly and more inclusive", which is very important for learner investment. She explained how the chat was essentially a mediational tool that not only fostered this sense of community, but that it was a resource that created opportunities for participation that would not have been available in a setting where verbal communication was the only medium.

I observed that the classroom practices, as well as the social cohesion within the classroom indeed resonated with different aspects of Eliza's identity. As discussed in the literature review, this resonance is important for learner investment because when classroom practices align with a learner's identity, they will be more likely to participate. As mentioned, one of Eliza's goals for the future was to become a language teacher of Spanish and TESOL. In her interview on March 19, 2021, Eliza explained that when she chose this career path, she was worried that she would be perceived as "strange" (her

words) by others because she wanted to teach Spanish as an Asian-American. However, as she progressed in her Spanish learning journey in college, she encountered many professors and students that took a similar path and were also non-native speakers. Eliza's goal is to be an example for younger people from a similar background who want to become Spanish teachers. She explained in her interview that "I try to give myself hope in a way and also remind myself that I can be kind of like a role model almost, [that] if I can do it, you guys can do it too".

Eliza's response evokes the imagined communities in that she is investing in an identity as a language instructor in order to be an example for other students who want to pursue a similar path. Eliza affirmed that "when it comes to language, there isn't any limits or boundaries... just because I'm Asian doesn't mean I can't speak Spanish". If you're another ethnicity, it doesn't mean you can't learn this language." In this way, it appears that Eliza's anticipation of Spanish-speaking communities in her future was in alignment with her investment in this course and in her class participation.

Leo

At the end of both interviews, I asked Leo how he felt about the role of Spanish and his identity. His answers about the relationship between language and his identity had to do with his academic and career ambitions. Leo's goal is to become a university professor of Spanish, and his academic trajectory has been guided by his interests in language and literature. As noted in his participant profile, when he first entered

university, he wanted to study English and focus on creative writing. He also lived in Japan and spent time learning Japanese.

His study of Japanese inspired his fascination with linguistics. He discussed how he still has these interests in creative writing and Japanese, but that his academic focus has pivoted to Spanish. Leo's study of Spanish has essentially "defined who he is" and played a very important role in Leo's formation as an emerging scholar. Like Andrea, Leo is interested in literature, linguistics, and translation. However, it is interesting to note that despite these shared interests, Leo was far more confident of a Spanish-speaking community in his future than Andrea was, perhaps because of his long, personal history of Spanish use. He said would take one or two years off after graduating to decide his next steps, but ultimately would like to go to graduate school for Spanish linguistics or literature.

Example 43, Leo's investment

Well I think in terms of academics, it's kind of defined who I am, what I study and what I plan to be in the future...It became more [about] Spanish, you know, read Spanish literature, write about that literature, do research in Spanish, structure usage, whatnot, write about the research. And I think that's kind of defined my professional slash academic life at this point (Leo, 21-03-19)

Leo's investment in this course indicated that the classroom practices, as well as the instructor's goals for the course, were in alignment with his investment in the Spanish-speaking communities he will encounter in the future. In his interviews, he specifically mentioned the "day-to-day speaking" component of the opening class discussions that gave him an opportunity to practice the language. Regarding the conceptual linguistic knowledge that was taught in this class, I observed that Leo viewed this course as foundational for his future coursework in graduate school as it has provided him with the knowledge to take more advanced courses in linguistics. Although Leo was

not completely decided on what path he would take in his studies, he planned to reflect on his plans during the next year or two and then decide his next steps. “I plan on taking one or two years of a sort of break after undergraduate, just to kind of pull things together and figure out what I'm going to do next. Grad school is an option.”

Conclusion

The results for Research Question 1 discussed how each participant’s role within the Intro to Spanish Linguistics virtual CoP was informed by aspects of their identity. In some cases, participant roles were determined by their level of expertise in relation to the course goals of developing Spanish proficiency and knowledge of Spanish linguistics. I observed that Leo and Aiden demonstrated expertise in terms of their Spanish proficiency and thus could be identified as old-timers within this CoP. In other instances, participant roles were influenced by their prior language classroom interactions, as seen in Andrea’s case. In her interviews, Andrea described having unfavorable experiences as a heritage learning in a prior Mandarin course. She brought these experiences with her to the Spanish Linguistics course, and they invariably determined how she approached class participation. Andrea also demonstrated “old-timer” traits with regard to her prior knowledge of linguistics. Her enthusiasm about sharing this knowledge with the class via the chat window allowed her to create a distinctive role as a “co-teacher” within this CoP. In some cases, participant roles were determined by a future professional identity. Both Diana and Eliza discussed how they volunteered during whole-class discussions out of empathy for the instructor, who at times found it difficult to elicit student participation. Both participants are entering the “helping” professions of human services and education

respectively, and these attempts at keeping the class discussion alive for the instructor's sake are indicative of their future professional identities. Diana used the chat feature to facilitate covert interaction with her classmates. This often occurred when she wanted to help them understand what the instructor was asking them. Additionally, Diana's participation in the sub-CoP of the GroupMe chat provided additional circumstances for new social relationships to form. This allowed Diana to become a less-peripheral member of the group in that context because she felt more comfortable discussing the difficult course material in that context.

Research question 2 examined each learner's goals for class participation and how they enacted their participation through the mediational means available to them. All of the participants mentioned the chat window as a positive affordance for class participation. Four of the five focal participants took up the chat during my observations to contribute to whole-class discussions. Andrea was the most prominent user of the chat and would use it to contribute her linguistic insights. Leo corroborated this finding in his interviews. Although he did not utilize the chat feature during my observations, he referred to it as a positive affordance for developing his linguistic knowledge through the examples that his classmates, such as Andrea, would add to the chat.

Other mediational tools within Zoom, such as the breakout rooms, were mentioned as positive affordances for communication in class. Aiden and Eliza favored breakout rooms because they offered an opportunity to practice Spanish with their classmates. However, the instructor preferred not to use breakout rooms very often because of his unfamiliarity with this tool. The unavailability of this affordance perhaps influenced the reduced engagement of some focal participants that preferred it as an

affordance. In addition to breakout rooms, Eliza mentioned the Class Notes document and ability to access online dictionaries greatly facilitated her understanding of Spanish linguistics, as well as her ability to express herself in Spanish regarding the linguistic topics being taught. With regard to communication outside of class, several participants mentioned the existence of a GroupMe chat that served as a sub-CoP of the Intro to Spanish Linguistics course. The students used this chat to clarify complex linguistic topics or deal with administrative matters pertaining to the course. It was in this space that more peripheral members of the CoP, such as Diana, could enact their participation and become less peripheral members within the sub-CoP.

The results for research question 3 demonstrated how each learner felt about the goals of this course in terms of accessing their imagined communities. Both Leo and Aiden indicated a high level of investment in the course in their interviews. This investment seemed to be influenced by their goals for using Spanish in the future. As mentioned, Leo wanted to become a university professor of Spanish and Aiden wanted to become a physician. Both participants saw a connection between the goals of the course and how they would use Spanish in their careers to access their imagined communities. Similarly, Eliza believed that this course was bringing her closer to her professional goal of becoming a TESOL/Spanish teacher. By improving her fluency in Spanish and acquiring conceptual linguistic knowledge, she felt she would be able to be an example to her students so that they could achieve their personal goals. On the other hand, Diana did not think this course would bring her closer to her imagined target language community. Moreover, she was not invested in the goal of improving content knowledge of linguistics. Despite her lack of investment in the course content, her enrollment in this

course did not discourage her from pursuing her goals of living and working in a Spanish-speaking community in the Southwestern United States. Finally, Andrea's interviews indicated that she may have had some investment in the linguistic content of the course. However, she discussed how she had taken similar linguistics courses before and that she was not learning a great deal of new information. Moreover, her academic interests had shifted to focus more on creative writing, and it seemed she was uncertain of a presence of a Spanish-speaking community in her future. The next chapter of this dissertation will discuss what these findings mean for a theory of class participation in online language classrooms.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study employed a qualitative data analysis methodology to understand the interior worlds of learners taking an advanced online, foreign language course. This study aimed to fill a gap in research regarding the role of identity in language courses on web conferencing platforms. In this study, findings from interviews, class observations, and written reflections demonstrate how learners negotiated their identity within a community of practice, and how learners use mediational tools and rules of the online classroom to accomplish their individual objects. In several cases, we saw how their goals for taking this course aligned with their imagined communities of the future, while in other cases they did not. The theoretical and pedagogical implications will be explained as each of the three research questions is addressed.

Research Question 1: Participant Identities

The community of practice of the Introduction to Spanish Linguistics online course included the instructor, whose role was to facilitate classroom and small group interactions as well as support the development of a cohesive community. The learner-focal participants utilized the various mediational tools of Zoom and verbal interaction to engage in valued community activities and practices, through which they negotiated their respective roles. I observed that learner roles for some participant profiles seemed to be connected to their personal and academic histories with Spanish. For example, I observed that Leo and Aiden demonstrated expert or old-timer identities within this community as

they possessed the valued skill of fluid expression in Spanish. Both had studied Spanish in schools where Spanish was one of the primary languages of instruction, albeit for different lengths of time. Leo, a second-generation heritage speaker of Spanish, was perhaps the most expert of all the focal participants not only because of his speaking abilities, but also because of his extensive repertoire of knowledge pertaining to Spanish linguistics. Although he described experiencing social anxiety in in-person classrooms, he stated that his anxiety dissipated in the online classroom which could perhaps explain his more participatory role in this CoP.

As mentioned, Leo was the only Spanish heritage focal participant in this study, and during my interviews with him, I was curious to know how he felt about the variety of proficiencies in this course, as the course offered some of the highest levels of discourse to be had at the undergraduate level on the topic of linguistics. While he noted that exposure to the non-standard, learner varieties of Spanish of his L2 classmates could be a bit detrimental to his Spanish-speaking abilities, he believed that he also learned a great deal from them about the course content. He was also very interested in contributing his knowledge to the group during whole-class discussions, which further suggested an old-timer identity. Similarly, Aiden was a very proficient L2 speaker of Spanish after attending an English-Spanish bilingual school from kindergarten to fifth grade. He viewed taking Spanish courses at the university as integral to maintaining the Spanish language as a part of his identity. Like Leo, Aiden wanted to share his knowledge with his classmates with their questions about how to say something in Spanish or with the course content, specifically in breakout rooms or in the GroupMe

chat. He also appreciated the support he received from his classmates as well as being part of a community of individuals that shared his interest in the Spanish language.

Another noteworthy observation was how some participant roles in the classroom seemed to be influenced by their future professional identities. For example, Eliza and Diana were studying to pursue careers in the “helping” occupations of education and human services. Despite having doubts about how their participation would be received, both students engaged in class discussions verbally and in the chat feature. Eliza’s identity as a future language teacher emerged in her role in this community of practice. Although Eliza noted that she was not always certain of her understanding of the course content, her empathy for the instructor compelled her to participate when there were long pauses in class discussions. She discussed how she would frequently try to help class discussions take off through her contributions. Similarly, Diana, who wanted to work in the human services field, was considerate of the instructor and would volunteer to speak in class when it appeared that no one else was going to. She also noted that she would privately send a message via the chat window to her classmates who did not understand what the professor was asking them.

Andrea’s case was unique in that she acquired knowledge and expertise in linguistics through membership in other communities of practice, having already taken linguistics courses across departments. Her displays of expertise in linguistics via the chat window seemed to confirm that she had an old-timer identity. I observed that Andrea demonstrated a preference for using the chat feature to initiate interaction with both the teacher and her classmates. In our interviews, she described being reluctant to verbally participate in class discussions. While her reasons for not verbally participating seemed

to be varied, her answers in the interviews suggested that her lack of verbal participation was partially due to her concern about infringing on the speaking opportunities of Spanish-heritage learners. As mentioned in the Results chapter, Andrea brought experiences from her previous community of practice of her Mandarin language class to the Intro to Spanish Linguistics course. She described instances of feeling somewhat conflicted about her membership to that classroom CoP in that she felt that her L2 learner classmates were trying to adopt the Mandarin language as an intrinsic part of their identity through their class participation. Andrea noted that she was mindful of potentially replicating this experience for the heritage learners in the Spanish linguistics course and did not want to overstep any boundaries that would make the native or heritage speakers of Spanish uncomfortable. These concerns applied to the Intro to Spanish Linguistics community and in her interactions with Spanish-speaking communities in the world beyond the classroom. As a result, she adopted a less verbally participatory role in this community of practice and utilized the chat feature as a positive affordance for her class participation.

A noteworthy finding from Andrea's case was that the instructor was overtly receptive to Andrea's use of the chat feature. Through her insightful comments in the chat, Andrea was able to create her role as a co-teacher in this course. However, had the course been taught by a different instructor who was not as receptive to her use of the chat feature, perhaps Andrea would have adopted a much more non-participatory role. Andrea's case evokes Bourdieu's notion of the *right to speak* or "the power to impose reception" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 648). As highlighted by Norton-Peirce (1995, p. 1), the classroom can be a "site of struggle" for learners. If learners understand that they have

the right to speak, this may lead to them feeling a sense of belonging and value in the community of practice of the L2 classroom. When all these pieces come together, it is more likely that learners will take the risk to participate because they will feel safe doing so. Through their participation, learners benefit from increased opportunities to develop their linguistic competence and gain confidence in their ability to express themselves in the L2. In terms of the practical implications of Andrea's case, it demonstrated how prior life experiences influence the identities of language learners and often inform learners' expectations in subsequent language courses. It is useful for instructors to understand the language learning histories of their students in order to encourage participation from each learner.

Research Question 2: Participant Goals

The application of Activity Theory for the social environment of the Introduction to Spanish Linguistics online course revealed that the instructor and learners alike had to make compromises regarding which mediational tools of the Zoom platform would be accepted as legitimate forms of participation. Recalling Engeström's (1987; 2001) iteration of Vygotskian Activity Theory, the presence of tension or contradiction within an activity system or between two different systems can serve as the driving energy for change and development. Moreover, Engeström (2014) asserts that conflict can occasionally result from the confrontation between "individual actions and the total activity system" (p. 66). As mentioned in Chapter 4, the instructor noted in his interviews that he was not enthusiastic about incorporating the breakout rooms. However, some learners valued opportunities for learning and socializing afforded to them through the

breakout rooms. Aiden and Eliza found interacting with their classmates in breakout rooms to be beneficial for building relationships with their classmates and understanding the course content. Considering these contrasting perspectives on breakout rooms, over the course of the semester, the chat feature incidentally emerged as an alternative to verbal interaction on the platform.

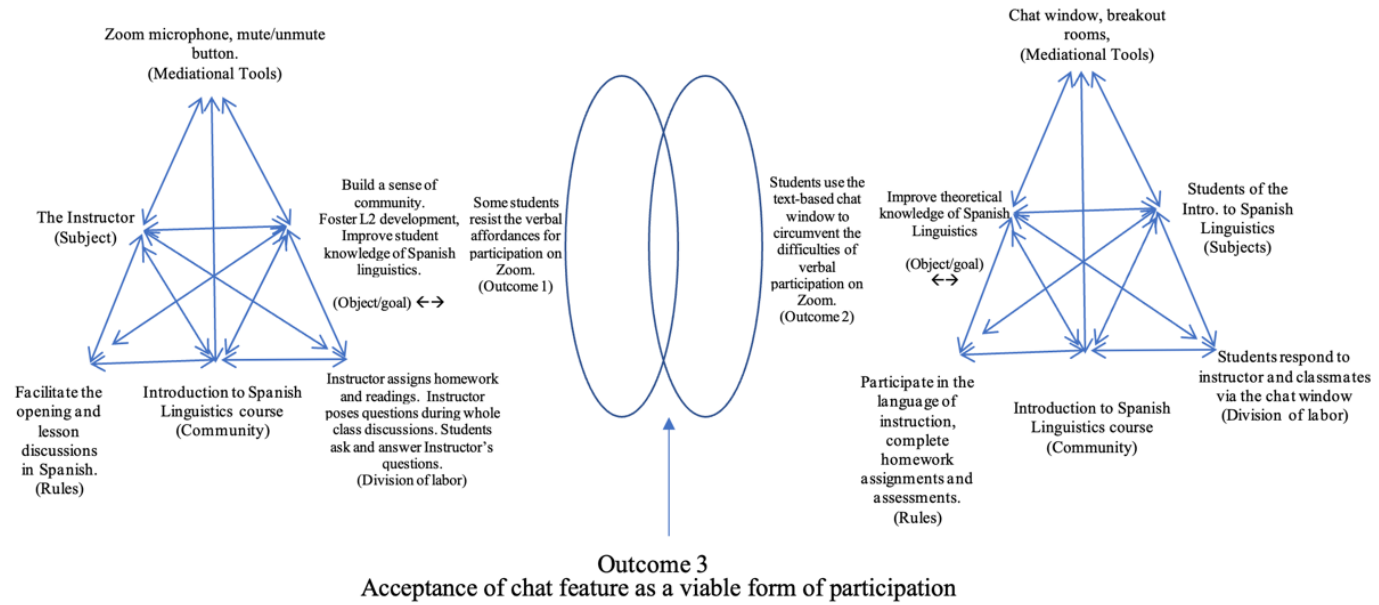
Figure 11 demonstrates the tension between the verbal affordances of the Zoom platform during whole-class discussions versus the growing use of the text-based chat feature. In Activity System 1, the instructor is the subject of the triangle. The tools area of the triangle demonstrates the mediational means he preferred—which were primarily verbal—to facilitate student interaction during class. Activity System 2 demonstrates how the students in the subject area of the triangle preferred to use different mediational means (see the tools area) such as the chat window and breakout rooms to participate in class. This was mainly due to the difficulties of verbal interaction over Zoom during whole class discussions. Ultimately, the outcome of this tension was the adaptation of the chat feature as an acceptable mediational tool for class participation.

Figure 11

Negotiation of Communication Affordances in Introduction to Spanish Linguistics Course

Activity System 1: Whole Class Discussion on Zoom

Activity System 2: Use of text-based chat feature on Zoom



I would also like to highlight the webcam as a material affordance in this course. Many students regularly left their webcams off during class sessions. This could have had a role in how much the learners participated during whole class discussions, which would provide a potential explanation for the reduced student participation in this course. Moreover, it is possible that by leaving their webcams off during class, they were demonstrating a lack of investment.

Learners who experienced burnout due to taking so many classes on Zoom, such as Andrea, found that chat feature to be especially useful. Andrea described a full schedule of Zoom classes every day that led her to feel too exhausted to participate verbally. Additionally, she noted that the transition to fully online courses made the boundaries between her life at the university and her life at home more ambiguous. I observed that burnout was another potential reason for Andrea to utilize the chat feature to communicate her ideas during whole class discussions. Andrea was identified by Leo as one of the most frequent users of the chat and someone who helped to normalize the chat as a substitute for verbal participation.

Andrea's use of the chat feature demonstrated a shift in the division of labor in this course that perhaps would have differed in an in-person classroom. The traditional responsibilities of the instructor of promoting linguistic knowledge were re-distributed through the use of the chat. Andrea, who had extensive prior knowledge of linguistics, used the chat to share and expand on the information being taught by building upon the instructor's comments during the lesson discussions. Her insightful contributions via the chat feature helped to change the division of labor in the course. While Leo did not

contribute to the chat window at all during my observations, he cited it as an important resource for his own learning of the course content.

For Aiden, remaining connected to his classmates and friends within the department was one of his primary objects for taking this course. Being in touch with a community of L2 learners who had common interests in the Spanish language and culture, and who also understood his experiences as an L2 speaker was extremely valuable to him. The symbolic affordances of text communication were important mediational tools that helped him to accomplish this object. Although there were elements of the technology that seemed to discourage class participation such as the “mute/unmute” button, he appreciated the mediational tool of the breakout rooms where he could interact with his classmates. It is possible that the unavailability of the breakout rooms—one of Aiden’s preferred mediational tools— explains his less frequent participation in whole-class discussions both verbally and through the chat window. Aiden felt he achieved his object in taking this course, and the outcome area of his activity triangle indicates that he was able to maintain connections with his classmates through other mediational means.

Outside of class, the GroupMe chat enabled him and his classmates to form a virtual study group and talk about administrative matters of the course. In a similar vein, Eliza found the mediation and symbolic means of Zoom to be beneficial to her learning of Spanish linguistics. In her interviews, she highlighted the chat feature as very important, but also mentioned the share-screen feature of Zoom to be helpful in that the instructor could project his presentations and notes onto the screen. She also cited the online Spanish dictionary and translator that she used to help her plan her answers.

Diana's attitude toward the affordances of Zoom was more critical than the other focal participants. She said that she preferred not to have her camera on and agreed with Aiden that the rules of muting and unmuting oneself during synchronous online meetings made verbal participation more difficult. Indeed, the chat was an affordance that she was able to utilize for class participation to some degree. However, Diana indicated that as the semester went on, she realized she had very little interest in the content covered in this course. She described herself as participating during class discussions only to receive a satisfactory participation grade and receive credit toward her degree in Spanish.

Research Question 3: Learner Investment and Imagined Communities

Learner roles in the L2 classroom have important implications for how learners will enact these identities in target language communities outside of the classroom. The term investment (Norton-Peirce, 1995), as it relates to discursive practices in the language classroom, is closely related to L2 identity. When learners are invested in L2 classroom practices, they are more likely to engage in class if such practices foster a sense of belonging and help learners to feel valued within the classroom community. Through my conversations with each focal participant, I gained an insight into how learners were invested in their immediate reality of the Introduction to Spanish Linguistics class as well as in their imagined future selves. Recalling Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *cultural capital*, several participants in this study were invested in the capital that knowing about Spanish linguistics could provide. As we saw in the situations of Aiden and Eliza, both sought to improve their knowledge of the Spanish language and use it in their different professional settings so that they could converse with a wide range

of people whose primary language was Spanish. As an L2 speaker of Spanish who started learning the language at a very young age, Aiden believed that the classroom practices of the online L2 classroom were in alignment with his present goals of being in contact with a community of like-minded people with similar intellectual interests. He also saw clear connections between these activities and his long-term goals. As a future doctor, Aiden wanted to use his knowledge of Spanish to make his patients who spoke the language more comfortable. His interview responses indicated that he indeed anticipated gaining cultural capital from taking this course through the instructor's insights on Spanish dialectology throughout the semester. He noted that this knowledge would help him feel more qualified in his imagined community of physicians who serve Spanish-speaking patients.

Similarly, Eliza was very much invested in the activities in this class and saw a direct link between activities in the course and her immediate personal goal for studying Spanish linguistics, which was to get a better understanding of the mechanics of Spanish grammar. Although she described the course as challenging, she believed that the knowledge or cultural capital she gained would be useful in the future in her career as a secondary education, Spanish, and TESOL instructor. Having an in-depth understanding of the language was important to Eliza in that she wanted to be able to communicate effectively with her native Spanish-speaking students who would be studying English with her. Additionally, she noted that through taking this course, as well as other courses in the Spanish department, she met many other non-heritage and non-native Spanish instructors and classmates whose goals and imagined communities aligned with hers. Regarding her imagined communities of the future, Eliza saw herself as a role model for

her future students, especially for Spanish L2 learners of an Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) background.

Investment in Spanish among participants was also found in the desire to travel and acquire cultural capital, as we saw in Diana's case. Like Aiden and Eliza, Diana wanted to work in a setting with individuals whose primary language was Spanish. When she enrolled in this course, she hoped the course would have provided her with more cultural capital to interact with native speakers, such as in-depth exposure to different varieties of Spanish. Diana felt somewhat uninvested in the course due to the difficulty of the content, as well as the online setting, as she felt that some of the mediational tools for communication were not desirable. As noted throughout Chapter 4, Diana described that she was comfortable participating in the opening class discussion but was very hesitant to participate during the lesson discussion. Despite this, she did not participate at an exceptionally low rate, as there were many students in the class who were equally not participatory. Diana's misgivings about class participation and the difficulty of the course material, however, did not deter her from pursuing her long-term object of working and building ties with Spanish speakers in the Southwestern region of the United States.

Andrea's position in terms of her investment and imagined Spanish-speaking communities was less defined than in the other focal participant profiles. One of the primary takeaways from her interviews regarding investment in Spanish was that she valued the cultural capital of being able to read in order to engage with literary texts in the original language. It is of interest to highlight the contrast between Andrea and Leo's imagined communities of the future. Leo was already invested in Spanish language and linguistics before university, as Spanish was a primary language spoken at home and

often at school. Leo defined Spanish as an academic and professional pursuit as a key part of his identity. Both Leo and Andrea had similar interests in Hispanic linguistics, literature, and culture, yet I observed that Leo was much more confident of a Spanish-speaking community in his future than Andrea was. Through his interviews, it was evident that Leo's investment in this course was concretely related to acquiring the symbolic and cultural capital of knowledge that would bring him closer to this professional goal of becoming a Spanish professor.

On the other hand, the nature of Andrea's imagined community seemed less well defined in that she was reluctant to build ties with members of Spanish-speaking communities out of fear of infringing on their spaces. Andrea expressed that she, at one point in time, was considering a career as an academic and wanted to use Spanish to connect with an imagined international community of multilingual scholars of linguistics. However, in her second interview, it seemed that her commitment to the discipline of linguistics had wavered. She noted that her interests had changed and were moving in the direction of creative writing. Additionally, her interview responses indicated that she already was in possession of the cultural capital that was being exchanged in this course because she had taken similar courses in the past. In this way, this course did not bring Andrea closer to her imagined communities.

I observed that investment in the community of practice of the online Introduction to Spanish Linguistics course seemed to have to do with how well classroom goals and practices resonated with the participants' goals as well as their imagined Spanish-speaking communities of the future. Both Leo and Aiden could see a connection between the goals of the course and their professional goals for using Spanish; Leo wanted to go

to graduate school to become a Spanish professor and Aiden wanted to attend medical school to become a physician, where he would use Spanish to communicate with his patients. Similarly, Eliza also saw a clear connection between the course goals and her goals for using Spanish beyond the classroom as a TESOL/Spanish teacher. She saw herself as a language instructor whose multilingual background could inspire her students to learn additional languages. On the other hand, Diana was less invested in the goals of this course as well as the mediational means for communication. However, her lack of investment in this course did not cause her to lose sight of her goal of being a part of a future Spanish-speaking community through her work. Conversely, Andrea, whose academic history and class participation record indicated a high investment in linguistics, had more of an indeterminate vision of a Spanish-speaking community in her future.

Limitations

While this study provides interesting and novel contributions to the sociocultural domain of SLA research, some of the limitations of this study lie in the context of the data collection. First, data collection began in the second half of the semester due to waiting on approval from the Institutional Review Board. By beginning the data collection process at that point, I likely missed key moments that helped initiate the rules and division of labor of this unique classroom community of practice.

The importance of the chat feature of this study evolved as data analysis went on. When I began collecting data for this project, I knew I wanted to incorporate the chat feature in some aspect of the study, but as data analysis progressed the chat feature became more important than anticipated. Now that the function of the chat window as a

mediational tool for synchronous online language instruction has been identified, further research could more comprehensively focus on the impact of this tool.

This course was chosen as the site for data collection because of the high number of volunteers who consented to participate in this study. However, the goal of this upper-level course was to acquire specific content pertaining to the linguistic system of Spanish rather than to solely develop grammar and vocabulary to increase proficiency. If I were to conduct this research again, I would duplicate it in a lower-division course such as beginning or intermediate Spanish that had a primary focus on developing language proficiency. This would provide more variation in terms of learner investment in Spanish.

Implications for Research, Theory, and Pedagogy

Although most institutions have returned to fully in-person instruction since the onset of the pandemic in 2020, at the time of data collection for this research, it was impossible to foresee how this crisis would unfold or if there was an end in sight. However, it is clear that the pandemic accelerated the day-to-day presence of technology in our lives, and this had unique implications for teaching and learning. This was highlighted by Eliza, who acknowledged the importance of adapting to the online classroom in order to become comfortable engaging with other people in Spanish in virtual spaces. Additionally, the rules and division of labor of the traditional in-person classroom were modified in the online classroom, as the tools of the online classroom allowed for the redistribution of the responsibilities of the instructor. As asserted by Borba (2021), “the internet has become a community, an agent, and an artifact” and has altered the way we experience learning and the co-creation of knowledge in the

classroom (Borba, 2021, p. 393). These implications prompt an important discussion about how teachers and students utilize technology to construct knowledge, as it is inevitable that technology will be further integrated into the classroom and in language learning.

The activity theory perspective of this research demonstrated how different material and linguistic means of the online classroom were utilized by individual learners with distinct language-learning histories and investments for studying Spanish. In this section, I would like to outline how activity theory and identity might be used in a broader sense to better understand L2/HL investment in CoP participation. As noted in the literature review, activity theory can be used to understand how activity is mediated through social interaction. The distinct activity systems of the five students in this study demonstrated how each student had an original object for taking this course, and how these objects motivated their activity. Each activity system highlighted both the affordances that facilitated their actions with regard to class participation, and the emerging outcomes that resulted from their participation in this course. With regard to in the language classroom, Swain et al. (2015) affirm that activity theory “provides a non-reductionist way” (p. 145) of analyzing the dynamic process of language teaching and learning. Moreover, activity theory is novel in its approach to understanding this process in that it not only evaluates the “social and affective factors” that impact an individual’s learning, but also how learning occurs through “multidirectional relationships” (p. 143). This is to say that activity theory is a framework that has redefined the relationship between the individual, learning and the context in which the learning occurs (Swain et al., 2015, p. 143).

This study can contribute to the literature on language learning in that it demonstrates how through conflict between diverse activity systems, new ways for learners to enact participation emerged. For example, in the case of the Intro to Spanish Linguistics course, the preferred medium for participation—besides verbal participation—that incidentally emerged through this conflict was the chat window. This study can serve as an example for teachers who are encountering challenges with some of the mediational tools or rules that they are trying to put into practice to elicit student participation. Moreover, it demonstrated how adapting to new forms of participation can initially be challenging for the instructor but can also lead to meaningful activity. When tensions surface around new mediational means in the online classroom, I view this as an opportunity for teachers to thoughtfully consider why learners may be gravitating to these tools for their participation, and the ways in which these tools could be operationalized to accomplish some of the learning objects of the course. If there is a conflict between elements of the teacher’s activity system and those of learners, this framework could be applied to better understand the emerging tensions and how these tensions could potentially lead to a new outcome or solution for optimizing learner participation.

Additionally, the present research has shown that for better or for worse, learners bring with them all the experiences that have shaped their identities as language learners. Many of these formative experiences come from other classroom CoPs where their participation may not have been validated as legitimate, or even marginalized. It is important for instructors to recognize that learners often enact participation based on these prior experiences.

Based on the findings of this study, I make the following suggestions for future research. The first is that this study does not investigate the link between the use of the chat feature and learning outcomes. Andrea's use of the chat feature showed us how the chat feature can be a democratizing tool for teaching and learning. There were many examples of Andrea taking up the role of co-teacher via the chat feature, thus changing the division of labor in the course. It would be interesting for future research to examine how this democratization impacts learning outcomes in whole-class discussions. Again, it is not clear if learning outcomes are better or worse in synchronous courses that incorporate the chat feature. It is also unclear if accepting the use of the chat feature as a legitimate form of class participation in a language course outside of the circumstances of a global pandemic is to be recommended. However, now that the chat has been identified as a possible affordance for learning, it should be further developed because of the complications of group discussions on web conferencing platforms.

Conclusions

The present study sought to understand the experiences of five learners with diverse language learning backgrounds and histories as they were taking an online Introduction to Spanish Linguistics course. Using a Community of Practice framework, this study demonstrated how learner identities manifested as they negotiated their roles within their virtual CoP. Using an Activity Theory approach, this research also highlighted the affordances of the online classroom that helped students meet their goals for participation within this CoP. Finally, it demonstrated the extent to which students viewed classroom activities as being in alignment or misalignment with their overall

goals for taking this course, as well as the imagined communities they wished to belong to in the future.

An important direction for future L2 research with respect to the affordances of the online classroom would be to consider the chat window's influence on L2 development during whole-class discussions. As mentioned, the focus of this course was not only on L2 development but also on specialized linguistic content that pertained to the Spanish language. In addition to studying identity, class participation and investment/imagined communities, it would be interesting to replicate this experiment in an online Spanish course where the goal was to increase L2 proficiency to see how the linguistic development of the students evolved through legitimizing the chat window as an acceptable form of participation.

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APPENDIX A

WEEKLY CLASS PARTICIPATION REFLECTION

1. What did you think of today's class? Please give your overall impressions.
(2-3 sentences)
2. Did you speak in Zoom class today?
3. If yes:
 - a) Approximately how many times did you participate (speak) in class?
 - b) Which activities did you participate in? Were you called on by your professor or a classmate or did you volunteer? (2-3 sentences)
 - c) What were your comments? (i.e. Questions, opinions, recalling information?) (2-3 sentences)
 - d) What were you thinking before you spoke in class? Please describe your thoughts, feelings and emotions. (2-3 sentences)
 - e) What were you thinking after you spoke in class? Please describe your thoughts feelings and emotions. (2-3 sentences)
4. Were there times during Zoom class where you wanted to speak but did not? Why do you think you did not speak? (2-3 sentences)
5. What are your thoughts on your classmates participation? (2-3 sentences)
6. Any other thoughts about today's class that you would like to share? (2-3 sentences)
7. Any comments about your Spanish language skills? (2-3 sentences)

Adapted from Morita (2002)

APPENDIX B

CLASS NOTES DOCUMENT MARCH 9, 2021

martes, 9 de marzo

Para el 11 de marzo:

- 1) Presentaciones
- 2) Leer las pp. 139-161 del capítulo 2 del libro
- 3) Explicar en unas 25-50 de sus propias palabras los siguientes conceptos de la lectura. Luego dé al menos un ejemplo para ilustrar su definición:
 - a) alomorfo
 - b) el masculino como género no marcado (valor de defecto = default value)
 - c) vocal temática
 - d) la epéntesis
 - e) tiempo (ver p. 151-158)
 - f) aspecto (ver p. 151-158)
 - g) modo (ver p. 151-158)
- 4) Completar los siguientes ejercicios
 - a) Ejercicio 30, p. 146
 - b) Ejercicio 34, p. 153
 - c) Ejercicio 37, p. 158
 - d) Crédito extra: Ejercicio 22, p. 137

Para el 18 de marzo: Entregar el examen de medio curso

Temas de clase:

- 1) Mis planes para ponerme al tanto de nuestra clase esta semana:
 - a) Diseñar y subir a Canvas el examen de medio curso
 - b) Preparar el nuevo módulo en Canvas de esta semana, lo cual incluye los materiales de las últimas presentaciones
 - c) Entrar las notas de participación para el 16 al 25 de febrero
 - d) Comenzar a calificar las tareas más antiguas
- 2) Elementos estructurales para representar estos significados
 - a) **morfemas y alomorfos:** ✓
 - (1) cambios fonéticos: *pod*er vs. *pu*edo vs. *pod*emos; *im*posible vs. *in*directo vs. *in*completo.
 - (2) interfijos: *café* + *era* = *cafete*ra
 - b) el uso de **morfemas libres:** p. ej. *We will go* → *Where will we go?* ✓

c) el uso de **morfemas ligados**: p. ej. *Iremos* → **Adónde -emos nosotros ir?*

i) **la afijación** = una raíz léxica + morfema ligado = una palabra que pertenece a una sola categoría gramatical. ✓

(1) prefijos

(2) sufijos

(3) los morfemas cero (la ausencia de un morfema como contraste significativo)

(4) Ejemplos de sufijos con significado flexivo:

raíz léxica + clase de verbo + persona/numero

libr-o-s

libr-o-Ø

habl-a-mos

habl-a-n

habl-a-s

habl-a-ís

habl-a-Ø

habl-o-¿?

(5) ejemplo de sufijos con significado derivativo

"memorización"

memor - iz-a - ción

N suf.der.(N→V) suf.der. (V→N)

ii) **la composición** = dos raíces léxicas unidas que pertenecen a categorías diferentes

(1) sustantivo + adjetivo = adjetivo compuesto (pelo rojo = pelirrojo)

(2) verbo + sustantivo = sustantivo compuesto (abre latas = abrelatas)

iii) **la cliticización** = una raíz léxica + morfema ligado = una palabra que pertenece a dos categorías gramaticales.

(1) en español: verbo + clítico = verbo + pronombre ej. *dígame*

(2) en inglés: pronombre + clítico = pronombre + verbo ej. *he's*

(3) en inglés: verbo + clítico = verbo + negación ej. *don't*

d) el **reemplazo** de un morfema sistemático con otro completamente diferente: ser *somos / fuimos*

e) el **cambio interno**:

sing → *sang*; *tenemos* → *tuvimos* pero NO *sentir* vs. *siente* vs. *sintió*

f) la **reduplicación**:

ej. "no quiero ese líquido marrón que Ud. me ofrece, quiero café café"

g) la **conversión**, o la **derivación cero**

viva (Adj) vs. *viva* (V);
trabajador (Adj) vs. *trabajador* (N),
rápido (Adj) vs. *rápido* (Adv);
her (poss.) vs. *her* (pro.)
bat (N) vs. *bat* (V)
call (N) vs. *call* (V).

3) Práctica con la identificación de procesos morfológicos estructurales:

¿Qué **tipos de significado** se encuentran entre ellos?

léxico, gramatical-derivativo, gramatical-flexivo

¿Qué **procesos estructurales** se encuentran?

alomorfismo, morfemas libres, afijación, composición, cliticización, reemplazo, cambio interno

¿**Cuántos morfemas** hay en cada palabra o frase?

- a) elegancia
- b) el parabrisas
- c) discutiéndolo
- d) no lo hace
- e) no lo hizo
- f) carilarga
- g) mucha alegría
- h) gotearse
- i) se siente mal
- j) su impopularidad
- k) somos riquísimos
- l) estuvieron en casa
- m) la delicadeza
- n) un sinvergüenza
- o) mi amorcito