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**Experiencing multilingual identities and
interculturality through learning and socialising in
languages: The ecologies of two “language cafés”**

Nuria Polo-Pérez

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

Durham University



April 2022

Abstract

Experiencing multilingual identities and interculturality through learning and socialising in languages: The ecologies of two “language cafés”

Nuria Polo-Pérez

This study investigates two “language cafés” (LCs), i.e., public events which provide an informal learning space for (foreign) language socialisation. Underpinned by social constructionism, an ecological approach to language research, and ethnographically-inspired methods of data collection, the study sheds light on the co-construction of the LCs as meaningful sites for languaging and language socialisation, and explores their affordances for experiencing and performing one’s multilingual identities and interculturality. Adopting a reflexive stance, the researcher participated in the LCs as a language learner drawing on her multilingual repertoire and subjectivities, thus contributing to researching multilingually praxis by demonstrating the affordances of translanguaging as methodology. Data were collected through participant-observation, audio-recording of naturally-occurring conversations in the LCs, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, participants’ written reflections, and a researcher’s reflective journal.

The findings show that participants co-constructed the LCs to seek out alternative and decentred ways of dwelling in their languages by making them part of their everyday lives and leisure activities, regardless of proximity to “target language” countries. The pleasure of languaging and the value of LCs as an intellectual and social hobby often outweighed the instrumental value of these events for the development of language skills. Further, the LCs mobilised participants’ multilingual identities and their sense of multilingual social selves which prompted them to draw on their previous language socialisation experiences. Finally, the LCs offered a safe space to engage in multiperspectivity and learn about each other’s worldviews, as well as to connect with like-minded, cosmopolitan, multilingual speakers.

This doctoral thesis contributes to the field of language learning beyond the classroom by focusing on how languages are lived intersubjectively, rather than merely learned or acquired. This is consistent with a poststructuralist view of language and intercultural learning as experiencing new ways of being in the world, and much more than the development of skills.

Title page

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List of abbreviations

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CEC	Commission of the European Communities
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
EFL	English as a foreign language
ELE	<i>Español como lengua extranjera</i> (Spanish as a foreign language)
ICC	Intercultural communicative competence
L1	First language

LC	Language café
LC1	Language café 1
LC2	Language café 2
LLBC	Language learning beyond the classroom
OIE	Online intercultural exchange
SLA	Second language acquisition
TA	Thematic analysis

Declaration

This thesis is my own work and no part of the material contained in it has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

Note to the reader

Some material from this thesis has been published in:

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Dedication

To the multilingual child who is about to be born

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

This qualitative study investigates the affordances of language cafés (LCs) as sites for peer language learning and multilingual and intercultural socialisation. LCs are public events that provide an informal conversational space for people interested in speaking a specific language or languages. Thus, the study is located at the intersection of informal language learning, multilingual socialisation, and intercultural communication. Underpinned by social constructionism and an ecological approach to language research, it explores the subjective meanings that LC participants attach to their experiences in the LCs, and it does so considering the complex interrelationships between language use, the participants, and their environment. This study is important because it explores how LCs—an under-researched language learning context—can make language socialisation more accessible within one's own social and physical surroundings, without the need to travel far or rely on sojourns abroad.

This opening chapter first introduces the context of the study (1.1), its rationale (1.2), and research aims (1.3). Then, I discuss my researcher positionality within the study (1.4). Finally, I clarify the meaning of some key terms (1.5), before providing an outline of the chapters to explain how the thesis is structured (1.6).

1.1 Context of the study

Learning a second or foreign language has become arguably more accessible in contemporary globalised societies, where the range of learning contexts and opportunities to use languages is broader and increasingly more available to everybody. Not only is human mobility more dynamic and global than ever, but so are the interpersonal and intercultural relationships that emerge in both virtual and real life, as well as the means by which knowledge and information are co-constructed and shared.

Among the plethora of activities one can engage with in order to increase the chances of conversing with others in a “foreign” language (i.e., a language that is

not dominant or readily available in one's immediate surroundings), some typically used would be: embarking on a language course, travelling to and sojourning in a place where the language is widely spoken, participating in language exchange partnerships (online or face-to-face), or finding speakers of that language in one's local area and using the language with them. The latter is what motivates the creation of LCs, which are commonly understood as public events aimed at gathering speakers of a particular language or languages to offer them a specific time and space to socialise in those languages. They are commonly organised in public places—e.g., cafés, bars, parks, cinemas, or libraries. They do not belong to any institutional programme or provide any formal instruction, and they are usually free of charge or accessible for a very small fee. LCs, therefore, are portrayed in this thesis as just one of the countless activities people can engage with in order to use languages. Language learning within LCs is not a method, nor a shortcut for acquiring the language, and it does not intend to substitute instructed learning, yet there is something distinctive about the LC environment that may contribute to the multi-layered and personal nature of the language learning experience (Ros i Solé, 2016; Woodin, 2018). Furthermore, LCs can be viewed from multiple angles: beyond their potential as language learning sites, they also work as hubs connecting people from different horizons with shared language repertoires.

In many parts of the world, the visibility of LCs has increased thanks to the growing popularity of networking online platforms such as Facebook or Meetup.com, which facilitate the organisation and advertisement of public events. In that sense, LCs have much in common with other public groups or events that aim to gather people with a shared interest or hobby which they enjoy practising with others, e.g.: salsa parties, jam sessions, sports clubs (for running, hiking, tennis...), chess clubs, or reading groups. These “affinity spaces” (Gee, 2005) or “communities of practice” (Wenger, 1998), however, may differ greatly in their internal dynamics. Each of them can be located somewhere across a continuum between formal or informal environments, more focused on the social or the educational aspects, structured or unstructured, transient or stable, and led by mediators or self-organised by participants. It is important to bear in mind that these features or dynamics can be negotiated and may evolve over time. Although

there are LCs where some form of language teaching is involved (e.g., Johnston, 2018; Kunitz & Jansson, 2021), this thesis is concerned with LCs located towards the informal, social, unstructured, and participant-led side of the spectrum. This way, LCs can be clearly differentiated from the context of the classroom. It is important to clarify as well the choice of the term. I use “language café” in this study as an umbrella term, as it is one of the denominations commonly used for this type of event in the English language, and it derives from the social aspects of the “coffee culture” of modern times and the traditional view of cafés as social hubs, or even artistic and intellectual centres (Davis & Holdom, 2009; Holliday, 2011). Other common denominations include “language exchange”, “languages encounter”, “language meetup”, or “language club”, yet they all share the aim to gather people interested in speaking a certain language through informal interaction.

The focus of LCs is, therefore, face-to-face conversation, which has been described as “the most pervasively used mode of interaction in social life” (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984, pp. 12-13). Montolío (2020) goes further and claims the value of conversation as a source of well-being for humans, while she also admits that spontaneous face-to-face conversation seems to be in the process of becoming a “vintage” type of communication (Montolío, 2020, p. 19). She argues:

Hablar personalmente con otro ser humano no consiste en una alternancia mecánica de datos (información), sino en un intercambio continuado de subjetividades, una reciprocidad continua entre dos conciencias. Y hay más: una conversación entre humanos es también un intercambio físico en el que nuestros cuerpos importan y participan.

<Speaking face-to-face with another human being does not consist of a mechanical alternation of data (information), but a continuous exchange of subjectivities, a continuous reciprocity between two conscious minds. And there is more: a conversation among human beings is also a physical exchange in which our bodies matter and participate.>

(Montolío, 2020, p. 17, my translation)

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced much of face-to-face interaction to take place in virtual environments. Using their screens, people have been able to look after their social relationships and after each other during these difficult times. Some face-to-face LCs came to a halt or moved to the online environment during this

time. However, Montolío (2020) highlights that the embodied and intersubjective aspects which are distinctive to the experience of conversing face-to-face are hard to replicate in the online environment.

The two LCs involved in this study are located in the United Kingdom (UK), and more specifically in the north of England. Despite the superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007) that characterises UK societies and their linguistic landscapes, learning additional languages is not as popular an option in English schools and universities as it is in other parts of the world. The languages that are privileged at schools in England are French, Spanish and German. However, foreign language departments have seen their numbers decline over the last two decades (Coffey, 2011), and the exit of the UK from the European Union (“Brexit”) has only deepened this decline (Kelly, 2018). There is also a stark social class divide in language learning in the country, with children from disadvantaged families being less likely to take up foreign language subjects than their better-off peers (Adams, 2019; Coffey, 2011; Coughlan, 2017; Ridealgh, 2019; Tinsley, 2019). A number of newspaper articles, drawing on the annual Language Trends reports produced by the British Council, have recently warned about the worrisome lack of language skills in post-Brexit Britain, which is estimated to cost the national economy tens of billions in missed trade each year (Parrish & Lanvers, 2017; Ridealgh, 2017; Tinsley & Board, 2017). This emphasis on the employability side of languages—so often promoted as skills needed for international trade—contrasts starkly with the motivations for learning that language students tend to report. For example, a survey conducted with language students at Lancaster University and the University of Nottingham showed that enjoyment and a genuine personal interest in the language and the places where it is spoken were the main motivations for studying languages at university for the majority of surveyed students, ranking much higher than the acquisition of employable skills (Stollhans & Speicher, 2019). Connecting these motivations with the socioeconomic dimension of learning additional languages, Coffey (2011) shows how adult speakers of French and German as additional languages in the UK present themselves in their narratives as educated liberals or cosmopolitans who construct languages as social and cultural capital that can give them greater access to worlds of privilege. These insights into how learning

additional languages is portrayed in the UK helps to contextualise the LCs investigated in this study, as I will discuss in Chapters 4 (4.3) and 5 (5.1.4).

Next, I turn to the rationale for conducting this research.

1.2 The rationale for the study

Language educators have extensively explored what happens inside the classroom and inside the learners' minds in search of the most effective ways to boost language proficiency. At the same time, proficient speakers of multiple languages usually attribute their success to out-of-class learning (Benson, 2011). In fact, it is generally agreed upon, among teachers and learners alike, that immersion experiences are a *sine qua non* for language and intercultural development. Current language education tends to focus on the development of communicative skills in the classroom, and relies heavily on mobility and study abroad programmes for learners to experience authentic foreign language and intercultural socialisation. This creates a gap between what happens inside and outside the classroom (Dressman & Sadler, 2020), and both educators and learners are trying to find better ways to connect the two worlds (Benson, 2011; Woodin, 2018). Research can be a powerful tool to give voice to language learners and listen to what they have to say about their multilingual socialisation experiences and subjectivities (Kramsch, 2009), so that language educators can reflect upon how certain teaching and learning practices may enhance or inhibit those language subjectivities in the classroom. These points supporting the rationale for the study also link to my own interest in the topic, which I discuss later on in section 1.4.

Furthermore, considering the superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007) that is characteristic of contemporary UK society, the description of a language as "foreign" can be questioned, since the additional languages that students learn in the classroom are often available in one way or another in their social surroundings due to increased mobility and globalisation (Blommaert, 2010, 2013). Similarly, Woodin (2018) throws doubt on the idea of "foreign" language because it implies that it is "the language of someone else", meaning that foreign language learning "invites us to learn something which is 'other'" (Woodin, 2018, p. 3). Learning to dwell multilingually (Phipps, 2007) can enhance social cohesion in contemporary

multilingual societies. Thus, language education could do more to promote multilingual and intercultural learning and socialisation “at home”, that is, without associating languages and cultures necessarily with faraway foreign lands (linked to what some scholars have called “internationalisation at home”, cf. Beelen & Jones, 2015). Going abroad is not essential in order to use an additional language face-to-face in naturalistic ways, especially if one lives near speakers of that language in their local area (Ros i Solé & Fenoulhet, 2011). Likewise, it is not necessary for learners to engage in long periods of formal study before they can use their new language resources in the “real world” outside if language learning and language use and socialisation can be seen as intertwined (Kramsch, 2002; Lantolf, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004; van Lier, 2004).

LCs seem to be a “niche” type of activity (van Lier, 2004) in that they fulfil a specific gap in the social ecologies of multilingual speakers (including both learners and proficient speakers) who are looking for opportunities to use and socialise in languages with multilingual others without the need to travel far. However, despite the growing research interest in social spaces for learning beyond the classroom (Benson & Reinders, 2011; Conacher & Kelly-Holmes, 2007; Dressman & Sadler, 2020; Nunan & Richards, 2015), LCs have not received much research attention (as evidenced in the review of the existent literature provided in Chapter 2). This thesis aims to fill that lacuna.

Following this rationale for investigating LCs, I now present the specific research aims of the study.

1.3 Research aims

LCs are viewed in this study as “spaces of possibility” (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p. 38) linked to the notion of “affordance” in ecological terms. Affordance refers to “action potential” (van Lier, 2004), that is, opportunities for action as they are perceived by individuals in interaction with their environment. An overarching aim of the study is to understand how participants co-construct their experiences in the LCs according to the affordances they perceive in these environments.

Ros i Solé (2016, p. 3) maintains that “[l]anguage learning allows us to connect with the world in new ways by rebelling against the long-held belief that we are

born and die with the same cultural identity”. This study also aims to move beyond the linguistic in second language acquisition (SLA) and focuses on exploring changes in participants’ self-perception as multilinguals and how the LCs afford them with opportunities to experience something new: new language identities, new intercultural encounters, or a new way of engaging with and dwelling multilingually in their own communities. In doing so, I aim to gather the voices and experiences of both learner-participants as well as proficient speakers who attend the LC for reasons other than language learning.

Methodologically, and in line with the study’s ethnographically-inspired approach, in this research I immerse myself in the LCs not only as a researcher and participant-observer, but also as a genuine learner of French and speaker of other languages. Thus, I also aim to explore the possibilities of reflexively drawing on the researcher’s multilingual subjectivities to carry out research in multiple languages (Holmes et al., 2013; Polo-Pérez, forthcoming; Polo-Pérez & Holmes, forthcoming).

Thus, the study’s design is informed by the following research aims:

- to explore the affordances of LCs as sites for language learning and multilingual and intercultural socialisation;
- to investigate whether socialising in LCs may contribute to the development of learners’ multilingual identities and sense of selves as multilinguals;
- to understand the role of interculturality in participants’ experiences in the LCs;
- to draw attention to the possibilities of LCs to make multilingual and intercultural socialisation more accessible within one’s local communities (i.e., without the need to travel far); and
- to explore the methodological possibilities and challenges of engaging the researcher’s multilingual repertoire and subjectivities at all stages of the research.

I now turn to my positioning in the research, which is interrelated with my interest in the topic.

1.4 Researcher positioning

As it will become clear throughout the thesis, I occupy a complex positioning in this study as a researcher, multilingual speaker and learner, Spanish migrant in the UK, and language teacher. I became aware of the existence of LCs in 2015 when I learned that such events were organised at the UK university where I worked as a teacher of Spanish. I had always been concerned with how to help my students to take their Spanish outside the classroom and start living in the language and seeing it as more than a study subject. In my classroom, I noticed the different approaches that students manifested towards their learning based on their subjective relationship with, and investment in, the language (Kramsch, 2009; Norton, 2000), and I became determined to support those with fewer language socialisation experiences to start connecting with Spanish in more personally-invested ways (Ros i Solé, 2016).

I was born in Madrid (Spain) and brought up in Spanish throughout my entire childhood and teenage years. When I was little, English was a compulsory subject in primary and secondary education, as it is today. At school, I was the kind of compliant English learner who enjoyed doing grammar exercises, memorising vocabulary and irregular verbs, and practising the exam techniques that would grant me the highest marks. While I was good at “playing the game” of the educational system, speaking spontaneously in front of others was a dreaded situation I would always try to avoid, even when I decided that I wanted to pursue a career in languages. I studied Translation and Interpreting at university in Madrid, but I only experienced the transformative effects of “linguaging” (Phipps & González, 2004) and being able to engage in and maintain human relationships in different languages during my year abroad in Italy and my sojourns in Syria and Egypt learning Arabic. After those linguaging experiences “in the wild”, back in Spain I understood for the first time what it meant to miss speaking and “dwelling” in other languages (Phipps, 2007), and I became an avid multilingual speaker who capitalised on every opportunity that arose to use my repertoire in conversation with others. In England, where I have lived for more than a decade, I still maintain the same attitude towards languages, and English is only one of the languages that are part of my everyday life.

Thus, my research interest in LCs was informed by both my professional stance as a language educator and my personal viewpoint and subjectivities as a multilingual speaker and learner myself. As I discuss in detail in the reflexivity section of the methodology chapter (4.4.5), in order to conduct this ethnographically-inspired study I decided to immerse myself in the LCs as a learner of French, although my teacher identity occasionally surfaced.

Having explained my complex positionality in the study, I now clarify the meaning of two key terms according to how they are used in this research.

1.5 Key terms

While I have already discussed what is meant by “language café” in the context of this study (see 1.1 above), in the title of this thesis appear two other key terms which require clarification in this introductory chapter, although they will be further discussed in Chapter 3 as part of the study’s theoretical framework. These terms are “multilingual identity” and “interculturality”.

1.5.1 Multilingual identity

As a theoretical construct, “identity” is employed in a wide range of research disciplines with different meanings according to different schools of thought or theoretical perspectives. Psychoanalytical approaches (e.g., Erikson, 1968) position individuals as having a complex core identity which develops over time and which can be examined and explained as a “thing” (Mansfield, 2000). From the viewpoint of poststructuralist approaches (Block, 2009; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004), identity is never fixed or developed in a linear fashion, and it is rather seen as an “effect” of the discursive practices and power dynamics that exist in every social interaction (Mansfield, 2000; Holliday, 2011). Poststructuralist and social constructionist approaches have a common understanding of identities as multiple, relational, and co-constructed through socialisation processes.

This study draws on poststructuralist understandings of identity, encapsulated in Norton’s (2013, p. 4) definition as “the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how a person understands possibilities for the future”. Self-projection in

the future as a multilingual individual able to join new communities of speakers is considered as the most crucial aspect that mediates learners' motivation (Dörnyei, 2005) and willingness to invest in the languages they are learning (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). In that sense, identity is linked to the concepts of "self", "subjectivity", and "intersubjectivity". I explore the different meanings of these interrelated concepts in Chapter 3 (3.3.1).

On the other hand, "multilingual" primarily means involving multiple languages. When referring to a person, I use multilingual in this study as an encompassing term referring to anyone who uses or is somehow connected to multiple languages in their lives, regardless of their level of proficiency in those languages (Gramling, 2021; Kramsch, 2009; Martin-Jones et al., 2012). As some have argued, everyone is multilingual to a certain extent (Gramling, 2021), even if they might not self-identify as such.

When learning additional languages, speakers may enlarge not only their communicative repertoires, but also identity repertoires that enable them to engage in new ways of being in the world (Norton, 2000; Ros i Solé, 2016). Thus, "multilingual identity" in this study refers to the projection of the self as a multilingual, as someone personally connected to and able to draw on multiple linguistic resources in their lives. Multilingual identities can be dormant in contexts dominated by a particular language, or unrecognised due to language ideologies (Grosjean, 2008), but they can be mobilised, revived, negotiated, and (re)constructed in interaction with others (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). One of the aims of this study is to investigate whether (and if so, in what ways) participating in LCs may support the mobilisation and development of one's multilingual identities.

1.5.2 Interculturality

Interculturality in this study is viewed as a process that emerges when people from different horizons engage in communication with one another, with the potential to co-construct new understandings about self and other as a result (Byram, 1997; Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 2011; Holmes, 2014; Woodin, 2018). Coming from different horizons can also be understood as having different cultural affiliations, taking into account that the nature of culture is fluid and dialogic, meaning that cultural

realities are always influencing and being influenced by other cultural realities (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016). Thus, interculturality in this study assumes an intersectional and non-essentialist view of culture (Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 2011; Scollon & Scollon, 2001), moving away from the uncritical view of cultures as static and contained within national boundaries. These aspects are further discussed in Chapter 3 (3.4) as part of the study's theoretical framework.

Interculturality is connected to language learning because, as Phipps and Levine (2012) contend, learning an additional language involves getting to understand that other ways of living are possible. Similarly, Woodin (2018, p. 8) argues that

[l]earning a language in any amount of time [...] takes us in the direction of unknown territory, where we are forced to doubt, to question, to accept and to interact. These are skills and attitudes which are paramount in a changing world, which brings communication alive as a human activity through language in all of its complexity.

This study aims to investigate the role that interculturality—which embeds the idea of having to navigate unknown territories and learning about self and other in communication—plays in participants' experiences in the LCs.

Having briefly clarified how these two key terms are used in the study, I conclude this introductory chapter by outlining how the thesis is structured.

1.6 Outline of the chapters

The thesis is organised into eight chapters. This first chapter has introduced the study's context, rationale, and research aims, before discussing the researcher's positionality and clarifying the meaning of key terms in the study.

Chapter 2 situates the study within the field of language learning beyond the classroom and provides a review of the relevant literature, including previous studies on LCs from different parts of the world. After outlining the themes and gaps emerging from the literature review, the research questions guiding the study are presented at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework upon which I draw in order to answer the research questions. Specifically, this chapter elaborates on the ecological approach that informs the study, and further discusses the key

theoretical constructs which shape its focus: languaging and translanguaging, multilingual identities, and interculturality.

Chapter 4 presents the study's methodological approach. It defines how the research paradigm is underpinned by social constructionism, and describes the qualitative nature of the study, which relies upon ethnographically-inspired methods of data collection and an ecological approach to language research. This chapter also describes the context of the two LCs involved in the study and provides a detailed account of the research methods employed.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 present and discuss the research findings: Chapter 5 centres on the co-construction of multilingual socialisation and collaborative learning in the ecologies of the two LCs investigated in the study; Chapter 6 explores how participants experienced multilingual identities in these LCs; and Chapter 7 focuses on their experience of interculturality.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by summarising the research findings, answering the research questions, outlining the contributions to knowledge, and presenting the main theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications arising from the study. It also acknowledges the limitations of the study and suggests directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The phenomenon of language cafés (LCs)—which I defined in the introductory chapter as public events that provide an informal conversational space for people interested in speaking a specific language or languages—is part of the vast array of contexts available for language learning beyond the classroom (LLBC). To complement the well-established area of research on instructed language learning (Ellis, 1990, 2005), some scholars (e.g., Benson, 2011) have claimed LLBC as an independent area of enquiry within the field of second language acquisition (SLA). In this chapter, I review the literature on LLBC and, within it, the scant number of studies that have been published on LCs more specifically.

More than two decades have passed since Firth and Wagner (1997) published their influential paper attempting to reconceptualise traditional approaches in SLA research. They critiqued SLA approaches on five key grounds: for their preoccupation with the concept of “learner” over other social categories; for adopting a monolingual ideology and ignoring multilingual realities; for overlooking noninstructional settings; for focusing on learning problems rather than successes of communication; and for viewing communication “breakdown” as an individual rather than a social/relational issue. Some of Firth and Wagner’s (1997) concerns still prevail and will be discussed in this literature review. However, in Chapter 3, I will review key theoretical and methodological advances made since then, which will inform this study’s theoretical framework.

The present chapter is organised as follows: after an overview of the current state of the growing body of literature in LLBC (2.1), I concentrate on the published studies that have been conducted on LCs in different countries (2.2). Then, I identify key emerging themes from this literature review (2.3). Having discussed the gaps in the literature, I present my conclusions and research questions (2.4). These questions will guide the study’s methodological and theoretical approach, and reflect the research aims stated in Chapter 1.

2.1 Language learning beyond the classroom

Much of the research in SLA has been carried out in classrooms or experimental settings (Firth & Wagner, 2007; Reinders & Benson, 2017), making instructed language learning a well-established area of enquiry within the field (Ellis, 2005). Given the growing interest in out-of-class learning contexts, Benson (2011) made a case for LLBC to become an independent area of enquiry within SLA. LLBC is indeed “emerging as a field ripe for the development of new research agendas” (Reinders & Benson, 2017, p. 561), and some edited volumes have been recently published in this area (Benson & Reinders, 2011; Dressman & Sadler, 2020; Nunan & Richards, 2015; Reinders et al., 2022).

Benson (2011, p. 12-13) explains that LLBC “is centrally concerned with locations for language learning other than the classroom” and it thus encompasses a vast range of settings that foster what has been referred to as “out-of-class”, “extracurricular”, “in the wild”, “naturalistic”, “informal”, “non-formal”, “self-instructed”, “non-instructed”, “independent”, or “self-regulated” learning, among other denominations. As Benson (2011) notes, these adjectives point to four main different dimensions: location, level of formality, pedagogy, and locus of control. Further, some of these adjectives are difficult to define. For instance, Dressman and Sadler (2020, p. 4) use the term *informal* language learning to refer to “any activities taken consciously or unconsciously by a learner outside of formal instruction that lead to an increase in the learner’s ability to communicate in a second (or other, non-native) language”. However, the European Commission (2001, p. 32), in the context of lifelong learning, notes that informal learning “may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or “incidental”/random)”. Eraut (2000) argues that the adjective “informal” may be confusing because it can also refer to aspects such as dress code, behaviour, language register, etc. More broadly, Livingstone (2006, p. 211) defines informal learning as “anything people do to gain knowledge, skill or understanding from learning about their health or hobbies, unpaid or paid work, or anything else that interests them outside of organized courses”. The latter definition highlights a crucial aspect of informal learning as will be used in this study, which is the strong connection that exists between learning and the personal world of the learner (Ros i Solé, 2016).

In what follows, I offer a brief overview of how different conversational or interactive settings known to foster informal language learning have been researched. Due to space limitations, I have excluded informal listening and reading activities (e.g., consuming films, media, music, books, and other cultural products) which do not necessarily involve learners' social interaction. Thus, I focus on digital language learning environments (2.1.1), immersion experiences abroad (2.1.2), and tandem learning partnerships (2.1.3). Tandem learning deserves its own section because of its parallels with LCs: both settings involve regularly scheduled meetings purposefully organised for language practice, thus offering opportunities for face-to-face "target language" interaction for learners who are not necessarily in a context of language immersion. The concept of "target language" is problematic: Risager (2007, p. 106) critiques the term for invoking only "the language in its capacity as a first language". Like her, this study advocates for a broader and more inclusive perspective of the target language as first, second and foreign language. Finally, the literature dealing specifically with LCs will be reviewed separately in 2.2, as this is the environment around which this study revolves.

2.1.1 Digital language learning environments

The most prolific area of investigation in LLBC in the 21st century focuses on the opportunities that new technologies offer for language learning. There are several international academic journals specialised in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (e.g., *Language Learning and Technology*, *ReCALL*, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching*, *CALICO Journal*), as well as a number of annual international conferences (e.g., CALICO, EUROCALL, GloCALL, PPTELL, WorldCALL). Some terms and acronyms which have become widely used in this area—yet limited to the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL)—are *extramural English*, coined by Sundqvist (2009); the acronym OILE (online informal learning of English) proposed by Toffoli and Sockett (2015); and Lee and Dressman's (2018) IDLE (informal digital learning of English). It is, in fact, noticeable that the amount of research within this area that is specific to EFL is disproportionate compared to other languages, although this is seldom recognised as a limitation in research outputs.

One of the digital interactive contexts which have attracted more research attention is gaming (Chik, 2014; Cornillie et al., 2012; García-Carbonell et al., 2001; Gee, 2003; Knight et al., 2020; Reinders, 2012; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012; Thorne et al., 2009). Knight et al. (2020) note that most research on gaming has focused mainly on its affordances for the development of language proficiency, thanks to the amount of contextualised and meaningful target language input, output and interaction involved both in and around gameplay (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). Game adepts, apart from strictly playing, also participate in “internet interest communities” (Thorne et al., 2009) or “affinity spaces” (Gee, 2004) where players assist each other with game rules, tips, and strategies. Following the social turn in SLA research (Block, 2003), Thorne et al. (2009) highlight that often the driving force behind language development in learners/players is precisely their desire to build social relationships within these online communities or affinity spaces. Through this lens, language development is a by-product of engaging in this leisure activity (Sokkett, 2014), very much linked to the personal interests and likings of the learner.

Regarding research limitations, Knight et al. (2020) question whether the positive relationship between informal gaming and language acquisition has been verified empirically, partly because “there is actually very little empirical evidence from gaming spaces that are purely informal” (Knight et al., 2020, p. 103)—that is, spaces with no teacher intervention whatsoever. Due to the challenges of collecting data in a systematic way from “purely learner-directed” environments, oftentimes the participants in these studies are “selected from a group of students [...] already participating in formal education. As a result, the degree to which their interaction in the game was player/ learner-directed is suspect” (Knight et al., 2020, p. 108). I would also add that the subjectivities and experiences of researchers as informal multilingual learners themselves remain unexposed, leaving a methodological gap which might be interesting to explore, as will be discussed later on in the chapter.

Furthermore, the fact that digital environments have gained so much attention in the literature should prompt reflection on what might be different, in terms of personal experience, in face-to-face encounters compared to virtual interactions. Montolío (2020) argues that conversational partners in face-to-face communication coordinate the use of their bodies intersubjectively in a way that is

not replicable in digital environments. A growing body of literature about this topic in the area of experimental social psychology conclude that face-to-face interactions involve more self-disclosure and are, therefore, more effective in building trust (Knop et al., 2016) and in promoting honesty (van Zant & Kray, 2014). Other studies focus on how individual levels of social anxiety determine the levels of communicative effectiveness and interpersonal connectedness that individuals feel in face-to-face as compared to virtual situations (Lundy & Drouin, 2016). There seems to be consensus amongst psychologists in suggesting that individuals with high levels of social anxiety may perform significantly better in online platforms. It is commonly assumed as well that face-to-face encounters might provoke generally higher levels of initial anxiety in most people, which “may emanate from a desire to create a positive impression on the interaction partner, while simultaneously lacking the confidence or interpersonal efficacy to achieve one’s self-presentation goals” (Lundy & Drouin, 2016, p. 271). Adding to this, it is important to note that social anxiety, the perception of the self, and how others perceive us as social beings can be dramatically affected when the context is mediated by an additional language (Norton, 2000).

While psychologists are more concerned with individual wellbeing and defend offline time as quality time, SLA researchers seem more interested in demonstrating the potential of digital environments to enhance the development of language skills. There is no doubt that the learning opportunities that the Internet offers without the need for international travel are immense and extremely valuable. However, face-to-face encounters are intrinsic to human sociality and wellbeing (Montolío, 2020), and what happens when multilingual speakers voluntarily gather together to interact face-to-face within a physical shared space remains underexplored in SLA research. Such research might offer new perspectives on the embodied and lived experience of language learning and socialisation—not replicable within the medium of digital online communication—as well as new methodological avenues in a research field that has recently started to move beyond the classroom.

Next, I discuss a different LLBC context which does require international travel: that of immersion experiences abroad.

2.1.2 Immersion experiences abroad

Linguistic and cultural immersion abroad is often seen as the quintessential setting for naturalistic learning, or learning “in the wild”. For many, being able to communicate successfully when visiting or living in places where their target language is spoken represents the ultimate objective that justifies or motivates their learning. Being immersed in the target language is also seen as a sink or swim situation, and a breakthrough experience if one *really* wants to achieve fluency and native-like proficiency. As will be discussed later, some scholars have recently argued that this vision is often idealistic and informed by a monolingual bias which overlooks the multilingual realities of target language contexts (Diao & Trentman, 2021).

Language immersion experiences can take many forms, and it is often the consequence of voluntary or forced migration (Burns & Roberts, 2010; Conacher et al., 2014). Regarding temporary immersion experiences, however, study abroad is one of the settings that has attracted more research attention. Study abroad involves classroom learning as well as LLBC as learners navigate their everyday life in a new linguistic and cultural context. Jackson (2018) investigated how pedagogical intervention can enhance intercultural learning during study abroad. In that respect, some studies have shown that not all sojourners develop intercultural awareness while abroad, and in fact some may come back home with accentuated ethnocentric views about the Other (Alred & Byram, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Papatsiba, 2006). Thus, pedagogical intervention to promote reflexive practice before, during, and after study abroad becomes essential to increase the opportunities for intercultural development (Holmes et al., 2016). Kinginger (2013) explored the impact of learners’ identities in the study abroad experience, and how their identities develop as a result. She has also investigated the conditions that enhance language learning during study abroad (Kinger, 2011), highlighting learner’s engagement in local communities as a determining factor. In that respect, studies have found that, while abroad, learners often struggle to access opportunities to use their target language with native speakers outside of their language classes (Cotterall & Reinders, 2001; Trentman, 2013). Finally, Diao and Trentman (2021) focused on the multilingual turn (e.g., Ortega, 2013) in study abroad research and the need to make translanguaging practices more visible

(Canagarajah, 2013; Li, 2018), so as to overcome the monolingual ideologies that have dominated SLA. The multilingual turn and the concept of “translanguaging” (which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter [3.2]) focus on the multimodal nature of communication and how drawing on complex and hybrid linguistic repertoires (rather than named languages) represents a more natural and effective way to communicate.

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that study abroad represents a costly investment not everyone can afford. Only an elite minority of students in higher education around the world embark on this journey during their studies (Ortega, 2021). As Kubota (2016, p. 347) puts it, “[d]espite potential rewards, study abroad cannot escape gender, racial, geographical and socioeconomic inequalities”.

Another form of temporary immersion experience abroad is language tourism: a form of voluntary short stay outside one’s usual place of residence in which language learning constitutes a primary motivation for travelling (Iglesias, 2016). Language tourists may enrol in language classes as part of their stay (Phipps, 2007), or take up temporary or seasonal jobs to increase their exposure to the language and interaction with the host community (e.g., working as *au pairs*, in the hospitality industry, in summer camps, or doing an internship or volunteering work). Due to visa requirements and other international travel restrictions imposed on people in many parts of the world, language tourism is also affected by the inequalities mentioned by Kubota (2016) above.

In this section I have discussed immersion experiences which involve travel abroad. However, in superdiverse societies (Vertovec, 2007), people can build multilingual social networks with friends, housemates, or work colleagues who come from different horizons, and encounter and participate in multilingual practices in markets, restaurants, and local services (Blackledge & Creese, 2019; Blommaert, 2010). Therefore, the idea of language immersion could be expanded to include settings available on one’s doorstep which do not necessarily involve travelling to target language countries (Fenoulhet & Ros i Solé, 2011). These settings may include purposefully scheduled gatherings in which informal language practice is foregrounded, such as LCs or tandem learning partnerships, which I discuss next.

2.1.3 Tandem learning partnerships

Tandem learning is based on a partnership between two people who wish to learn or improve each other's languages. There are two dimensions that connect LCs with tandem learning, and which set them apart from any other LLBC setting: reciprocity, and the foregrounding of language as the *raison d'être* of the social gathering. People come together in tandem partnerships or LCs *because of* their multilingualism. In other social encounters where the learner's target language is used, the learner may be the only social actor looking at the communicative event from a language learning perspective. Both in LCs and in tandem partnerships, language practice and development is not a by-product, but the *agreed* purpose of these encounters, and the relational aspects of the encounter are grounded on the assumption that collaborative interaction will benefit everyone. As Woodin (2018, p. 12) notes, in other naturalistic contexts "the self/other two-way process of reciprocity is not automatically present", as the learner's interlocutors may not be interested in learning any particular language, nor indeed in supporting their learning.

Finding a language partner to practise a foreign language—either online, face-to-face, or via post—has been a popular way to look for opportunities to use one's languages. These partnerships have been well researched in the last two decades (Kennedy & Furlong, 2014; Lewis & Walker, 2003; Nishioka, 2014; Voller & Pickard, 1996; Woodin, 2013), especially in virtual environments (Appel, 1999; Darhower, 2008; Kötter, 2002; Lewis & Dowd, 2016; Little & Brammerts, 1996; Tian & Wang, 2010; Ushioda, 2000).

Stickler and Lewis (2008) trace the start of tandem exchange practices back to the 1960s, when it was mainly addressed to members of the military forces who needed to learn other European languages for strategic reasons. Tandem learning was used as a complementary activity on top of very intensive classroom learning based on the "direct method", very popular at the time. The direct method (Krause, 1916) was a language teaching method based on the instructor's use of the target language only in order to provide the learner with the immersion experience through which children acquire their first language.

For Stickler and Lewis (2008, p. 238), the aims of tandem learning partners are usually threefold: “(1) learning each other’s mother tongue; (2) learning about each other; and (3) learning more about the culture to which each of them belongs”. According to Little and Brammerts (1996, p. 11), a successful tandem partnership is characterised by observing two principles: reciprocity, as “tandem learners support one another equally”, and learner autonomy, as “tandem partners are responsible for their own learning”. Tandem learning is claimed to be a form of independent, autonomous learning, promoting the development of much needed autonomous learning skills and strategies (Lewis & Walker, 2003). Although this might be true, on the other hand, it is also argued that learner autonomy is an essential prerequisite for a tandem partnership to be successful (Appel, 1999; Kötter, 2002).

It is often claimed that “tandem partners are experts in their own language and culture” (Little & Brammerts, 1996, p. 11) or “expert informants on their own language and culture” (Stickler & Lewis, 2008, p. 238), but these assertions seem problematic. Woodin (2018) nuances this use of “expert” by saying that, although tandem partners might be expert *users* of their mother tongue, they are not expert *knowers* of the structures and forms of that language. Furthermore, Deborah Cameron (2012) highlighted the widespread deceptive belief that being a native speaker makes you an expert informant of your language and culture. Cameron suggested that to believe that native speakers are experts on their mother tongue(s) is like saying that all parents are experts on child-raising. Thus, this area of research needs theoretical approaches which recognise the complexities and idiosyncrasies of native speakerism, and the notion of language and cultural realities as socially-constructed practices which are negotiated in interaction rather than “owned” (Holliday, 2011; Holmes, 2014; Kramsch, 2013; Risager, 2006, 2007). These theoretical approaches will be discussed in the next chapter (3.4).

In addition, it is commonly assumed in the literature about tandem learning that the languages involved in the partnership ought to be each other’s mother tongue (e.g., Lewis & O’Dowd, 2016). However, inasmuch as there are highly competent and effective non-native language teachers (cf. Braine, 1999), similarly there must be very successful and productive tandem partnerships involving proficient non-native language users. One only needs to think about English as a lingua franca and

the millions of people in the world who are not considered native speakers of English, but can speak it fluently and are intercultural enough to discuss cultural topics with a similar level of confidence. Moreover, as Sharifian and Jamarani (2013, p. 15) point out, “[o]ften, assigning the status of ‘native speaker’ is based on nonlinguistic factors, such as race, color of skin, place of birth, first name, surname, etc.”, while identity factors also play an important role in identifying oneself as native or non-native (these concepts will be further critiqued and problematised in 3.3).

Woodin (2013) and Liddicoat and Tudini (2013) explore the native speaker’s role in dyadic conversations between tandem learners. The authors conceive the meaning of “native speaker” (NS) as one of the many identities that one can manifest in communication (Sato, 2009). Liddicoat and Tudini (2013) focus on the “didactic voice” often used by the NS when they give feedback to the non-native speaker (NNS) in a teacherly manner, thereby creating asymmetries of power in the interaction. Woodin (2013) explains how in discussions about word meaning in dyadic conversations between NS and NNS one’s perspective needs to be relativized in order to understand the other’s understanding of a word. This can be an important step towards becoming an intercultural speaker (Byram, 1997). While the NS usually seems to hold ownership over linguistic forms, the conversations analysed in Woodin’s study show that this ownership is often not conceded or claimed when it comes to the semantics of a word: “it is easier to mark oneself as native speaker when the issue is syntactic (grammatical ‘error’) as opposed to being semantic/meaning-based” (Woodin, 2013, p. 296).

Many scholars have emphasised the positive impact of participating in tandem partnerships on intercultural learning (Brammerts, 1995; Kennedy & Furlong, 2014; Lewis & O’Dowd, 2016; Woodin, 2010, 2013, 2018). However, some of this research risks falling into the essentialist discourse trap: the complexities of “culture” are not considered and cultures are conceived as contained within national boundaries (Holliday, 2016). More research attending to the socially-constructed nature of cultural practices and the experience of interculturality from a non-essentialist perspective is needed.

Stickler and Lewis (2008) drew on Rebecca Oxford's model on language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990) to identify the most commonly used collaborative learning strategies among the participants in an e-mail tandem exchange. They found that Oxford (1990) did not develop a comprehensible description of *social* strategies, which happened to be the most prevalent type of strategies used by the participants in their data. These included asking personal questions, offering unsolicited information, thanking or apologising, and using greetings and social niceties (Stickler & Lewis, 2008, p 252). These seem essential social and interpersonal strategies to build mutual trust in learning partnerships. Additionally, it would be interesting to analyse the experience and management of affectivities (Ros i Solé, 2016) in these informal language exchange contexts, and this might be easier to do in face-to-face environments such as language cafés.

In their systematic review of the literature in online intercultural exchange (OIE), Lewis and O'Dowd (2016, p. 48) conclude that "asynchronous, text-based communication has remained a staple of OIE from the 1990s to the present day". Their corpus of 54 OIE studies included only six where synchronous video communication tools (e.g., Skype) were used, showing that the popularity of this medium in contemporary societies is underrepresented in the literature. One reason might be that data collection in informal face-to-face or video-based interactions is less straight-forward and more intrusive, and the data analysis requires the employment of complex, multimodal approaches (Lewis & O'Dowd, 2016). In fact, as mentioned by Knight et al. (2020) in relation to digital learning environments, it is noticeable that much of the data used in studies on tandem learning come from activities which are part of an instructed programme, drawing on some sort of pedagogical intervention by the teacher-researchers (e.g., Kennedy & Furlong, 2014). The authors maintain thus a greater control and agency over their participant recruitment and data collection processes. When it comes to informal spaces for language learning available "in the wild", researchers need to overcome a number of methodological and ethical challenges. These might be some of the reasons why studies on face-to-face and self-managed spaces for language socialisation outside the classroom are so scarce.

Thus, although the trend indicates a shift of focus from formal to informal settings—taking into account the personal world of language learners (Ros i Solé,

2016)—research on learning contexts outside of formal education remains limited (Wang & Mercer, 2021). Furthermore, even when moving outside of the classroom to investigate language use and exposure in naturalistic or “real life” settings, researchers tend to recruit classroom students; in other words, research participants rarely include other multilingual profiles (Knight et al., 2020; Reinders & Benson, 2017).

Having reviewed the literature on LLBC, with particular attention to research on tandem learning, I now present an overview of the studies which have been conducted on different LCs around the world.

2.2 Previous research on language cafés

Within the growing body of LLBC research, LCs are a social language learning environment which has received relatively little research attention if compared with technology-enhanced environments, despite their increasing popularity around the world, and despite them not being a new phenomenon. In the current era of virtual socialisation (particularly intensified by the global pandemic of COVID-19), face-to-face gatherings for spontaneous, informal conversations seem to be becoming a “vintage” communicative event (Montolío, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, LCs are advertised as language-focused events where the practice of a specific language (or languages) in social and informal ways is foregrounded. As opposed to other activities where language use or learning happens as a by-product, what brings LC participants together is precisely the language(s) they want to speak, learn, or socialise in. This is a commonality with tandem learning.

Although the origins of LCs are unknown, they are reminiscent of the “coffee culture” and the traditional view of cafés as social, artistic, and intellectual hubs (Davis & Holdom, 2009; Holliday, 2011). The use of pubs and cafés to meet and converse with like-minded strangers is reminiscent of the intellectual cafés that thrived in many parts of Europe, giving rise to the famous “tertulias” in Spain and Portugal (also popular in Latin America); the “Stammtisch” in Germany; the “clubs” in England; the “salons” in 18th century France; or the Viennese coffee house culture in Austria. These consisted of informal gatherings of the writers, artists,

and avant-garde intellectuals of the time, who would regularly sit around a table in their favourite bar or café to discuss political and philosophical issues.

Some research has been conducted on a particular type of LCs in Nordic countries (Jansson, 2021; Johnston, 2018; Kunitz & Jansson, 2021). These LCs are informal settings “designed to promote the migrants’ integration process within the local community” (Kunitz & Jansson, 2021, p. 28). Thus, language learning in these LCs has a very specific aim. The events are organised by non-profit organisations, such as libraries and churches, and run by volunteers, who are native or proficient speakers of the local language and often provide “teaching activities focusing on grammar and vocabulary” (Kunitz & Jansson, 2021, p. 28). Although this type of LCs can be found in other parts of the world (for instance, Phipps [2018] mentions the existence of such events in Scotland), to my knowledge, published research has hitherto focused on the Nordic region only. The specific aim of these LCs to help migrants learn the local language in order to facilitate their process of integration in the local community sets them apart from the type of LCs concerned in this study, which have in common the following features: they focus on languages which are not dominant in the local community, and they are self-managed by participants, without any teaching intervention from organisers.

Considering the research literature on LCs that share the above features, most of the studies published in English have been conducted in China, where “English corners” are very popular, and in Japan, where a growing number of universities have dedicated built-in facilities for informal language socialisation among local and international students (some examples will be discussed below). To my knowledge, Balçıkanlı (2017) is the only study published in English about a LC from a different part of the world, reporting on an English café in Turkey. I am yet to find any LC studies published in the other languages that I can read, or conducted in contexts which prioritise languages other than English as a foreign/second language (EFL). One example of such research—although unpublished and ongoing—is Hannah King’s doctoral study on a Spanish LC in London. With a focus on sociolinguistics and conversation analysis, King studies the ways in which participants use talk about space and place to co-construct their transnational identities and their belonging to this international group of Spanish speakers.

2.2.1 LCs in the Chinese context

The national pursuit of learning English in China over the last three decades has contributed to the emergence of the so-called “English Corners”, characterised by “ad-hoc, relatively unorganised gatherings of people, who meet together on usually a weekly basis in a public place or inside the confines of a university, to practice speaking English” (Kellaway, 2013). They are free of charge, voluntary, and might be “spontaneously formed or purposefully organised” (Su & Wu, 2009). The most spontaneous ones take place in the open air (in parks or squares), where passers-by can join the conversation groups. English corners have been described as “the best examples of learner independence” in China (Martyn & Voller, 1995, p. 3, as cited in Gao, 2007, p. 260), a “characteristically Chinese approach to informal practice” (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002, p. 60), and a “curiously Chinese thing” (Kellaway, 2013), similar to other informal gatherings that happen in large cities, where people exercise or dance together in the street.

English corners typically involve people of all ages and professional backgrounds. Some are students, others are adults who use English at work or who are learning for leisure, and a minority are foreigners. The chance to interact face-to-face with foreigners is seized by many Chinese learners eager to practice English with “native” or proficient speakers: “English-speaking visitors who chance upon an English Corner will quickly be surrounded by eager conversationalists” (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002, pp. 60-61). Foreigners represent a rare opportunity to engage in real-life “authentic” conversation, which is what many seek in the English corner (Gao, 2012; Gao, 2007). In fact, the higher the number of foreigners that attend, the more popular an English corner becomes (Su & Wu, 2009).

Given how little research knowledge there is about the phenomenon of English corners, much of the enquiry conducted to date has focused on attempting to theorise broadly what goes on in these events by gathering participants’ perspectives (e.g. Gao, 2007; Kellaway, 2013; Su & Wu, 2009).

Su and Wu (2009) conducted a small scale study based on questionnaires and interviews to look into the distinctive features of the most popular English corner in Beijing. They concluded that, apart from its advantageous location, the reasons for the success of this English corner were that it welcomed people from all ages,

levels of proficiency, educational backgrounds, and occupations; more importantly, it was also attended by a number of foreigners from English-speaking countries.

Kellaway (2013) writes from his perspective as a foreigner who first attended an English corner in China “because [he was] new to the city and the English Corner was an excellent repository of information about the city, for example ‘where can I get my shoes repaired?’”. Kellaway opines that the voices of foreign (proficient English speaker) attendees also need to be heard.

Xuesong Gao (2007, 2009) studied participant experiences of an “English club” which took place at a European-style café in a city in mainland China. English clubs are “smaller in size in comparison with traditional English corners but retaining the feature of non-native speaker dominance” (Gao, 2007, p. 26). Drawing on participants’ spontaneous “reflective experiential accounts” in a webforum, Gao (2007, p. 263) analysed the ways in which these online comments helped to construct “a grand narrative of the club as if it were to be shared by all past, present, and future participants”. These accounts revealed perceptions of the English club as a place for supportive peer-learning, self-assertion, and changes in self-perception. Moreover, participants’ remarks suggested that the quality of human relationships forged in the LC overrode the opportunities for language learning, meaning that “English-learning experiences at the club were inseparable from the process of socialization and mutual belonging” (Gao, 2007, p. 264). Thus, Gao (2009) argued for a holistic, humanistic approach to learning, which sees learners as complex human beings and not “simply” students, and where language learning encompasses growth as individuals and not just the acquisition of instrumental skills.

Liu (2013) used quantitative data from questionnaires to study the development of students’ self-efficacy and speaking skills as a result of participating in a Chinese university “English bar”, a self-access centre on campus inspired in the traditional public English corners. An interesting feature not mentioned in other studies is the English-only policing measures put in place in this English bar to guarantee the desired linguistic immersion experience.

Shuang Gao (2012, 2016) condemns individual and uncritical perspectives on learner agency, which fail to see the underlying neoliberal mechanisms of

constraint, perpetuating English as “a social stratifier” in China, and “a middle-class stylistic resource being actively pursued, at economic and cultural cost” (Gao, 2016, p. 39). She illustrates the emergence of the neoliberal imperative and “national craze towards English” in China with a powerful example: the transformation of the touristic city of Yangshuo into a place for domestic language tourism. As part of its marketing strategy, the city has designated itself as “the biggest English corner in China”, has mobilised English-speaking foreigners to work in the city, and has been attracting Chinese learners of English from all around the country with the promise of an immersion experience without the need to travel abroad. Gao (2016) illustrates how Chinese learners’ eagerness to speak to foreigners in public spaces in the city of Yangshuo is sometimes met with resistance from some of these foreigners, who feel tired of being used and would rather be paid for their linguistic assistance. Gao (2016, p. 415) proposes the term *interactional straining* for “the reflexive and strategic manipulation of interactional contents and/or structure so as to establish oneself as (pass for) a legitimate interlocutor”. Such strategies would include, for instance, purposefully going to a bar to speak with solo travellers, or approaching them with a group of friends so as to facilitate the flow of the conversation. In sum, Gao’s critical perspective on the phenomenon of Chinese English corners (and Chinese enthusiasm for learning English) as underpinned by neoliberal constraints represents a much needed research contribution, as it helps to situate the phenomenon in its broader socio-political context.

2.2.2 LCs in the Japanese higher education context

So far, I have conceptualised LCs as a group of people, rather than a place or a venue. With the exception of the on-campus “English bar” in Liu’s (2013) study, the English corners featured in the literature involved people gathering in places with a different primary function (e.g., parks, pubs, cafés, or public squares). In such an understanding, a LC is a metaphorical space that only becomes real as individuals come together and start interacting with each other. If nobody turns up for the event, or if there is only one attendant, there is no LC. It is in fact a conversation, and not just a place, that one enters in order to participate in a LC.

In the Japanese higher education context, however, the concept of LC represents a space which has been built for the purpose of language practice, analogous to a

self-access centre. In recent years, a number of Japanese universities have followed this trend and invested in such self-access facilities or language cafés (mainly English cafés) because:

First, they [language cafés] offer a solution for learners who have difficulty finding opportunities to practice their target language in their home country. Second, they provide international exchange students in study abroad contexts with possibilities for integrating into the host society and, subsequently, opportunities to use their target language. SLLSs [social language learning spaces] serve as places where these groups can come together in order to learn with and from one another. (Murray & Fujishima, 2016, p. 2)

Albeit informal, these self-access centres have opening times, and the conversations and activities that take place in them are facilitated by language assistants specifically hired to do this job. For instance, in some cases, proficient speakers of English are paid to act as conversation partners (e.g., Murray & Fujishima, 2016). Some examples of LCs from different Japanese universities are “the Plurilingual Lounge” in Keio University, the English, French, Chinese and Japanese Lounges in Nagoya University, the “English Support Lounge” in Yokkaichi University, the “World Plaza” in Nanzan University, the “L-Café” in Okayama University, and the “English Lounge” in Kanda University of International Studies (Mynard et al., 2020).

Research in these LCs has been conducted by scholars working at the host universities as a way to gather evidence to support the viability of these costly centres. Given that institutional investment is involved, some scholars approach the research almost from a commercial point of view. The focus is on improving the effectiveness of the venue so that more students will use it and benefit from it. This is clearly reflected, for instance, in one of the research questions in Kurokawa et al. (2013, p. 116), namely: “What needs to be done to ensure the Lounge’s success and improve it further?”. Such research goals are consistent with a view of LCs in purely instrumental terms as “an additional approach to existing methods of language mastery” (p. 113). This perspective marks a contrast with X. Gao’s (2009) afore-mentioned humanistic approach to language socialisation as involving personal growth.

Both Murray and Fujishima (2016) and Mynard et al. (2020) have conducted longitudinal studies as scholars and teachers working in the LCs of their respective universities. Both studies share a theoretical framework drawing on an ecological approach to research (e.g., van Lier, 2004), complexity theory (Davis & Sumara, 2006, 2008), communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), and on theories of place and space from human geography (e.g., Cresswell, 2004).

Framed as a narrative enquiry, Murray and Fujishima (2016) collated a series of narratives written by different stakeholders in the L-Café at Okayama University, including administrators, teachers, and students. Drawing on theories of place and space, and complex dynamic systems theory, in the last chapter of the book they offer a brief thematic analysis of the stories collated. They focus on understanding the complex social dynamics and affordances in these environments (both for language and personal development) in order to better support their growth and efficacy as learning spaces for their university students. They conclude that, for learners willing to step out of their comfort zone, the LC “appears to have unprecedented affordances for linguistic, intellectual and personal development” (Murray & Fujishima, 2016, p. 146). In a different study (Murray et al., 2017), they focused on aspects of participant entry, access, and belonging in this same social learning environment, and found that different affective entry boundaries acted as an “invisible fence” preventing people from becoming members of the L-Café.

Mynard et al. (2020) report on a comprehensive case study of the English Lounge in Kanda University of International Studies. The study focuses on beliefs, membership and identity as individual psychological phenomena that affect how people participate (or refrain from participating) in the learning space. The researchers’ ultimate goal is to promote student wellbeing, and help students become more autonomous in their learning. Thus, they investigate the effectiveness of the English Lounge in promoting that goal. This way, their research aligns with the stated mission of the university self-access learning centre: to “foster life-long learner autonomy as an international community by empowering learners to engage in reflective practice and take charge of their language learning”. Although there were speakers of other languages among the users of the self-access centre, the researchers adopt a monolingual approach by focusing on English only. Mynard et al. (2020) found that the English Café fostered

opportunities to develop speaking confidence; to develop a sense of belonging to a community; to be exposed to native peer role models; to project new identities; and to act as role models to other learners. All of these affordances are thought to contribute to sustaining learning motivation over time.

Both Murray and Fujishima (2016) and Mynard et al. (2020) highlight the value of an ecological approach to research which acknowledges the contextual complexities and interrelations within the LC, and between the LC and other learning environments. These researchers conceptualise the LCs as “social spaces for language learning”. However, this term does not acknowledge the reciprocity dimension in these environments, which is what differentiates them from any other social space for language learning (Woodin, 2018).

2.2.3 An English café in Turkey

Balçıklı (2017) investigated yet another type of LC in Turkey. A difference in relation to other LCs in the literature is that the “English café” in Balçıklı’s study counted on the presence of coordinators who provided some structure and facilitated the conversation, for instance, by planning ahead the topic for each meeting. Also, despite this English café being advertised and open to newcomers, the researcher seemed to avoid the question of membership fluidity by presenting this community of practice as a rather static group of regular attendees (“they had spent almost two years participating in the meetings at the EC [English Café]”, p. 65).

Through the analysis of data collected through observations, interviews, and participant learning histories, Balçıklı (2017) shows how the English café was perceived as a place (1) to practise English, (2) to socialise, (3) to exchange knowledge and life experiences, (4) to learn from others and (5) a safe place to take risks and deal with emotions through peer support. In relation to (4) and (5), the author does not distinguish between interactions among peer learners and interactions which involve highly proficient speakers.

After this overview of current trends within research on LLBC, and LCs more specifically, I now summarise the themes and gaps that emerged from this literature review.

2.3 Themes emerging from the reviewed literature

Some gaps in the literature can be identified as a result of this review. The first and most obvious one is that LCs remain an under-investigated environment in LLBC research, particularly those self-organised by members of the public and with no links to educational institutions.

Second, research on LLBC, and on LCs in particular, is dominated by EFL. Due to the socioeconomic status of English as the global language which has been associated with hegemony and cultural imperialism (Sokkett, 2014), some scholars argue that research findings from EFL contexts might not apply to other language contexts, for instance, when it comes to learning motivations (Duff, 2017). As S. Gao (2012, p. 38) puts it, the success of English corners in China is informed by a general view of English competence as symbolic capital and “a promise of upward social mobility”. That might not be the case with foreign languages in the UK (Coffey, 2011; Stollhans & Speicher, 2019): given the declining numbers in language learning uptake at school (Tinsley & Board, 2017), it seems that for proficient speakers of English learning additional languages might not be perceived as a gatekeeper for social mobility, or even a requirement to pursue a successful international career (Coffey, 2011). Languages, albeit desirable, are not perceived as an essential skill for employability. Graduate jobs in international environments do not depend on command of languages other than English either, thanks to the current times of linguistic imperialism (Canagarajah, 1999; Phillipson, 2009). Why, then, bother to learn other languages? The field needs new insights regarding social spaces for language learning from the perspective of learners interested in languages other than English.

Third, methodologically, this topic has never been approached from a multilingual perspective and the positioning of the researchers as multilingual learners themselves. Researchers tend to position themselves as detached observers in the field, and their subjectivities as multilingual speakers themselves remain absent from their research reports. However, how researchers’ multilingual subjectivities play out in social research has increasingly become an area of investigation (Holmes et al., 2022). When, how, and for what purposes do multilingual researchers turn to their different linguistic resources? What are the opportunities

and challenges of drawing on researchers' subjectivities and experiences as language learners when researching language socialisation? How can researchers open up about multilingual research processes, and why does it matter? As will be discussed in Chapter 4 (4.4.5), a reflexive approach with a *researching multilingually perspective* (Holmes et al., 2013, 2016) may help to address these questions and offer transparency regarding the impact that multilingual subjectivities—of the researcher and the researched—have on all phases of the research: from the choice of topic, to planning data collection, and the representation of research outcomes.

Fourth, LCs tend to be presented in the literature as instrumental to improve language proficiency, while other motivations for participating in these events tend to be ignored. This positioning echoes Firth and Wagner's (1997) and X. Gao's (2009) remarks about researchers focusing on participants' *learner* identity only, while ignoring all other relevant categories. Similarly, Piller (2002, p. 180) contends that "it seems inappropriate to treat L2 [second language] users as perpetual learners". Looking for speakers of a particular language in one's local area does not necessarily imply the aim of improving one's linguistic skills. In the study of social spaces for language learning, the voices of those who are already proficient speakers remain to be explored.

Fifth, the development of intercultural competence is often treated as an assumed outcome of multilingual encounters, but how participants experience interculturality in LCs is yet to be explored. In terms of intercultural learning, both "native" and "non-native" speakers may be equally influenced by these encounters; therefore, again, voices other than those of language learners ought to be heard. Consistent with non-essentialist views of culture (Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 2011), intercultural research in LLBC should avoid looking at native speakers as "experts" or providers of knowledge about "a language" and "a culture" which others are trying to acquire. Learning is much more than knowledge building, and language and culture are emergent practices, rather than mere codes with norms to be acquired (Kramsch, 2021). Kellaway (2013) talks about his initial interest in English Corners as a way to get practical information from locals about the city he had just moved to, and Balçıkanlı (2017) highlights the value of LCs as spaces to exchange knowledge and life experiences and to learn from others. This is different

from considering others as representatives of their “national cultures”, as these participants focus instead on individual personal trajectories and their local knowledge. Thus, exploring the experience of interculturality in LCs from a non-essentialist perspective represents a new and worthwhile research avenue.

Finally, most of these studies do not make explicit the researcher’s understanding of *language*. In many cases, language is conceptualised from a monolingual perspective as a code to be acquired, and speaking languages as a skill, rather than a lived and situated experience. New theoretical advances point towards a multilingual—or *translingual*—turn in applied linguistics (e.g., Canagarajah, 2013; García & Li, 2014; Li, 2018; Trentman, 2021), and highlight the transformative power of adding a new language into someone’s life (e.g., Kramsch, 2009; Ros i Solé, 2016). How the LCs can contribute to such transformations (such as becoming more self-aware of multilingual subjectivities and intercultural understandings) can be further explored. As opposed to identifying outcomes (in terms of increased language proficiency or intercultural skills, attitudes and knowledge), a new theoretical approach to researching this topic would attempt to understand how languages are *lived* in LCs (rather than learned or acquired). Throughout this thesis I make the underlying assumption that language is more than a code (Kramsch, 2021) and that language learning is much more than the development of skills (see 3.2).

Summary of Chapter 2 and research questions

This chapter presented an overview of the current state of the research on LLBC, with particular attention to the extant literature on social spaces for language learning and socialisation, such as tandem partnerships and LCs.

The review has highlighted that, to date, LCs are an underexplored phenomenon in the literature, particularly when it comes to languages other than English. Thus, the emerging research questions remain quite broad to allow for a holistic approach, and these are:

1. *How do participants co-construct language learning and multilingual socialisation in the ecologies of LCs?*
Subquestion: What affordances and challenges do participants perceive in this environment?

2. *How do participants experience their multilingual identities in the LCs?*
3. *How do participants experience interculturality in the LCs?*

While holistic in perspective, the questions touch upon three main interrelated themes that emerged from the literature review: the experience of language learning and multilingual socialisation, the experience of multilingual identities, and the experience of interculturality. These themes are seen as highly interrelated and interdependent.

The first question focuses on participants' lived experiences of using and socialising in different languages in the LCs. Rather than looking at what participants learn in LCs, it focuses on the experience of learning through language socialisation. Specifically, it explores the ecologies of LCs and analyses how language learning and multilingual socialisation emerges as participants co-construct the environment by interacting with each other. In doing so, it invites an ecological approach (Kramsch, 2002; Palfreyman, 2014; van Lier, 2004) to look at the interrelationships among different elements within the environment, as well as the interrelationships between the LCs and the broader ecologies for language learning in which they are nested. Thus, this first research question seeks to contextualise what goes on in the LCs, and establishes the ground from which to build up the answers to the next two questions.

The second question focuses on the role of participants' multilingual identities in the LC experience. This particular focus on multilingual identities is motivated by the idea that being aware of one's multilingual subjectivities can have a positive impact on learners' interest and investment in learning additional languages (Fisher et al., 2020). I am interested in how multilingual identities emerge as participants interact with one another in the LCs, and whether the LC experience leads to participants' (re)construction of selves as multilingual speakers (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

The third question examines the role of interculturality in participants' LC experiences. I do not take intercultural development for granted; instead, with this question I seek to investigate whether participants frame the LCs as an intercultural experience and, if so, the ways in which they make sense of the intercultural aspects of these multilingual encounters.

In the next chapter, I present the theoretical framework that underpins the study's conceptual approach to these research questions. This theoretical framework also sets the study apart from previous studies in the field. Thus, Chapter 3 elaborates on how the study aims to contribute to knowledge.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical underpinnings that have informed the development of this study. First, I examine the ecological approach to language research (3.1), and how it supports my understanding of key constructs in the study, such as “language” and “learning”. The ecological approach offers a lens from which to look at the complexity and interdependence of different elements in the LC environment. This approach has been used by other scholars investigating language learning beyond the classroom (e.g., Murray & Fujishima, 2016; Mynard et al., 2020) in order to underscore the role of context in shaping the learning experience. I then discuss the key theoretical constructs which, in line with my research questions, shape the focus of the study: languaging and translanguaging (3.2), multilingual identities (3.3), and interculturality (3.4).

3.1 An ecological approach to language research

Much of SLA research has focused on the psychology of the learner, that is, on what goes on in the minds of individual learners when trying to acquire language (van Lier, 2004; Kramsch, 2009). Learning has traditionally been regarded as an individual endeavour, and language as a code to be acquired in a linear fashion. Key concepts in learning such as motivation, agency, identity, and autonomy have been studied as individual psychological characteristics of the learner. Instead, an ecological approach focuses investigation on the role of context, and emphasises the complex interrelatedness of language use, participants and the environment (Kramsch, 2002; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008; van Lier, 2004). Such an approach centres on what happens between individuals, rather than inside their brains. It entails both a way of researching, and a way of conceptualising all of the above-mentioned key concepts (as well as *language* and *learning*) as relational and emergent, or co-constructed, in social interaction.

Although the ecological approach borrows from the sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978), as reflected in the centrality both

approaches place on the role of context and social interaction in learning, they also differ in a number of ways. The goal of sociocultural theories of learning is “to explicate the relationships between mental functioning, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historical situations in which this functioning occurs, on the other” (Wertsch et al., 1995, p. 3). In that sense, these theories align themselves with (social) constructivism in that they focus on the internalisation processes that occur *within* the individual as a result of their interaction with the world. The central construct in sociocultural theory is *mediation*: it is believed that learning processes are mediated through tools and artefacts, through interaction, and through the use of signs. Following from this, language is considered the most productive mediational tool that humans use for the construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). However, van Lier (2004) argues that Vygotsky failed to consider language as more than a tool and a system with rules, while the ecological approach provides “a consistent theory of language within a theory of semiotics, clarifying the notion of sign, and emphasizing the dialogical nature of meaning” (van Lier, 2004, p. 21). Furthermore, the ecological approach has a more encompassing view of context which includes the physical, the social, and the symbolic world, besides the cultural and historical—which is the focus in Vygotsky’s theories. In that sense, the ecological approach aligns with social constructionism (Berger & Luckman, 1966), in that it is interested not just in what happens within the individual’s mind, but *between* people as they join together and interact with one another and the social world. Social constructionism looks at the role of mediational artefacts to think with (e.g., language), but more crucially at how people shape them, or design and create their own, as part of their living in society. Humans shape society and are shaped by society (Berger and Luckman, 1966).

As Sfard (1998) points out, learning has been conceptualised around two main metaphors depending on different epistemologies: learning as *acquisition*, and learning as *participation*. The acquisition metaphor aligns with the structuralist and cognitivist approach which views the brain as a computational device which is able to produce output after processing input successfully. In such an understanding, language is a code or a static system with rules that can be stored in the brain. The participation metaphor, on the other hand, encapsulates the sociocultural notion of learning as the “process of becoming a member of a certain

community” (Sfard, 1998, p. 6). From this viewpoint, language is a practice used to establish and maintain ecological relationships. Risager (2006) asserts that, while it may be useful to give language the shape of a system—for pedagogical purposes, for instance—what really exists is language practice, or what people say. Adopting an ecological approach means moving away from the reified view of language as words, sentences and rules, and, instead, thinking of language as relational, that is, as emergent from human relations which involve thought, action, power, and both physical and sociohistorical contexts (van Lier, 2000). To this end, Scollon and Scollon (2001) argue that the most important function of language is not to convey information, as one may be tempted to think, but to establish and maintain relationships.

Thus, the ecological approach views language learning as much more than the acquisition of skills for decoding, encoding, or information exchange (Kramsch, 2009, 2021; Phipps, 2007, 2019; Ros i Solé, 2016). In her book *Language as Symbolic Power* (2021), Kramsch focuses on the power of language as discourse. She defines symbolic power as “the power to construct social reality by creating and using symbols that give meaning to the social world” (Kramsch, 2021, p. 5). She insists that language is not merely a code or a tool for information exchange, but a meaning-making system that “both enables and limits what we can say and think; it structures and is structured by other people’s speech and thought, and, ultimately, their actions” (p. 8). Drawing on Bourdieu (1991), Kramsch reminds that “[u]tterances [...] are a way of exercising power through the use of linguistic symbols”; in other words, utterances have “mobilizing effects” or the “ability to affect, move and motivate people” (Kramsch, 2021, p. 6). In her understanding, language educators still nowadays place the focus mainly on how to make oneself understood in another language, neglecting the symbolic aspects of language (or discourse), which have to do with “the capacity to make yourself listened to, taken seriously, respected and valued” (p. 11).

An ecological way of thinking about language phenomena is influenced by complexity theory and complex dynamic systems in the natural sciences. In her ground-breaking paper, Larsen-Freeman (1997) wrote about the potential of chaos/complexity theory to offer new lenses from which to study SLA phenomena. The main premise is that language, and the processes involved in learning it, are

complex systems which cannot be understood by studying its elements independently, “since the behaviour of the whole emerges out of the interaction of its parts” (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, p. 143). While systems theory resonates with positivist epistemologies, Larsen-Freeman moved away from positivism by placing the focus on complexity as emergent. Many factors are at play and interact with one another to foment learning, and she argues that “no one of these by itself is a determining factor, the interaction of them, however, has a very profound effect” (p. 151). These ideas are related to two fundamental and interrelated concepts in ecological thinking: emergence and affordance.

3.1.1 Emergence

The notion of emergence refers to the “reorganisation of simple elements into a more complex system” (van Lier, 2004, p. 181). As Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008, p. 59) highlight, emergent complex dynamic systems are “more than the sum of its parts”, and “cannot be explained reductively through the activity of the component parts”. A common metaphor utilised to represent emergence within a complex dynamic system is the formation of an avalanche. One pebble on a hillside might start rolling and cause the rolling of other pebbles, which eventually might develop into an avalanche. However, it would be fallacious to point to this pebble as the cause of the landslide, since the landslide only occurs when pebbles and other elements in the hillside interact with each other in a certain way. “It is not the individual organism that shapes the environment, and it is not the environment that necessarily conditions the organism; rather, they are engaged dialectically in a mutually specifying choreography where, all at once, each specifies the other” (Davis and Sumara, 2008, p. 118). Van Lier translates these ideas to the relationship between learners and their environment as follows:

From an ecological perspective, the learner is immersed in an environment full of potential meanings. These meanings become available gradually as the learner acts and interacts within and with this environment. Learning is not a holus-bolus or piecemeal migration of meanings to the inside of the learner’s head, but rather the development of increasingly effective ways of dealing with the world and its meanings. (van Lier, 2000, p. 246)

Thus, from an ecological perspective, language development occurs as a result of meaningful participation in human events. LCs, together with all other learning contexts, are embedded in what Reinders and Benson (2017, p. 3) call the “social

ecologies” of language learning, which they define as “an interconnected web of learning opportunities” (p. 14). From this viewpoint, the dichotomy “in-class” versus “out-of-class” learning makes no sense (Benson, 2017, p. 136), as all learning settings are part of “nested systems” (Larsen-Freeman, 1997) that interact and shape one another.

Larsen-Freeman (1997) argues that it is very difficult to determine what constitutes learning, or how to determine that something has been learned. She critiques SLA research methods which rely on simple pre-test/post-test designs to measure language gain for limiting learning to target-like production, when “much learning can take place in the form of reduction of uncertainty in the system state without ever manifesting itself in production of a new form” (p. 158). And even when such measuring instruments are used, it is not possible to establish which individual variable led to language proficiency (that is, which pebble caused the landslide), as all variables overlap and interact with one another, and new components *emerge* from that interaction (van Lier, 2004). As Seliger (1984) puts it,

[w]hile many characteristics have been related correlationally to language achievement, we have no mechanism for deciding which of the phenomena described or reported to be carried out by the learner are in fact those that lead to language acquisition (Seliger, 1984, p. 27, as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 1997, p. 156).

Likewise, van Lier (2004, p. 4) notes that “[i]n language, grammar emerges from lexis (Bates & Goodman, 1999), symbols emerge from tools (Vygotsky, 1978), learning emerges from participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Language proficiency emerges from all these transformations”. Kramsch (2021, p. 4) reminds us that, from a semiotic point of view, symbols do not exist on their own, but “are always created and wielded by people who use them to address someone else”. In other words, symbolic meaning *emerges* only when symbols “interpellate people into interpreting them” (p. 4).

The notion of emergence, therefore, seems productive to capture the complexities of what happens in LCs as people interact with one another. Another concept that is fundamental to ecological thinking is that of affordance, which I discuss next.

3.1.2 Affordance

Affordances are relationships of possibility, or opportunities for action, which are perceived by individuals as they interact with their environment (van Lier, 2004). Individuals exercise their agency to decide whether or not to act upon those perceived affordances.

Within an ecosystem [...] a large number of influences are present in a partially chaotic, that is, unpredictable and uncontrolled way, and somehow among all the movement and interaction a social system, a complex order emerges. This order, which is dynamic rather than static, provides affordances for active participants in the setting, and learning emerges as part of affordances being picked up and exploited for further action. This view of situated learning is quite different from the assumptions of scientific research in which every input has an output, and every effect has an identifiable cause preceding it. (van Lier, 2004, p. 4)

The concept of *input* developed by Stephen Krashen in the 1980s alludes to the above-mentioned acquisition metaphor and the view of the brain as a computational storage device. Instead, van Lier replaces input with the concept of *affordance*, which he defines as *action potential*, which “emerges as we interact with the physical and social world” (van Lier, 2004, p. 92). An active learner is capable of perceiving the social affordances of uttering certain words or using certain cultural artefacts in a specific situation, and out of the responses of their interlocutors emerge other affordances for further action.

Drawing on this ecological perspective, Palfreyman (2014, p. 182) defines learner autonomy as:

the capacity for intentional use in context of a range of interacting resources toward learning goals. (...) The autonomous learner will identify in her environment resources relevant to her purposes, make effective use of these, be open to new affordances in her environment and be able to adapt to changing circumstances by seeking out new resources or adopting new ways of using them for learning.

In the context of face-to-face language exchange partnerships, Ahn (2016) draws on the notion of *affordance* (van Lier, 2004) and sociocultural theory (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978) as a theoretical framework to investigate learner agency. In particular, using conversation analysis, the author looks at the affordances perceived by language-exchange participants to create opportunities for learning about each other’s language and culture. Data excerpts from naturally-

occurring conversations between participants illustrate their agentic dispositions (in other words, their ability to perceive and act upon affordances) to ask each other questions about word meanings and usage, or about cultural facts about each other's countries. The study shows that learning is emergent in interaction. However, it fails to consider language learning beyond knowledge-building about a "target" language and culture (conceived of as monolithic). Furthermore, it fails to consider exchange partners as nothing else than containers of that language and culture, and a source of knowledge about these for each other. Woodin (2018)—whose work on tandem learning was reviewed in Chapter 2 (2.1.3)—offers a different perspective by showing how tandem learning partners oriented to the "other" in personal and relational ways, and did not merely see their partner as a "native speaker" from whom they learn the language.

The ecological approach guides my enquiry into how the LCs are co-constructed by their attendees as language socialisation spaces to accommodate different participant profiles. LCs may be seen as an "ecological niche", in that they are "parts of ecosystems that are particularly suited for particular organisms ... [and they are] to a greater or lesser degree constructed by the organism, to make it even more suitable (enhancing existing affordances and creating new ones)" (van Lier, 2012, p. 33).

Beyond the cognitive and the social, little attention has been paid to the *personal* aspects of language learning, the importance of which is highlighted by scholars such as Kramsch (2009), Woodin (2018) and Ros i Solé (2016). For Woodin (2018, p. 28), it is important to recognise that "language cannot be considered outside of the person that is using it" and who is transformed by it. Every speaker makes a language their own in idiosyncratic ways, and word meanings can be personal and shaped by their own life experiences. Furthermore, Woodin highlights that "to limit language learning to linguistic accuracy would be to deny the human, personal and relational aspects of language" (2018, p. 8). For Kramsch (2009) and Ros i Solé (2016), the personal dimension includes subjective aspects such as what it means for a learner to speak a certain language in their particular context, how they feel when they speak that language, how far they have developed a multilingual sense of self, the role languages play in their everyday lives, or their aesthetic subjectivities and investment in learning for personal fulfilment. More

research with a closer consideration of the personal world of language learners and multilingual speakers is needed, and this call is embedded in the notions of *linguaging* and *translanguaging*, which I discuss next.

3.2 From language learning to *linguaging* and *translanguaging*

It has been made clear thus far that language learning is inseparable from language use. On that note, the concept of *linguaging* has been used extensively from a cognitivist perspective as a means to mediate cognition and “a process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (Swain, 2006, p. 98). However, language learning is not just a cognitive activity done with the head with the ultimate goal of acquiring enough linguistic knowledge and skills for communication purposes (Kramsch, 2009; van Lier, 2004). Cognitive approaches fail to consider that “[l]anguages are not only ‘acquired’ and ‘learnt’, but also ‘lived’” (Ros i Solé, 2016, p. 1). Phipps and Gonzalez (2004) elaborate on their concept of *linguaging* from an existential point of view: rather than mediating our thoughts when trying to use another language, linguaging is “the effort of *being a person* in that language in the social and material world of everyday interactions” (Phipps, 2007, p. 12, my emphasis). For Scollon, Scollon & Jones (2012, p. 171) the same could be said about learning in general: “learning is not just about knowing something or being able to do something, but rather of *being someone* within a particular community with its various systems of discourse”.

Phipps and Gonzalez (2004) suggested a paradigmatic shift—from language learning to *linguaging*. They proposed investigating the ontological skills of *being* in another language in the *whole social world*, focusing on *meaning making* and developing new *human connections*, and living in and with cultures to become *interculturally critical beings*, rather than learning about cultures to develop intercultural communicative competence. Thinking in “competence” terms can be misleading, as “[b]eing intercultural is not about being safe in your knowledges and ways of doing things, it is about working away as border crossers, making the links, filling the gaps and then taking time to be quiet, to listen and to reflect” (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004, p. 93). Finally, linguaging involves *living languages from within* and in connection with their material worlds, rather than studying language as an objective reality from a distance. *Languagers* are more than purely language

learners in that they “move in the world in a way that allows the risk of stepping out of one’s habitual ways of speaking and attempt to develop different, more relational ways of interacting with the people and phenomena that one encounters in everyday life” (Phipps, 2011, p. 365). These perspectives capture a way to interpret the language learning process beyond the idea of communicative success as highlighted in competence models (e.g., Breen & Candlin, 1980; Council of Europe, 2001; Hymes, 1972).

Although Phipps and Gonzalez (2004) and Phipps (2007) did not explicitly discuss the affective dimension in their work at the time, their examples of languaging as an embodied and social experience suggest that languaging necessarily involves emotion work. Later work by Phipps (2019) illustrates the intimate relationship between language, emotions, the body, and the social and material world, breaking away from the exclusive focus on rationality that dominates academic discourse. In that respect, SLA research on affect has attempted to establish linear cause-effect relationships between “affective factors” and achievement, i.e., how certain emotions, understood as variables in quantitative analysis, can predict levels of language learning achievement. For instance, some emotions, such as foreign language anxiety, have been considered as “negative” emotions as they act as an “affective filter” (Krashen, 1981) which hinders success in language learning (Dewaele, 2010). According to Pavlenko (2013, p. 8), these studies fail to understand that “anxiety, attitudes and motivation are dynamic and social phenomena and the relationship between these phenomena and levels of achievement is reciprocal rather than unidirectional”. Ros i Solé (2016, p. 101) suggests a new approach to humanise emotions by “focusing on the impact language learning has on the emotions we experience rather than how emotions impact the process of language learning”. Furthermore, she contends that emotions are intersubjective phenomena: rather than being lodged in the mind of the individual, they are constituted, and I would add, *emergent*, in social interaction. Emotions are also reactions to past experiences, and to the relationships of individuals with their environment. Therefore, emotion work is interwoven with the social experience of languaging (Phipps, 2019).

Focusing on languaging, therefore, means acknowledging the whole *mélange* of emotions involved, including a key one for language enthusiasts: enjoyment. While

researchers have been preoccupied with the problem of language anxiety—or “reducing the affective filter” in Krashen’s terms—, the joys and pleasure of stepping out of one’s social circles and succeeding to establish, maintain and learn from new social relationships in another language have been overlooked.

The pleasure of languaging is linked to the pleasure of engaging in conversational practice. van Lier (2004, p. 143) talks about the “centrality of conversation in human development and in the construction of reality”. Furthermore, he claims that “meaning is created, enacted, and shared in conversation. Language learning, if it is to be at all meaningful, and if it is to be tied to the self and the formation of identities, must therefore be embedded in conversation” (van Lier, 2004, p. 145). Levelt (1989, p. 29) sees conversation as “the most primordial and universal setting for speech and the canonical setting for speech in all human societies”. For Heritage and Atkinson (1984, p. 12-13), conversation is “the most pervasively used mode of interaction in social life and the form within which [...] language is first acquired”. Similarly, Levinson (1983, p. 284) sees in conversation as “clearly the prototypical kind of language usage, the form in which we all are first exposed to language – the matrix for language acquisition”.

However, beyond its instrumental value for language development, other qualities have been attributed to the activity of conversing with others, or conversation for conversation sake. The psychological anthropologist Francis L. K. Hsu argues that intimate human relations are “literally as important as [a person’s] requirement for food, water, and air” (Hsu, 1985, p. 34, cited in Scollon et al., 2012, p. 63). This resonates with Montolío’s (2020, p. 12) simple but powerful statement: “*Vivimos para conversar y conversamos para vivir*” [We live to converse and converse to live]. Montolío’s (2020) discussion around “*cosas que pasan cuando conversamos*” [things that happen when we converse] is premised on the idea that (good) conversations are a source of well-being for human beings, just like a healthy diet. She is inspired by psychological perspectives which consider verbalising as therapeutic and curative (e.g., Rojas Marcos, 2019). She claims that, in the same way as people are becoming increasingly literate in nutrition and what constitutes a healthy diet, society should reflect more on how conversational habits play an important role in people’s health and wellbeing.

Moreover, conversation is part of people's dwelling in places. Phipps and Gonzalez (2004, p. 127) argue that "no learning of language can be conducted in isolation from living through it", and this is why languaging is also an act of dwelling. For Phipps (2007), the notion of "dwelling" involves experiencing how to flow socially in another culture and in the material worlds of other languages. It is inhabiting new places and being part of them in "neighbourly" ways, by knowing, for instance, "what the right kinds of coffee are to order, how to eat the cakes, how to use the serviettes, how to count with one's fingers and thumbs" (Phipps, 2007, p. 154). This should not be confused with "going native", as dwelling "keeps the misunderstandings and stumbling in the relationships rather than working towards an intercultural communicative nirvana in which awareness has erased all difficulty in communication" (p. 154). In other words, through dwelling in another language, language users experiment with their views of themselves as multilingual social beings in the world.

A later developed construct that builds upon the notion of languaging is *translanguaging*. While the concept of languaging assumes that language is always in the making and intrinsically connected to humans acting and being in the world (Li, 2011; Phipps, 2011, 2019), *translanguaging* focuses on the multilingual, multimodal, and transformative dimensions involved in the act of languaging. Translanguaging refers to the practice of using one's full linguistic repertoire in hybrid and creative ways in communication with others (Canagarajah, 2013; Li, 2018), allowing for the enactment of multilingual identities not necessarily available in monolingual spaces (García & Li, 2014):

[Translanguaging] creates a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience. (Li, 2011, p. 1223)

One example of a translanguaging practice would be what Li (2018) calls "New Chinglish", consisting of words and expressions that Chinese speakers of English create by drawing on their semiotic resources, such as *chinsumer*, "a mesh of 'Chinese consumer', usually referring to Chinese tourists buying large quantities of luxury goods overseas"; or *niubility*, made of "*niubi*, originally a taboo word, now meaning awesome ability that is worth showing off or boasting about + ability" (Li,

2018, p. 12). Other examples of translanguaging practices can be found in language classrooms when teachers and students draw on multiple linguistic and other semiotic repertoires to make sense of the new language (García & Li, 2014).

According to Li (2018), the purpose of adding the *trans*- prefix is to argue that “[m]ultilinguals do not think unilingually in a politically named linguistic entity, even when they are in a ‘monolingual mode’”, and that “[h]uman beings think beyond language” in multimodal ways (Li, 2018, p. 18). In LLBC contexts, such as LCs, this may appear troublesome. The monolingual ideology that prevails in many language classrooms still informs many language learners’ expectations regarding authentic interactions with target language speakers (Trentman, 2021). Murray et al. (2017, p. 238) found that some learners preferred not to attend the LC, believing that they had to “speak in perfect English”. Mynard et al. (2020) explored LC participants’ views on the use of their mother tongue (Japanese) and target language (English) during LC events, and concluded that views were conflicting: for some, implementing and monitoring an English-only policy was necessary, whereas for others this policy was a deterrent for less-confident learners. An underlying assumption of monolingual ideologies is that mixing languages interferes with language acquisition. Even if translanguaging is the norm in multilingual contexts, translanguaging practices are often interpreted with a monolingual mindset (Trentman, 2021) and seen as indexing language deficiency and inability to sustain talk in one language and, therefore, a practice to avoid if one wants to be accepted as a legitimate speaker of that language. Zhu (2020) suggests promoting social change in this area by reconceptualising language learning so that learners are empowered and prepared to maximise their language learning in multilingual environments (Trentman, 2021).

A translanguaging approach also allows for the reconceptualisation of the researcher’s multilingual repertoires as a methodological resource for transforming research praxis, and for handling multilingual and multimodal data. I will discuss this in detail in Chapter 4 with regard to the methodological implications of researching multilingually (Holmes et al., 2013, 2016).

While immersion experiences abroad provide excellent opportunities for languaging and dwelling in languages, and a companion to classroom learning, the affordances for multilingual socialisation beyond the national boundaries of

“target language” countries have been neglected in language education research and practice. Also, previous research on informal language socialisation spaces like LCs has focused on learners’ development of speaking skills and autonomy (see 2.3). The concepts of languaging and translanguaging can be useful to address the study’s first research question regarding the co-construction of multilingual socialisation in the LCs from a holistic and complex approach to language learning—viewed as a lived and embodied experience involving emotions. Also, in this section I have shown how languaging and translanguaging involve identity investment (Norton, 2000) and intercultural becomings (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004; Phipps, 2019). The next two sections elaborate on my understanding of multilingual identities and interculturality *vis-à-vis* the relevant literature, and why these are important constructs to support research in the context of LCs. This theoretical positioning is needed to reflect the fluidity and complexities that characterise language practice in informal contexts.

3.3 Multilingual identities

The fields of applied linguistics and language education have witnessed an exponential growth in identity-based research, in which identity serves as a conceptual lens for understanding how the language learning journey of individuals is inextricably enmeshed with and shaped by their condition of social beings in the world (Block, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2013; Kramsch, 2009; Norton, 2000; Norton-Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). The language learning experience is informed by the learner’s demographic data (such as nationality, ethnicity, age, gender, or social class), together with their personal biographies and aspirations for the future, or their “imagined identities” (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). The latter is linked to the notion of “imagined communities”, which “refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination” (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 176). Thus, identities emerge “at the crossroads of the past, present and future” (Block, 2009). The idea of projecting oneself in the future as a multilingual speaker, and active participant in different multilingual communities of practice, has been recognised as central to sustain learners’ motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) or investment (Norton-Peirce, 1995) in the languages they are learning. Thus, how learners experience their

multilingual identities represent an important research agenda because, on the one hand, low or high in-group identification affects language proficiency (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) and, on the other, developing multilingual identities may contribute to enhance social cohesion in increasingly diverse societies (Fisher et al., 2020).

For the purpose of this discussion, “multilingual” is used as an encompassing term to describe anyone who uses more than one language in their everyday lives, regardless of their level of competence, and regardless of whether they have learned these languages through formal instruction or immersion in naturalistic settings (Gramling, 2021; Kramsch, 2009; Martin-Jones et al., 2012). This understanding of multilingual incorporates the notion of “plurilingual” proposed by the Council of Europe (2001, p. 168) to describe the ability to use several languages to varying degrees and for distinct purposes, but it also goes beyond by incorporating the affective and identity-related aspects embedded in languaging and translanguaging practices.

However, many multilinguals do not self-identify as such or, as Grosjean (2008) puts it,

[some multilinguals] have a tendency to evaluate their language competencies as inadequate. Some criticize their mastery of language skills, others strive their hardest to reach monolingual norms, others still hide their knowledge of their “weaker” language, and most simply do not perceive themselves as being bilingual even though they use two (or more) languages regularly. (Grosjean, 2008, p. 224)

Additionally, some multilinguals downplay their multilingualism because they see the languages they use as having no symbolic currency in the globalised world (Busch, 2015; Gramling, 2016).

The belief that a high level of proficiency is required in all the languages one speaks in order to be considered bilingual or multilingual is instilled by the traditional “primacy of the native speaker as the provider of baseline data against which to measure ultimate attainment” (Piller, 2002, p. 180), an ideology that has been termed *native-speakerism* (Holliday, 2006). The native-speaker ideal creates a lasting sense of inferiority in foreign language speakers (Byram, 2018). The arguments against native-speakerism are very strong (cf. Cook, 1999; Dewaele et

al., 2022; Holliday, 2006; Ortega, 2019; Rampton, 1990). Not only does the native-speaker model represent an unattainable goal for language learners, but the very idea of “native” often is ideologically charged with racist connotations (Holliday, 2006). Besides, the model is severely flawed, since, according to Piller (2002), the typical native speaker is conceptualised as a monolingual, while those who learn to speak additional languages become, by definition, multilingual.

Cook (1999) puts forward the notion of *multicompetence*, simply defined as “the knowledge of more than one language in the same mind or the same community” (Cook, 2012). Multicompetence implies that the knowledge multilinguals have of the languages they speak is different from the knowledge that monolingual speakers of those languages have. That is the case even with one’s first language: having learned other languages, my knowledge of Spanish (my first language) is different from Spanish monolinguals’ knowledge of Spanish. Bilinguals cannot be considered two monolinguals in one (Byram, 1997; Grosjean, 1989; Ortega, 2009). The aim of language learning, therefore, should be to become a multilingual speaker, not an imitator (Cook, 1999). As Woodin (2018, p. 153) concludes, “[t]he language learner is different from a monolingual native speaker, and should not aim to be one”. Nevertheless, and linking this with the intercultural, Woodin (2018, p. 154) also highlights that the complexity of interculturality lies in the processes of “becoming ‘other’ through adhering to a code which is ‘owned’ by others (...) while still trying to appropriate it in our own way”.

Understanding languages as distinct, bounded systems which are somehow compartmentalised in orderly ways in one’s repertoire responds to a way of understanding multilingual practices from a monolingual perspective. In his book *The Invention of Monolingualism* (2016), Gramling argues that monolingualism does not just refer to the knowledge of one language only; it is a structural ideology through which linguistic practice is evaluated, linked to “the invention of discrete, transposable, pan-functional languages” (Gramling, 2016, p. 190) and “the idea that anything, absolutely anything, can be reasonably done, said, or meant in any one particular language, given the proper circumstances” (p. 195).

The second research question in this study of LCs is concerned with multilingual subjectivities, rather than linguistic identities, although the latter may be relevant in some cases. While it can be argued that everyone is multilingual to a certain

extent (Gramling, 2016; Martin-Jones et al., 2012; Blommaert, 2010), following Fisher et al. (2020) and Benson et al. (2013), in this study I use *multilingual identity* as an “umbrella” identity for people who know more than one language (or dialect or variety) and are aware of their multilingual repertoires when engaging in translanguaging practices, as opposed to *linguistic identity*, which implies a more compartmentalised view of languages and refers to “the way one identifies (or is identified by others) in each of the languages in one’s linguistic repertoire” (Fisher et al., 2020, p. 449).

To investigate identity, it is important to know how the notions of self, identity, subjectivity and intersubjectivity intertwine. Thus, I unpack these terms in the next section, and discuss how they are operationalised in my study in relation to multilingual speakers.

3.3.1 The notions of self, identity, subjectivity and intersubjectivity

The self

The first thing to be stated is that one is not born with a *self*: the self is “an ongoing project of establishing one’s place in the world” (van Lier, 2004, p. 115). Neisser (1988, p. 36, cited in van Lier, 2004), proposes five types of self-knowledge: (1) the *ecological self* is the self as perceived with respect to the physical environment in the here and now; (2) the *interpersonal self* is the self in interaction with others, and emerges with the first emotional rapport and human communication; (3) the *extended self* is the self who had certain specific experiences and has ways of remembering them, and who regularly engages in specific and familiar routines; (4) the *private self* is the one who practises inner speech and appears when children realise that their thoughts and what goes on in their bodies are not shared with other people; and (5) the *conceptual self* or *self-concept* refers to what individuals believe about themselves, their assumptions and “theories of themselves” (for instance, in terms of identity, roles, and status).

For van Lier (2004), all five selves contribute to one’s *voice*. He argues that “the longer-term goal of any language program is [...] to connect the new language to the self, finding a voice, constructing and validating identities or *roles*, in Vygotskyan terminology (Kramsch, 2000, p. 151) and this can only be done through conversation” (van Lier, 2004, p. 120). Language practices—and

linguaging—shape the ideas the individual hold about themselves and how they understand their role as participants in different contexts or discursive communities (Morgan & Clarke, 2011). Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) argue that, if additional language learning is understood from the perspective of participation in new discursive communities (and not just as the acquisition of a code), it is then a social process which necessarily entails a reconstruction of the self. Research interest in the reconstruction of self tends to focus on second language contexts such as immigration or study abroad experiences. These experiences tend to destabilise individuals' identities as they navigate new social realities, along with the learning of the new language (e.g., Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000), whereas the foreign language classroom experience is unlikely to have such deep identity impact, according to Block (2009). However, other scholars, such as Kramsch (2000), Ohta (2001), Rivers and Houghton (2013) and Forbes et al. (2021) offer a different perspective by evaluating positively the foreign language classroom as a place for the reconstruction of self and the development of multilingual identities with the support of pedagogical intervention. The possibilities for the reconstruction of self in informal language-focused groups (such as LCs) remain underexplored.

As mentioned earlier, one's imagination, and being able to project one's self in the future, has been linked with learning motivation. Based on the theory of "possible selves" (Markus & Nurius, 1986), Dörnyei (2005) proposes a second language (L2) motivational self system with three components: (1) the *ideal L2 self*, which is the motivational driver; (2) the *ought-to L2 self*, or the projection of what one thinks is necessary to know and do so as not to disappoint others; and (3) the *L2 learning experience*, constituted by the motivational effects derived from pleasurable experiences of learning (what has been called "intrinsic motivation" or, as Balboni calls it, motivation "based on pleasure" [Balboni, 2012, pp. 86-89, as cited in Borghetti, 2016]). However, Henry (2017, p. 548) notes that Dörnyei's model of L2 motivational self system does not "take account of the other languages that the individual speaks or is learning". To overcome this monolingual bias, he proposes to extend Dörnyei's model to a "multilingual motivational self system", and develops the concept of the "ideal multilingual self" (Henry, 2017). He is inspired by Pavlenko (2006), whose research shows that, "in addition to identities connected to the different languages they speak, multilinguals can also develop an

identity that transcends those that are language-specific" (Henry, 2017, p. 549). Likewise, Aronin (2016, p. 145) argues that multilinguality needs to be seen "as a whole, not divided or separated into distinct sub-identities". Henry (2017) argues that how learners envisage their future selves as multilinguals can have powerful motivational effects on their learning of two or more additional languages. By exploring how LC participants experience their multilingual identities in the LCs, this study's second research question investigates how the LC experience may enhance learners' imagination of their "ideal multilingual selves".

Norton (2000, 2013) critiques the notion of motivation for placing the responsibility of being motivated upon the individual. She argues that, if learners invest in learning a new language, they expect to see their cultural capital increased through symbolic or material resources, which, in turn, enhances their sense of selves, their hopes for the future, and their imagined identities. This process can be disrupted by the ever-present power issues in social relations, which might result in motivated learners desisting from investing in the language in certain contexts (Norton, 2000, 2013). However, Ros i Solé (2016, p. 66) contends that, while some might want to "climb up a power-social ladder", learners' becomings and self-identities do not always develop vertically based on levels of achievement, but they grow laterally in unexpected directions. Thus, there are no single benchmarks for the language learner, but rather a myriad of combinations and possibilities for the development and transformation of the self.

Language education needs to move beyond the utilitarian, instrumental view of language learning which downgrades the language learner to "an efficient professional who serves the market economy and its neoliberal imperatives" (Ros i Solé, 2016, p. 20). As discussed in Chapter 2 (2.2.1), this view is shared by Gao (2012, 2016), who warns against the mechanisms of constraint of the neoliberal paradigm in the context of English learning in China. As Kramsch puts it (2009, p. 3), "students discover in and through the foreign language subjectivities that will shape their lives in unpredictable ways". Although this may lead to better employment opportunities, language education should emphasise the personal transformational journey that living in more than one language can provide to language learners and their sense of self, not least because those transformations and new ways of relating to the world can be what multilinguals value the most

about their multilingual journey (Coffey, 2011; MEITS Project, 2019; Ros i Solé, 2016).

Apart from the ways in which “language users see themselves and become aware of the subjective dimensions of language learning” (Kramsch, 2009, p. 16), this study is concerned with how participants in the LCs may construct an image of themselves as able to socialise and flow in multilingual environments through the mobilisation of their complex repertoire and multilingual subjectivities (e.g., the memories, emotions, and personal attachments they link to different languages). I propose to call such a co-constructed self-concept the *multilingual social self*.

The ideas discussed thus far suggest the need for research that focuses on the opportunities that informal foreign language learning contexts beyond the classroom may offer for individuals to perform, discover, or develop their multilingual social selves.

Identity

Although many psychologists use “self” and “identity” as the same construct (Giddens, 1991), van Lier (2004, p. 124-125) explains the difference as follows: the self is “the personal history of a person, phylogenetically as a member of humanity, and ontogenetically as a particular person”, whereas identity is “the project of this person (with this sense of self) to place him or herself in the world, and to act in this world in some identifiable manner. Identity is thus both a project and a projection of the self”. Similarly, for Norton (2013, p. 4) identity refers to “the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how a person understands possibilities for the future”. Drawing on the above definitions, I use the term “multilingual self” to refer to the ongoing project of establishing one’s place as a multilingual speaker in the world, while “multilingual identity” refers to the projection of the self as a multilingual, which is co-constructed in interaction with others in different settings or social groups. Through social interaction people position themselves, and are positioned by others, in relation to the social world around them (Kramsch, 2009).

Identity issues can result in language learners not developing a voice in the new language. For example, learners may find difficulty in making their mouth produce

certain sounds, or feel uncomfortable with the identity that has been imposed on them in the new discursive community and, therefore, limit their use of the new language to purely transactional interactions needed for survival (or needed to obtain a good grade, in the context of instructional settings), at the risk of being perceived as an unmotivated learner (Norton, 2000). Successful language learning, thus, entails the complex task of developing “compatible identities that do not negate existing ones, nor erode the self” (van Lier, 2004, p. 126).

Thus, my research draws on a poststructuralist understanding of identities as multiple and dynamic: identities are subject to a life-long process of non-linear transformation, and they are always complex, socially constructed, and historically situated (Block, 2009; Kramsch, 2009; Norton, 2013; Norton-Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; van Lier, 2004). Identities can be imposed, assumed, or negotiable (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; van Lier, 2004), and may affect individual’s self-concept. Mansfield (2000) highlights the divide between psychoanalytic theories which conceptualise identity as a “thing” that can be examined within the individual, and postmodern and poststructuralist approaches which see identity as contingent on human sociality and the effect of discourse and power relations. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004, p. 14) explain that “social constructionists conceptualize identities as an interactional accomplishment, produced and negotiated in discourse [...] [and] [p]oststructuralists add to that view that we cannot underemphasize the role of power in the process of categorization”. As mentioned earlier, from a language learning perspective, power relations interfere with one’s capacity to produce utterances that are worth being listened to and valued (Kramsch, 2021). This is why a poststructuralist perspective is important in this study to understand how people experience their multilingual identities in LCs.

Subjectivity

While some scholars use identity and subjectivity interchangeably (e.g., Norton, 2000), Kramsch (2009, p. 25) distinguishes between the two:

Identity refers to the identification with a social or cultural group, while subjectivity focuses on the ways in which the self is formed through the use of language and other symbolic systems, both intrapersonally and interpersonally. As individuals participate in multiple symbolic exchanges, themselves embedded in vast webs of social and power relations,

subjectivity is conceptualized dynamically as a site of struggle and potential change.

Subjectivity emerges through the individual's interactions with their environment. "We only learn who we are through the mirror of others, and, in turn, we only understand others by understanding ourselves as Other" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 18). In this sense, subjective experience is responsible for the ongoing construction and re-construction of the conceptual self or self-concept.

Kramsch's (2009) notion of the "multilingual subject" has been influential in my research. One of her main claims is that, "as a symbolic system, language creates and shapes who we are, as subjects". With the term "subject", Kramsch wants to indicate that the multilingual speaker is a person who experiences the subjective aspects of language, and has been transformed by it in unique ways. The multilingual subject associates different emotions with the languages they know and use. Adding a new language in one's repertoire involves experiencing new subjectivities, adding new symbolic value to the expression of self and, thus, undergoing a process of decentring and transformation of the self. In that process of decentring (relevant to interculturality, as I will discuss later), one becomes aware of "the gap between the words that people utter and the many meanings that these words could have, between the signifiers and the possible signifieds, between who one is and who one could be" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 19).

Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity has been defined as

an innate human propensity for mutual engagement and mutual responsiveness. Some of this propensity is cognitive or intellectual, some of it emotional, but in any case human character and human experience exist only in and through people's relations with each other. (Carrithers, 1992, p. 55)

Intersubjectivity refers to the socially contingent nature of the subject, who "defines itself and is defined in interaction with other contingent subjects" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 20). Notably, intersubjectivity is closely linked with the interactional self and with finding one's voice.

Bucholtz and Hall (2005, 2011) explain the factors that make identities an intersubjective reality: (1) identities are social processes which emerge in

discourse and are shaped through language practice; (2) identities emerge in interaction based on the roles that interlocutors assume (“who listens”, “who speaks”, “who judges”); (3) identities are underpinned by social positionings and ideological structures (which might determine, for instance, the register or lexis interlocutors use); (4) identities are relational, that is, they acquire their social meaning in relation to other possible identities that can be assumed by the interlocutors in a particular context (e.g., in the classroom, identities are linked to the institutional roles that the social actors assumed: teacher and student); and (5) identities are always partial, for the above reasons.

Montolío (2020, p. 17) adds an embodied perspective when she asserts that face-to-face conversation involves an exchange of subjectivities and meaningful physical body movements. The embodied exchange of subjectivities occurs also in interaction with non-human and non-material entities (Ros i Solé, 2022). As Kramsch (2009, p. 75-76) puts it, intersubjectivity is “an appropriateness or coordination of bodies with themselves and their environment... [it is] relationality or synchronicity, in which the organism feels in sync with itself, its language, its environment and others”. Linking this with the earlier discussion on emotions, considering that these are embodied reactions to subjective experiences, it makes sense to look at them as co-constructed intersubjectively, rather than lodged in the individual mind (Ros i Solé, 2016).

A poststructuralist understanding of intersubjectivity does not see it as being constructed only in the here-and-now of the conversation, but “it is to be found in the shared memories, connotations, projections, inferences elicited by the various sign systems we use in concert with others” (Kramsch, 2009, pp. 19-20). In this study, I view intersubjectivity as informing the emergence of multilingual identities and the reconstruction of self in the LCs.

To articulate the links between identity with intercultural communication, Scollon et al. (2012, p. 267-268) state that “part of every person’s identity is the discourse systems within which he or she participates”; therefore, “identity is a matter of membership in different discourse systems”. In a similar vein, Morgan and Clarke (2011) contend that “identity relies on a repertoire of communicative resources (e.g., rituals, texts and signs) through/by which categories of difference/individuality are perceived, maintained or resisted and these

communicative resources are fundamentally social in nature”. In the next section, I further explore how the above discussion about multilingual identities, the self, subjectivities and intersubjectivities links to the intercultural dimension of multilingual socialisation, and review the literature that supports the non-essentialist approach to interculturality underpinning this study.

3.4 Interculturality

Learning additional languages has been associated with the development of intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable individuals to carry out effective communication with people from different cultural backgrounds, especially since the “(inter)cultural turn” in language education in the 1990s (Holmes, 2014). Looking beyond linguistic competence is important because, as Coffey (2013, p. 266) asserts, “interculturality meshes with widespread aims of equity and acceptance of the stranger in new contexts of global diversity”. According to Phipps and Levine (2012), knowing other languages enables to understand that other ways of living are possible.

Borghetti (2016) highlights how multiple conceptual approaches have been devised to describe the components of intercultural competence (e.g., Chen & Starosta, 1996; Samovar et al., 2010; Spitzberg, 2000), to propose models of pedagogical intervention for intercultural development (e.g., Balboni & Caon, 2014; Byram, 1997; Seelye, 1993), to identify the different phases of intercultural development (e.g., Bennett, 1993; Deardorff, 2006; Gaston, 2005), and to look at the development of intercultural competence within contexts of formal instruction (e.g., Brislin & Yoshida, 1994; Fantini, 1995, 2012; Kramsch, 1993, 1998). An alternative categorisation and extensive review of models is offered by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009).

Dervin (2010) argues that what is meant by “intercultural” is still confusing and inconsistent in language education and, in general, too much focus is placed on the *cultural* and not on the prefix *inter-*, which semantically carries the relational aspects of the term (see also Kramsch, 2013; Woodin, 2018). Although “culture” has been often uncritically understood and presented as contained within national boundaries—culture = country/language—this alignment “has been rightfully thrown into question as the basis for fomenting a kind of essentialism which is

reductive, can lead to erroneous predictions of behaviour and easily lead to stereotyping” (Woodin, 2018, p. 3). When “culture” is described in such fixed and static terms, it can be used as an excuse or lazy explanation of people’s behaviours, particularly in episodes of miscommunication (Dervin, 2010, 2016; Holliday, 2011, 2016; Piller, 2011). That is the tenet of essentialism, a discourse of culture which “presents people’s individual behaviour as entirely defined and constrained by the cultures in which they live so that the stereotype becomes the essence of who they are” (Holliday, 2011, p. 4). Essentialist discourses also promote Othering, defined as “the way members of one social group distance themselves from—or assert themselves over—another by construing the latter as being fundamentally different (the ‘Other’)” (Thornbury, 2017, p. 192).

In contrast, a more recent intercultural turn draws attention to “the socially constructed nature of intercultural communication” (Holmes, 2014, p. 77), encourages learners to learn about the self as much as about others, and looks at the dialogic nature of cultural realities, which, like languages, are both influenced by and influencing other cultural realities in an ongoing process of fluid development (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016).

Interculturality in this study is intertwined with the concepts of *linguaging* (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004), *translinguaging* (Canagarajah, 2013; Li, 2011), and the *multilingual subject* (Kramsch, 2009), concepts which I have presented as theoretical and interpretive tools in this chapter. As noted earlier, *linguaging* presupposes stepping out of one’s habitual way of doing things and developing new relational ways of interacting with the world in multiple languages (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004; Phipps, 2007, 2011, 2019). *Language*rs, however, are not imitators of an “ideal native speaker”, but they devote time and effort to try to be who they want to be in the languages they speak. The language^r is, thus, a *multilingual subject* who lives in a constant process of creating new subject positions in the world by reconsidering the familiar through the experience of the foreign (Kramsch, 2009). In such an understanding, interculturality is always in the making and it emerges in interaction with others (Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 2011; Holmes, 2014; Phipps, 2011; Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Woodin, 2018).

Next, I explore the intercultural aspects of multilingual encounters, and how previous studies on LCs and other LLBC contexts have conceptualised them.

3.4.1 What is intercultural about multilingual encounters

Holmes (2014, p. 79), citing Barrett et al. (2014), describes intercultural encounters as those that “take place when two or more people interact in situations where they perceive each other to have different cultural backgrounds or come from different horizons—they are from different countries, regions, religions, ethnicities—and when these differences are salient and affect the nature of the interaction”. Perhaps influenced by the powerful idea that by knowing another language one has access to other worldviews (Fantini, 2012), previous studies on language encounters involving interaction between proficient speakers and language learners (e.g., tandem learning, virtual exchange, or LCs) have taken interculturality for granted (Mori, 2003). These studies often assume that conversing with speakers of other languages from different countries is by default an intercultural activity that enhances the intercultural skills of the participants. From this viewpoint, interlocutors are considered “representatives of their cultural background, both linguistically and culturally” (Woodin, 2018, p. 2), based on fixed discourses of culture. However, Woodin (2018) contends that it cannot be assumed that language exchange encounters constitute an intercultural context *per se*, just because they normally involve people from different national backgrounds. Likewise, intercultural development cannot be an assumed outcome of these encounters. A better way to know whether an encounter is framed by interactants as intercultural is to look at who makes culture relevant to whom, in which context, and for which purposes (Piller, 2011). A theoretical tool which enables to analyse how culture is drawn upon in interaction without falling into the essentialist trap is Holliday’s grammar of culture, which I present in 3.4.2.

Regarding the relationship between language and culture, Risager (2006, 2007) proposes a transnational approach under the premise that “languages spread across cultures, and cultures spread across languages” (Risager, 2006, p. 2), meaning that no language has its own culture. Linguistic and cultural *resources* (as she prefers to call them) should be recognised as mobile and part of the global flow. Thus, Risager’s transnational approach disrupts the notion of target language and culture as unitary entities contained within national boundaries.

The fact that it is difficult to establish a clear nexus between language and culture (i.e., no language has its own culture) does not mean that speakers do not fill with

culture the linguistic resources they mobilise in interaction with others. The linguistic resources one possesses reflect one's biography and affiliations, and individuals never cease to develop their linguistic repertoires in the course of their lives (Busch, 2012, 2015). All these personal linguistic and cultural resources are embedded in what Risager (2007) calls "languaculture". For the reasons stated above, it is important to highlight "the idiolectal nature of languaculture as an aspect of the life history of the individual" (Risager, 2006, p. 134).

Individuals with complex languacultures and life stories may self-identify, or be referred to, as cosmopolitans. For Ros i Solé (2013) cosmopolitanism involves transnational ways of living one's everyday life. Willingness to engage with multiple languages as part of one's ordinary everyday activities and leisure constitutes a cosmopolitan disposition. A cosmopolitan learner "wants to discover and immerse herself in new exciting cultural worlds through aesthetic, intellectual and moral experiences" (Ros i Solé, 2013, p. 332). As Delanty (2005) contends, transnational affiliations are not at odds with national attachments. Further, Canagarajah argues that cosmopolitanism can be experienced in one's own neighbourhood "in forms of super-diversity constructed by people of different language and cultural backgrounds" (2013, p. 193). One would think that, thanks to superdiversity and increased mobility, LCs can offer a different type of immersion that is more readily available to everyone, including those who might not have the means to travel.

However, the "cosmopolitan" in everyday language cannot be understood without considering a "privilege" factor. For instance, Najar (2014, p. 195) observes that the participants in her ethnographic study on intercultural learning through processes of place-making were "what Rizvi (2007) termed 'cosmopolitan learners', learners who were able to travel across the globe and who were generally interested in and open to intercultural experience". In such an understanding, there is an elitist social class element embedded in the notion of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan learners have "the economic and social capacity to travel and to afford language journeys across the world" (Najar, 2015, p. 151), something that is not accessible to all.

Many studies dealing with the intercultural aspects of language encounters beyond the classroom have overlooked the complexities of the transnational attachments

of multilingual speakers and focused instead on learners' development of intercultural competence based on what participants learn about each other's (national) cultures. Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has proven very effective in these research contexts. The model is based on five *savoirs*:

- Attitudes: relativising self, valuing others (*savoir être*)
- Knowledge of self and other; knowledge of interaction: individual and societal (*savoirs*)
- Skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*)
- Skills of discovery and/or interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*)
- Critical cultural awareness, political education (*savoir s'engager*)

This model has been critiqued for being essentialist and promoting a comparative approach to cultural learning (e.g., Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 2011). Byram (2021, p. 38) responded to this critique by stating that “[a] version of essentialism in the form of a model [...] may be necessary as a pedagogical device without this being a commitment to a view that a culture is ‘a physical place’”. The model was in fact designed as a pedagogical toolbox for curriculum development in the context of instructed language learning. Thus, it would be inappropriate to use this model to research interculturality in the context of LCs, an informal context where there is no pedagogical intervention.

Likewise, the concept of “competence” has been critiqued for its positivist connotations, as it is “closely linked to the educational context and to individual assessment and testing in relation to general labour-market requirements”, and also, in the context of language learning, competence “typically only deals with one (standard) language at a time; it does not contain any sociolinguistic understanding of the multilingual/plurilingual individual” (Risager, 2006, p. 80). In other words, it does not consider the complexities and affectivities of translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2013; Li, 2018). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, Phipps and Gonzalez (2004, p. 93) argue that “competent” can be misinterpreted in intercultural education as “being safe in your knowledges and ways of doing things”, while being intercultural embeds a lifelong process of becoming, a decentring disposition, and the idea of embracing being out of the comfort zone. Phipps and Levine (2012) argue that the skills-based approach that has dominated the teaching and research on intercultural competence in language pedagogy

should evolve into one which encourages complexity, ecological thinking about context, criticality, conflict transformation, and compassion.

Following the afore-mentioned idea that learners' becomings and self-identities do not necessarily develop vertically based on levels of achievement (Ros i Solé, 2016, p. 66), this study avoids skills-based approaches to intercultural competence (e.g., Bennett, 1993; Byram, 2021; Deardorff, 2006). Instead, it is concerned with the experience of interculturality as participants come together to speak different languages with one another. According to Dervin (2016, p. 1), the suffix *-ality* indexes "a process or something always in the making". Holliday's (2011) "grammar of culture", which I present next, is consistent with such an understanding: it is designed to analyse intercultural encounters from a non-essentialist perspective, to treat culture as something that is experienced in interaction and is always in the making through "small culture formation on the go" (Holliday, 2013), and to focus on criticality and the complexities that shape individuals' personal trajectories. The grammar of culture thus shares with (trans)linguaging and multilingual identities the fluid and intersubjective nature which has been highlighted throughout the chapter.

3.4.2 Holliday's grammar of culture

Countering fixed discourses of culture, Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016, 2019) grammar of culture, together with his large and small culture paradigm (1999), are useful theoretical tools to analyse how individuals encounter culture from a non-essentialist perspective, whereby cultures are understood as dynamic and negotiable in nature. This idea is inspired by Weber's (1964) social action theory of society, "which argues that we all have the potential to negotiate our personal positions in dialogue with the structures which attempt to constrain us" (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017, p. 260).

Holliday (2019, p. 1) describes his grammar of culture as "a map which can do no more than guide us, and which must not be mistaken for the real terrain which is too complex and deep to be mapped too accurately". The grammar, represented in Figure 1, revolves around three domains of cultural reality in loose conversation with one another (as indicated by the arrows), namely: (1) particular social and political structures, (2) underlying universal cultural processes (fed by personal trajectories), and (3) particular cultural products.

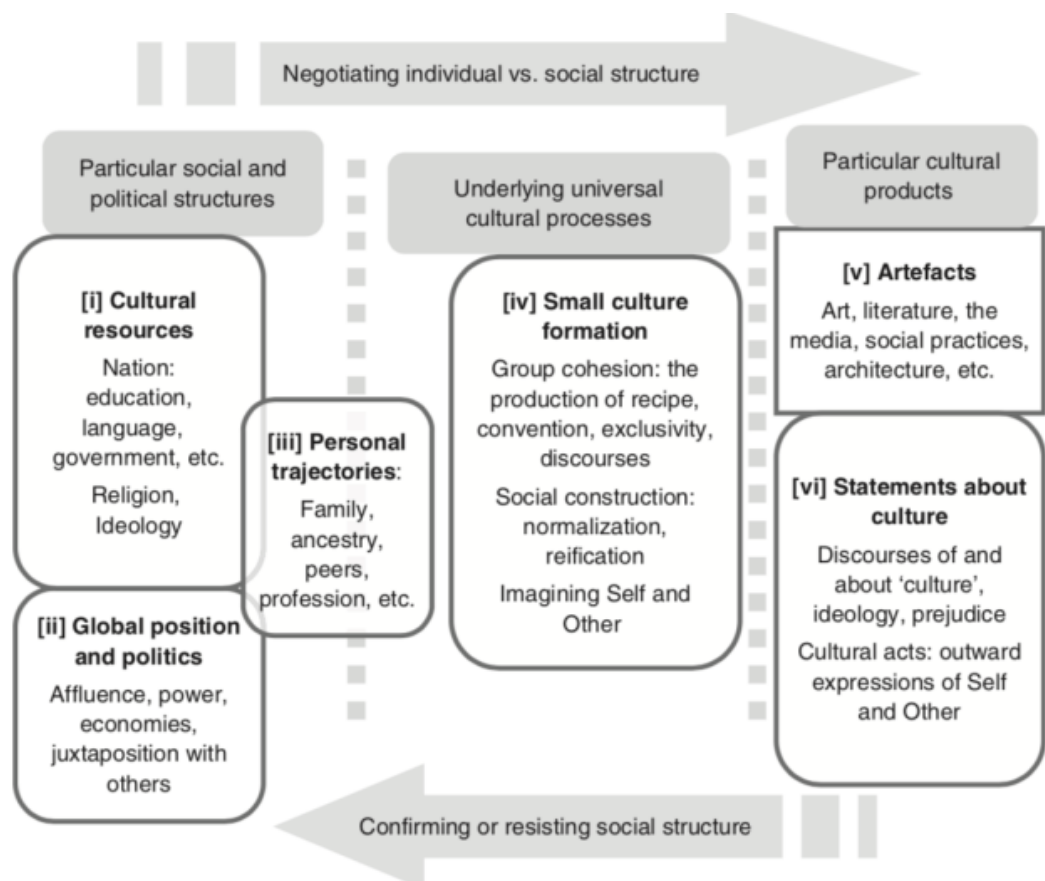


Figure 1 Grammar of culture (Holliday, 2011, p. 131)

Underlying universal cultural processes

This is the domain which tends to be overlooked in other discourses of culture. Understood as processes that are shared across cultural settings irrespective of geographical location, these processes are at the centre of the grammar. They involve skills and strategies “which enable us all to make sense of, read and interact with the particular wherever we encounter it” (Holliday, 2019, p. 2). These universal processes intervene in the formation of *small cultures*, that is, “cultural environments, small social groupings or activities wherever there is cohesive behaviour” (p. 3) such as families, leisure groups, or work groups. Small cultures should not be understood as places, but “locations of social action” (p. 3). In contrast, a *large culture* approach tends to see culture as contained within national or ethnic boundaries, and contributes to discourses of culture that are reductionist, overgeneralising, and prone to stereotyping and Othering everything “foreign” (Holliday, 1999).

Also located at the centre, but moving towards the left, is the category of “personal trajectories”, which “comprise the individual’s travel through society, bringing

histories from their ancestors and origins” (Holliday, 2019, p. 3). Personal trajectories inform the ways in which individuals negotiate their positionings between the large cultures in which they have been brought up, and the underlying universal processes through which they engage in *small culture formation*: “the everyday business of engaging with and creating culture” (Holliday, 2013, p. 56).

Particular social and political structures

Located on the left of the diagram, these are “structures which in many ways form us and make us different from each other” (Holliday, 2019, p. 3). They comprise “cultural resources” related to one’s upbringing and socialisation within a particular nation, language, educational and political system, religion, or ideology. Holliday labels these elements as “resources” to indicate that individuals often draw upon them in order to interpret cultural realities around them, but they do not determine everything they do and think. As Jin (2020) argues, these cultural resources are also the result of the social and economic conditions within which individual trajectories are contained.

Holliday notes that many individuals are influenced by different structures or large cultures (e.g., different nations) due to their personal trajectories. Throughout their lives, individuals form their own personal resources to resist and negotiate imposed ones. In that sense, Holliday’s understanding of personal trajectories can be linked to Risager’s notion of languaculture mentioned earlier.

The other category within this domain is “global position and politics”, which “concerns how we position ourselves and our society against the rest of the world” (Holliday, 2019, p. 4) and can be represented by “Us versus Them” discourses. These are very much influenced by grand narratives of nation and history, which have been so powerful in the patriotic discourses that led to some recent political events, such as Brexit in the UK or the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in 2016.

Particular cultural products

Cultural products are “the outcome of cultural activity” (Holliday, 2019, p. 5) and are located on the right hand side of the diagram. The first element, “artefacts”, includes literary and artistic products, but also the ways in which people carry out certain everyday practices, such as eating, wearing clothes, greeting, showing

respect, etc. The second element is “statements about culture”, which have to do with “how we present ourselves and what we choose to call ‘our culture’—how we position ourselves and how we choose to play the ‘culture card’” (Holliday, 2019, p. 5).

Holliday’s grammar of culture is an interpretive tool that will enable me to investigate the complexities of how participants make sense of their intercultural experiences in the LCs. These complexities have been overlooked in previous studies on LCs which explored learners’ development of intercultural competence from a culturalist perspective, focusing on cultures as bounded systems that determine people’s individual behaviour, instead of considering the socially-constructed nature of culture in communication (Holmes & Dervin, 2016). Nevertheless, the grammar of culture recognises that narratives about culture often draw on cultural *blocks* and *threads*:

Blocking and threading in a sense become defining features of narratives in their effect on the presentation of cultural identity. The block narrative of cultural difference promotes the idea of national cultures as the prime, defining and confining units of cultural identity. It builds boundaries and restricts cultural travel. The thread narrative of cultural differences instead focuses attention on diverse aspects of our pasts that mingle with the experiences that we find and the threads of the people that we meet. It has the power to extend and carry us across the boundaries that are encouraged by cultural blocks. (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017, p. 259)

Through this lens, the thread mode favours a critical cosmopolitan discourse of culture. Citing Beck and Sznaider (2006) and Delanty (2006), Holliday (2011) contends that a critical cosmopolitan discourse recognises that national boundaries, and people’s perceptions of them, are political and ideological constructions, while acknowledging the positive contributions of cultural realities which have been marginalised and Otherised by dominant Western discourses.

On that note, although a long-standing defender of non-essentialist approaches to interculturality himself, Dervin (2016) concedes the impossibility of being completely non-essentialist and non-culturalist in all situations—i.e., using only the thread mode, to use Holliday’s terminology. Dervin also admits that such approaches “can lead to self-congratulation and to patronizing attitudes (‘I am non-essentialist and you are not’)” (Dervin, 2016, p. 80). Thus, he recognises “that essentialism is a ‘universal sin’ and that no one is immune to it” (Dervin, 2016, p.

81), and that “[c]lichés, stock phrases, and adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality” (Arendt, 1978, p. 4, as cited in Dervin, 2016, p. 81).

To conclude, in this section I have presented a theoretical approach to address the study’s third research question, which explores how participants experience interculturality in the LCs. Holliday’s understanding of culture shares with (trans)linguaging and multilingual identities—the other important theoretical concepts in the study—the fact that they are emergent and co-constructed in interaction. These constructs can therefore complement each other as interpretive tools to yield new findings on the co-construction and emergence of intercultural and multilingual socialisation experiences in LCs.

Summary of Chapter 3

In this chapter I have presented the theoretical underpinnings that shape the focus and orientation of this study. Following Firth and Wagner’s (1997) call for a reconceptualization of SLA research (see the introduction to Chapter 2), this study focuses on the noninstructional setting of LCs; understands LC participants as more than just learners; adopts a multilingual ideology that embraces translanguaging practices and multilingual identities; focuses on enjoyment and success, rather than communicative barriers; and views emotion and identity work as social and intersubjective, rather than primarily based on the psychological characteristics of the individual. In the mostly cognitive-oriented field of SLA, I follow the lead of poststructuralist scholars who have attempted to shift the focus onto the lived, embodied, intercultural experiences of language learners. This approach is important because it takes into account the role of power in shaping all human relations and communication.

First, I presented the ecological perspective that underpins my research approach and understanding of language learning in this study (3.1). Then, I discussed the key theoretical concepts that shape the focus of this study: languaging and translanguaging (3.2), multilingual identities (3.3), and interculturality (3.4). Underlying these concepts is a poststructuralist approach to language as much more than just a code, and language and intercultural learning as more than

knowledge building and skills development. The poststructuralist approach is consistent with the aims of the study, which is not concerned with having or acquiring languages, multilingual identities, and interculturality, but with living through and experiencing them in interaction. To that end, Holliday's grammar of culture is an interpretive tool that is consistent with a view of interculturality as a process that goes beyond competence models and is understood as fluid and emergent in interaction—like the relational approach to (trans)linguaging and multilingual identities that underpins the study's complex theoretical framework.

The next chapter discusses the research paradigm and methodological approach adopted in the study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological approach used to address the study's research questions:

1. *How do participants co-construct language learning and multilingual socialisation in the ecologies of LCs?*
Subquestion: What affordances and challenges do participants perceive in this environment?
2. *How do participants experience their multilingual identities in the LCs?*
3. *How do participants experience interculturality in the LCs?*

First, I discuss the research paradigm of the study, underpinned by social constructionism (4.1). Second, I explain its qualitative and interpretivist approach, and how this is supported by an ethnographically-inspired methodology with an ecological perspective (as introduced in 3.1) to research language learning and socialisation (4.2). I then describe the research context (4.3) and research methods (4.4), where I discuss my early participation in the field, data collection methods, data analysis, ethical considerations of the study, and reflexivity with a researching multilingually perspective, which played a key role in the development of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary and some remarks about the structure of the three findings chapters.

4.1 Research paradigm: social constructionism

This study draws on social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) as an overarching theory to interpret the subjective meanings that people attach to the LCs and the ways in which they understand their experiences in these environments. The ontological research position of social constructionism assumes that there are multiple realities of the social world, and that these realities are constructed by individuals and their social groups by means of primary and secondary socialisation processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). There is not a single reality associated with LCs out there that can be studied, captured, and fully understood. What research can achieve is an approximate interpretation of different realities by co-constructing knowledge in interaction with research

participants with the support of empirical data. This endeavour requires attention to the multiplicity of experiences and understandings that research participants bring with them.

What happens when people gather in a place to interact face-to-face with one another is informed by their tacit knowledge of how certain situations call for certain social behaviours. This tacit or “commonsense knowledge” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) is formed by the multiple subjective meanings and social processes that individuals have internalised through life-long socialisation experiences: “Humans shape society and are shaped by society, in a way that they understand the social world that they themselves have created” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 59). Thus, commonsense knowledge precedes any theoretical knowledge, and is the key to making sense of social processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). One may not know what an LC event is, but will likely be able to understand what social processes are usually involved when engaging in conversation with others in a café or bar thanks to one’s everyday life knowledge and previous socialisation experiences. This study looks at a type of social event, the basis for a language learning experience, that has not been researched extensively, thus raising questions about how people come to shape these social language-centred learning contexts, and at the same time understand the social contexts they have created for themselves.

Socially constructed meanings or realities can be maintained, reaffirmed, resisted or modified in everyday social interaction, and face-to-face conversation is the most prominent vehicle for doing so (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As Creswell (2007, p. 21) puts it, “subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. [...] The researcher’s intent, then, is to make sense (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world”. Meanings are not predefined, but subjectively co-constructed, drawing on ideologies and the situated context when and where people engage in communication. Not only is the context where the data is generated important, but so is the sociocultural and political contexts during which the research takes place (Braun & Clarke, 2013), as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Having framed this study within the research paradigm of social constructionism, I now discuss the methodological approach that supported the research process.

4.2 Qualitative research, ethnography, and the ecological approach

Among the plethora of definitions available in the literature, qualitative research can be generally understood as “a form of social inquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a number of naturally occurring cases in detail, and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of approach” (Hammersley, 2013, p. 12). The aim of my study is not to establish generalisations about the LC phenomenon in the UK or elsewhere. Instead, the study explores LC participants’ experiences qualitatively in order to unfold their stories and interpret the ways in which they see the world, which inform the ways in which they make sense of the social reality of LCs and their experiences in them. In other words, and in line with the ontological and epistemological position of social constructionism, the methods involved in this study need to embrace subjectivities, calling for the need to adopt an interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Such a paradigm assumes a subjectivist epistemology by which research participants (including the researcher) co-construct understandings. Thus, this study’s epistemological position endorses the need to understand the world through the interpretation of the multiple realities and social meanings that arise in interaction with participants in the study, considering that social meanings are socially constructed, are culture- and context-bound, and can be negotiated (Cohen et al., 2011).

Also, this study adopts a naturalistic and non-interventionist stance: the aim is not to improve or change anything in the environment, or experiment with it, but to observe it in its natural conditions. This naturalistic approach is not at odds with acknowledging the influence that the presence of the researcher may have in the field (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), which I will discuss in detail in the reflexivity section of this chapter (4.4.5).

In order to study qualitatively the natural environment of LCs, I draw on ethnographically-inspired methods of data collection. Though it has been loosely defined, (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Jackson, 2016), ethnography has the general aim to “discover the cultural knowledge people are using to organize their

behavior and interpret their experience” (Spradley, 1980, p. 31), and it may rely on both emic and etic perspectives—i.e., both the participants’ and the observer’s viewpoints—to uncover the meanings attached to the social phenomena under investigation. Therefore, drawing on the principles of ethnography as a research method aligns with the purposes of this qualitative enquiry into LCs.

Ethnography requires the researcher’s immersion in the field during a period of time, and the collection of unstructured data in their naturalistic setting through an array of data collection methods (Cohen et al., 2011; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Ethnographers often engage in extensive participant observation and keep an open-ended and flexible approach to their research design, so that it is interactive and data-driven. As Blommaert and Jie (2010, p. 12) put it, “[e]thnography is an inductive science, that is: it works from empirical evidence towards theory, not the other way round (...), you follow the data, and the data suggest particular theoretical issues”. The researcher ought to keep a holistic approach to fieldwork, which is naturally chaotic and hugely complex, while attending to detail in order to find the right questions to ask (Blommaert & Jie, 2010). Spradley (1980, p. 32) similarly argues that “[i]n doing participant observation for ethnographic purposes, as far as possible, both questions and answers must be discovered in the social situation being studied”. This flexible and data-driven approach supported the rationale for my early participation in the field, as I discuss below, in order to start gathering data that then shaped the focus of my research and helped me refine my research questions.

In order to collect data that would help me answer my research questions, I used the following ethnographically-inspired methods of data collection: participant observation, a researcher reflective journal, audio-recording of naturally-occurring conversations in the field, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and written reflective accounts from participants. Documents complemented these data, such as the textual and visual advertising materials for the LC events (mainly posters and Facebook posts), and pictures taken during the events. I offer a detailed account of the data collection processes in 4.4.2.

As discussed in Chapter 3, this study’s theoretical framework is informed by an ecological approach to research in SLA (Kramsch, 2002; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008; van Lier, 2000, 2004), which has important methodological implications.

According to van Lier (2004, p. 205), “ecology is not a single method or even theory, it is more of a world view and a way of working, and it can motivate a wide variety of research and practice”. In reviewing SLA research, van Lier (2000) provides a critique of the positivist scientific perspective that has been dominant in the Western civilization, which is based on the belief that scientific work must simplify and be selective with what is available in the infinite real world, must provide the simplest explanations that minimally account for the data, and must break down reality into components which are analysed separately one by one.

An ecological approach regards language learning and identity development as complex processes that cannot be reduced to single linear cause-effect relationships. To understand a complex process, one must work holistically, yet at the same time pay great attention to detail (van Lier, 2004). Therefore, an ecological approach in SLA emphasises the complex interrelatedness of language use, participants and the environment (Kramsch, 2009; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008; van Lier, 2004). Unlike other approaches, it also takes into account the always present ideological aspects and power structures in dialogical interactions (Creese & Martin, 2003).

These ideas are echoed by Blommaert and Jie (2010, p. 11) when they state that “[r]eality is kaleidoscopic, complex and complicated, often a patchwork of overlapping activities”. Therefore, the ecological approach is consistent with the principles of social constructionism and the ethnographically-inspired methods adopted in this study.

Having discussed the research paradigm and methodological approach of the study, I now turn to the research context.

4.3 Research context

The LCs involved in this study took place in the north of England (UK) and were focused on languages other than English. Given that LCs can be diverse in terms of their aims and social dynamics, I decided to take a multisite approach to this qualitative research and chose two different LCs as sites for my data collection. Rather than establishing typicality, by choosing two different sites my intention

was to demonstrate the uniqueness of each LC, while using empirical evidence to shed light upon what connects them as part of the same social phenomenon.

Considering the wealth of LC events available, I decided to narrow down my target research field sites based on two considerations: I was interested in LCs that were (1) free of charge, and (2) where the organisers did not have a clear role during the events in a way that would make them look remotely like “teachers”. These criteria cannot be taken as definitional aspects of what LCs are, but they were useful to delimit a research context that would clearly distance itself from contexts of formal instruction. In addition, I chose the research sites based on their accessibility and proximity to where I lived.

According to the ecological approach, context shapes and is shaped by everything that happens in the environment, and the individual learner and the learning are inseparable from their context (van Lier, 2004). In other words, the research context is not seen as an external, stable factor that can be analysed separately from what goes on in it. As Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008, p. 205) put it,

[e]ach individual is unique because he or she has developed his or her physical, affective, and cognitive self from a different starting point and through differing experience and history. Each individual thus acts as a unique learning context, bringing a different set of systems to a learning event, responding differently to it, and therefore, learning differently as a result of participating in it.

The field sites in this study—the two LCs—are understood as complex ecosystems that operate at different nested, interconnected levels of scale (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008)—for instance, the broader sociocultural and historical context, the physical environment, and the inner social-interactive environment. Each of these levels of scale contributes to the dynamics and meaningful behaviour of participants within these environments. Thus, in what follows, I briefly describe the main aspects of the two LCs involved in the study—Language Café 1 (LC1) and Language Café 2 (LC2)—while the next chapter (Chapter 5), which addresses the co-construction of learning and socialisation in these environments, offers a detailed description of the context looking at the different nested levels of scale of each LC as part of the data analysis and discussion of findings.

4.3.1 Language Café 1 (LC1)

Language café 1 (LC1) was a university-based multilingual LC, attracting both home (UK) and international university students (typically aged 18-23) interested in practising different languages (mainly French, Spanish, German, and Italian, although some were interested in speaking Chinese, Arabic, Catalan, Russian, Portuguese, or Japanese). LC1 attracted 30 to 40 participants at each event, and took place twice each term (i.e., four times per year), in the evening, at the university Student Union bar. Although most of the participants were university students, some members of the general public occasionally attended.

LC1 was organised by university language teachers, who set up the date and time of the events, publicised them, and welcomed participants on their arrival. As part of the welcoming ritual, the organisers usually provided participants with one or more stickers with the initials of the languages they were interested in speaking. Other than that, during this study's fieldwork period (November, 2016 – March, 2019), the teacher-organisers did not tend to participate or intervene in the conversations, which were self-managed by the participants. The stickers facilitated the self-organisation of conversation groups around different language tables, and participants could move among these tables during the event as they pleased (for instance, if they wanted to practise more than one language during the event).

There was an unpredictable and dynamic flow of people coming and going during the events, which made the LC environment feel rather transient and unstructured. Participants did not need to arrive on time, and they could stay for as long as they wanted. It was common to meet new people at every event, as there were always new participants attending for the first time, as well as some regular attendees.

4.3.2 Language Café 2 (LC2)

Language café 2 (LC2) took place in a public house (or “pub”) in a large city. It consisted of a small group of regular attendees, with different professional backgrounds and nationalities, who met once a month to have a drink and speak French. As opposed to LC1, LC2 was intergenerational and characterised by regular attendance. The core of regular attendees (who had become long-lasting friends), were of mixed ages and professional backgrounds. Two spoke French as a first language and others had mixed abilities in French. All were fluent in several

languages, and considered themselves cosmopolitan, highly educated people who enjoy using their languages and learning from others. Although the event was held in order to speak French only, other languages, such as English, Spanish, Italian, or Portuguese, were occasionally drawn upon and talked about during the conversations.

At the time of data collection, LC2 was organised by Hugo, a French speaker who had no links with language teaching or any formal educational institution. During the LC2 meetings, Hugo participated in the conversations like everyone else. Due to the stable nature of this group, since most participants were regular attendees, the conversations in this LC usually built up on previous ones, allowing for a certain continuity and the development of more stable social relationships. This continuity dimension is key to understand some of the methodological decisions taken during the research process—which I discuss in this chapter—and will also be key to make sense of the findings across the three findings chapters.

Next, I describe the research methods used to conduct the study.

4.4 Research methods

In this section, I first discuss my early entering the field (4.4.1), and then introduce the data collection methods (4.4.2), data analysis (4.4.3), and research ethics (4.4.4.), before addressing researcher reflexivity in relation to the multilingual dimension of the study (4.4.5).

4.4.1 Entering the field

Entering the field in this study coincided with the very early stages of the research project. Prior to ethnographic fieldwork, it is recommended to gather as much information as possible about the field in order to understand what to expect and, very importantly, to “lower the risk of asking the wrong questions and behaving totally out of order” (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p. 19). Therefore, in order to evaluate the “researchability” of LCs, I decided to familiarise myself with these events by participating in the ones available in my area. Before selecting LC1 and LC2 as the two research sites for my study, I participated in eight different LC groups. I attended some of them only once, whereas I became a regular attendee in others. I felt it necessary to have first-hand experiences in different LCs to get an idea of

how diverse they are. Besides, being interested in speaking French for my own personal development was crucial for my authenticity as a researcher, as I discuss later on in 4.4.5. From these experiences I learned that it was relatively common for language learners to attend different language groups in their area. This was important tacit knowledge and background information that proved useful during the interviews with some of the participants, since, in their narratives, they tended to draw on their experiences in different LCs, and not just the ones that were part of the study.

In order to keep a record of my first experiences in the field, I gathered my thoughts, observations, feelings and memories in a researcher reflective journal. Ethical approval was received prior to this initial phase of fieldwork, even if it did not involve the collection of participant data (see Appendix A). Early participation in different LCs allowed me to forge relationships in the field, which paved the way for the process of recruiting participants for the following phases of data collection, which I describe next.

4.4.2 Data collection

According to Holliday (2015, p. 49), “the aim of qualitative research is to search for the richest possible data”. Learning contexts beyond the classroom can involve very unstructured and messy environments (Benson & Reinders, 2011; Dressman & Sadler, 2020). Therefore, a complex set of data collection methods is required to achieve a holistic understanding of such research sites (De Costa, 2015) and their kaleidoscopic realities (Blommaert & Jie, 2010), as well as to combine the strengths and overcome the limitations that each individual method presents, which, in turn, ensures the quality and trustworthiness of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rather than searching for convergence of findings through data triangulation (Fielding & Fielding, 1986; Flick, 2008), all data complemented and built upon each other to allow for an analysis and discussion based on “thick description” (Geertz, 1973), which shows the full complexity and depth of the events, and “gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organized the experience, and reveals the experience as a process” (Denzin, 1994, p. 505).

Table 1 shows an overview of the study's data corpus. Throughout this chapter, I explain how the different ecologies of each LC informed the data collection methods employed in each of them.

Table 1 Data set from each LC

	Method of data collection	Number and length / duration
Language café 1	Participant observation	10 sessions, 15 hours in total approx.
	Researcher's reflective journal	10 entries, 12,600 words
	One-to-one semi-structured interviews	13 interviews, 50-70 minutes each
	Semi-structured focus groups	2 focus groups, 6 participants, 45-60 minutes each
	Participants' written reflections	8 participants, 7,300 words in total
	Audio-recording of naturally-occurring conversations	2 sessions, 180 minutes in total
	Photos	8 photos
Language café 2	Participant observation	15 sessions, 39 hours in total approx.
	Researcher's reflective journal	15 entries, 13,800 words
	Semi-structured focus group	1 focus group, 5 participants, 72 minutes
	Audio-recording of naturally-occurring conversations	2 sessions, 240 minutes in total
	Photos	1 photo

I now turn to what each individual method of data collection contributed to the research and the procedures followed for each of them, after which I provide details of the sampling, focusing specifically on the participants who participated in interviews and focus groups.

Participant observations

Participant observations were a primary source of data in this study. Gold's (1958) classification of the different roles of participant observers in the field is among the most cited ones in ethnographic research, and it consists of four possible roles: complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant, and complete observer. I mainly adopted the role of participant-as-observer as I

participated in the LCs as a learner of French. Towards the end of the data collection period, I purposefully switched to complete observer on two occasions in LC1 to gain new insights into the dynamics of the place. Thus, in these two occasions I attended LC1 and sat at a corner of the bar from where I had a panoramic view of the venue, and I took fieldnotes on my laptop and some pictures with my phone camera. Although I could not hear the actual conversations, these observations gave me a different insight into the social dynamics of the environment to complement what I had gathered from the viewpoint of a participant-observer.

As mentioned above, data collection methods had to be adjusted between the two sites to take account of the different characteristics of LC1 and LC2 in terms of size and flow of people. Switching my researcher role to observer-only was not deemed appropriate in LC2. First, it would have been obtrusive and disruptive to sit next to the three or four fellow LC participants and take notes while observing them having a conversation in a public space. Second, I did not see any added value in doing this, since the group was too small and did not have the same flow of people coming and going, or changing tables during the event, as in LC1. The audio-recordings, together with the notes in my reflective journal from my role as a participant-observer, were already an effective way of capturing the richness of the social dynamics at play during the meetings.

I participated in all of the LC1 and LC2 meetups that took place over a period of three years (November 2016 – November 2019), which comprise a total of 10 times in LC1 and 15 times in LC2. My prolonged stay in the field could be described as “persistent observation”, with the support of a researcher reflective journal, to identify and focus on the most relevant elements for my study emerging from the LCs, thus supporting the credibility of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Researcher's reflective journal

As mentioned earlier, from the very early stages of my research project I kept a reflective journal about my experiences and observations in both sites.

Researchers are often encouraged to keep a reflective journal, especially during fieldwork, to keep a record of and reflect upon their research journey. Among the benefits associated with this practice, it is claimed that writing a research journal offers the possibility to document changes in thinking (Gerstl-Pepin & Patrizio,

2009), to write down reflections and keep a log of decisions made (Gibbs, 2007; Silverman, 2005), to mediate one's emotions and feelings during the research process, often neglected otherwise (Borg, 2001; Cooper, 1991), and to scaffold one's own construction of the research knowledge through critical thinking (Engin, 2011). In short, a researcher journal can be a productive artefact to engage with reflexivity, as it can foster a called-for space "to perform the personal, embrace vulnerabilities, and bring methodological dilemmas to the forefront" (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014, p. 25). Furthermore, the researcher's reflective journal offers transparency regarding the research process, becoming a tool to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

At first, the reflective journal was aimed at gathering information about each LC to help me reflect upon their potential as research settings. Also, it assisted me in refining the focus of my observations and shaping the research design. However, soon my reflective journal became a source of autoethnographic data, containing reflections about my own experiences as a genuine participant and learner of French in the LC events. Furthermore, writing a reflective journal brought to the fore the need to reflect upon my multiple positionings in this study as a researcher, a teacher, and a learner; in other words, someone in-between the positions of insider and outsider (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Probst, 2016). Appendix I shows examples of the types of notes that I wrote in the reflective journal, which can be divided into descriptive observational notes, reflective notes as a language learner and LC participant, reflective notes as a researcher, and theoretical notes.

After one year participating in different LCs, when I started collecting data from LC1 and LC2 through the recording of naturally-occurring conversations, one-to-one interviews, and focus groups, I had written 19 entries in my researcher reflective journal. Four of those entries focused on LC1, and six of them on LC2. The other entries were about other LCs that I attended. This preliminary phase of data collection informed my decision to select LC1 and LC2 as the research sites for my doctoral project and shaped my thinking and research questions about the LCs (Blommaert & Jie, 2010), thus having an impact on how I approached the next stages of data collection.

Audio-recording of naturally-occurring conversations

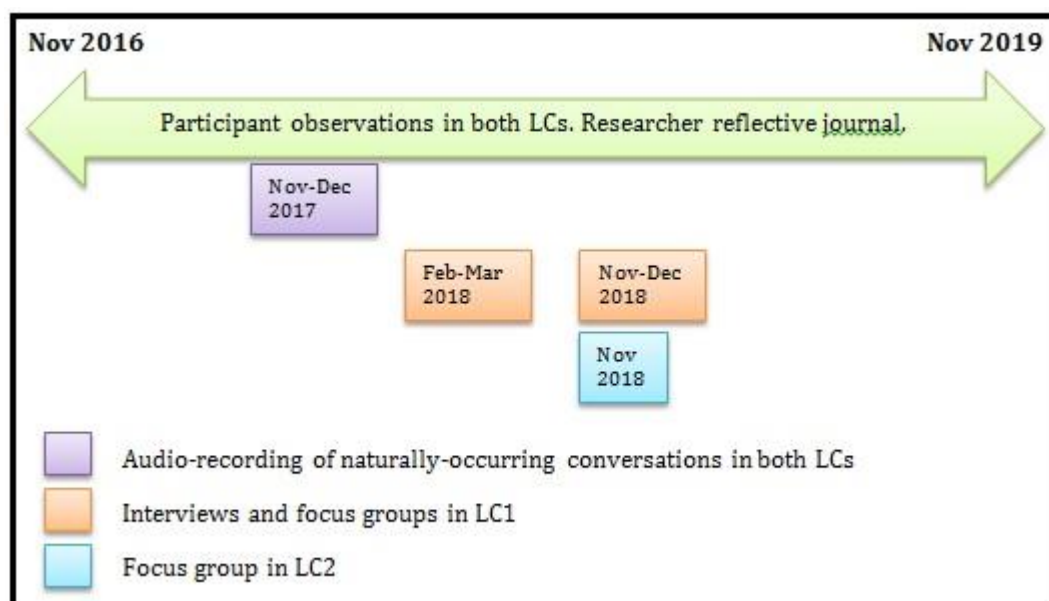
The audio-recording of naturally-occurring conversations complemented the other data sources by gathering data about actual interactions that took place during the LCs. I audio-recorded naturally-occurring conversations during two sessions in both LC1 and LC2. Video recording was discarded due to the ethical and logistic implications of recording in crowded public spaces.

One of the limitations of this method was related to ethical issues in LC1. Some participants mentioned that they associated the voice recorder with the stressful experience of oral exams, where teachers commonly use these devices to record student performances for assessment purposes. Moreover, due to the constant flow of people coming and going in LC1, it was not easy to obtain informed consent from all participants being recorded without disrupting the natural course of the conversations within the language groups. Consequently, this method of data collection was only used on two occasions, and the second time I did not ask participants if I could record our conversations until I had built some rapport with them prior to starting the recording.

Interviews

Having collected data through participant observation, the researcher reflective journal, and audio-recording of naturally-occurring conversations in the LCs, I then conducted two rounds of semi-structured interviews and focus groups with participants from LC1 (between February and March 2018, and November-December of the same year), and a focus group interview with participants from LC2 (November 2018). Figure 2 below offers a snapshot of the stages in the data collection process.

Figure 2 Stages of data collection



I designed the protocols of the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix G) to allow for a natural, flowing, and collaborative interaction between research participants and researcher (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), considering that I was also a language learner with my own experiences in the LCs. The interview protocols were flexible enough to adapt to the different perspectives that each participant would bring depending, for instance, on whether they participated as language learners, proficient or native speakers of a language, or event organisers, or whether they were first timers or had a long experience of participating in LCs. Also, although I had an interview guide with a list of questions, I did not follow the order in which they were outlined, but retrieved them during the discussion as they became relevant. After piloting a number of interviews, my interview protocol remained unchanged, and I only refined some of the questions to address more in depth some of the themes that were emerging as relevant. For instance, when participants mentioned that they enjoyed discussing cultural topics in the LCs, I asked them to give concrete examples of those cultural topics or conversations that they remembered fondly.

The first round of interview data collection included nine one-to-one interviews and one focus group with participants from LC1. These data were transcribed and analysed through some initial coding before I conducted the second round of interviews (see 4.4.3 for details of the data analysis process). The second round of interview data collection included four interviews and one focus group with LC1

participants, and a focus group with LC2 participants. During that time, I did not stop attending the two LCs as a participant myself, and I kept writing about my experiences and observations there in my reflective journal.

The interviews with LC1 participants were conducted in the same bar where the LC events took place—the university Student Union bar—where university students might feel a sense of belonging. I chose this venue because I wanted participants to feel comfortable and perceive the interview as an informal conversation, recreating the atmosphere of LC1. Also, participants could choose the language(s) of the interview, a decision that I further discuss in 4.4.5 in relation to researching multilingually.

I interviewed two of the organisers of LC1 and analysed these data following the same procedures. There are no explicit references to the organisers' data in the findings chapters, as the research questions prioritised the viewpoints of LC conversation participants. However, the data collected from the organisers contributed to my holistic understanding and tacit knowledge about the ecologies of LC1 (confirming, for instance, that organisers were not involved in the LC conversations, and providing me with knowledge about the background of the LC venue).

Due to the different ecology of LC2, I ended up building a different rapport with LC2 participants. This had implications for how I planned data collection with them. We had become a group of friends who socialised also in the private sphere, thus maintaining a certain degree of continuity in our relationship, and transcending the boundaries of the public French conversation events. As a way of being reciprocal with them while respecting the natural ecology of the group, I invited them for dinner in my house in order to conduct the focus group. The details of how I conducted focus groups are discussed in the following subsection.

Focus groups

Focus groups are widely used in qualitative research, and offer a space where a small group of research participants, moderated by the researcher, can interact about their shared experiences and views of their social worlds (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Morgan, 1996). The discussions in this case focused on participants' experiences and understandings of the LCs. As well as researcher's questions

based on a semi-structured protocol, some visual prompts (see Appendix H) were used to mediate and guide the focus group conversations (Silverman, 2017).

Researchers need to be wary of the synergy effect that focus groups can create (Morgan, 1996). The group setting facilitates an exchange of ideas among participants, who can comment on each other's answers and add further questions. However, there is a risk of obtaining "groupthink" as an outcome if the culture of the group interferes with the individual expression of participants during the interview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Looking at it from a different perspective, focus groups enable participants to "listen and respond to the utterances of the others in a process of 'polyphonic meaning-making' (Vitanova, 2004, p. 155), highlighting the nature of narratives as multi-voiced and intertextual spaces" (Harvey, 2015, p. 34). Focus groups also allow collecting rich data from several participants in a short time. With LC1 participants who were already friends and attended the LC together, I decided to conduct focus groups instead of individual interviews, so that they could engage in such process of "polyphonic meaning-making".

Carla, Maria and Valentina were three Italian Erasmus students from the same university in Italy, who came to the LC together to help others with their Italian speaking skills. Similarly, José, Carlos and Alberto were three Mexican postgraduate students who wanted to engage in Spanish conversations with learners of Spanish. I felt that, since these participants were already friends and came together as a group to the LC events, it would be easy for them to feel relaxed to share their individual narratives in front of each other, while they would also be able to co-construct their understandings of the LC in interaction with each other during the focus group.

In the case of LC2, there were different reasons why conducting a focus group, instead of individual interviews, was deemed appropriate. LC2 was mainly attended by a small group of regular participants who had developed a friendship and were members of the group from its outset. First, a focus group interview would allow me to gain insight into the origins and evolution of LC2 through the lens of those who founded it. I encouraged participants to share and co-construct their understandings of the origins and development of this group. Second, the focus group did not involve the disclosure of information that individuals would

see as too sensitive to be shared in front of their friends. In-group confidentiality and anonymity in the presentation of findings could not have been guaranteed anyway even if I had conducted individual interviews, since this small group of participants would most likely be able to identify one another in their narratives despite the use of pseudonyms. Finally, the focus group format would enable me to carry out the data collection in French more comfortably than through one-to-one interviews, due to my lack of confidence and competence in the language. Since speaking French was this group's *raison d'être*, I found that a group interview in French would be the most appropriate way to respect the linguistic ecology of the group and to maintain the spirit of the LC environment, thus offering research participants an experience that they would enjoy, as a way of being reciprocal with them. I reflect further on these intentional decisions in relation to researcher's reflexivity and the complexities of researching multilingually (4.4.5).

Optional pre-interview activity: Participant written reflective piece

In the participant information sheet I proposed a voluntary pre-interview activity in which participants were invited to write, in the language(s) of their choice, a short reflective piece about their LC experiences (see Appendix C and D). Those reflections then would inform the discussion during the interview, thus enabling the emergence and co-construction of interview topics with participants. The pre-interview activity was completed by eight out of seventeen participants from LC1 (the two organisers interviewed were not asked to do this). Participants were given the option to write their reflections in any of the languages that I can read and understand comfortably: Spanish, English, Italian, Portuguese or French.

At the time of data collection, one of the Spanish modules I taught at the university included, as part of the assessment, a reflective writing assignment in which students had to reflect upon their Spanish socialisation experiences outside of the classroom. Some students chose to write about their experiences in LC1 for this assignment, and four of these students became interview participants for my study. In those cases, I obtained their formal consent to use their reflective writing as research data for my doctoral project, and these reflective pieces were treated as their pre-interview activity.

Sampling

I interviewed 24 participants in total: 19 participants from LC1, and the five regular attendees from LC2. Purposive sampling was used in LC1 to reflect different forms of participation—i.e., to include the voices of language learners with different levels of proficiency, participants who spoke mainly their first language in the LCs, and two teachers who organised the events. In LC2 I interviewed 100% of the regular attendees at the time through a focus group.

Table 2 below shows some relevant details about the research participants from the time when they were interviewed for this study: the LC in which they participated, their main form of participation, the pseudonym by which they are known in this study, their main linguistic resources (their dominant language(s) is marked with “L1” in brackets), the data collection methods in which they participated, the language they chose for the interview, and some biographical details concerning their relationship with the languages they speak. The table includes the participants who contributed to the study through interviews or focus groups. The data from the researcher’s reflective journal and audio-recordings of naturally-occurring conversations may feature some other LC participants who were not interviewed, but gave their consent to be audio-recorded during the LCs.

Table 2 Research participants

Lang. café	Pseudonym	Form of participation	Languages spoken	Data collection method	Language of the interview	Notes
LC1	Lydia	Speaker of French	English (L1) and French	• One-to-one interview • Participant written reflections	English	2nd year Modern Languages student; regular attendee in LC1; does not currently use French in her social life; short immersion experience from a school exchange when she was 14.
LC1	Rachel	Speaker of Spanish, French and Italian	English (L1), Spanish, French, and Italian	• One-to-one interview • Audio-recording of LC conversations	Spanish	2nd year Modern Languages student; regular attendee; socialises very much in her languages; multiple immersion experiences.
LC1	Alice	Speaker of Spanish, Italian and Catalan	English (L1), Spanish, Italian, Catalan,	• One-to-one interview • Participant written	Spanish	Final year Modern Languages student; year abroad in Italy and Spain; regular

			German and Finnish	- reflections • Audio-recording of LC conversations		attendee in different LCs; socialises very much in her languages; multiple immersion experiences.
LC1	Carla	Speaker of Italian	Italian (L1), English, Spanish and French	• Focus group interview	English	Erasmus Modern Languages student from Italy; attended LC1 once; regular attendee in another Italian LC at university; socialises very much in English, not in her other foreign languages.
LC1	Maria	Speaker of Italian	Italian (L1), English and French	• Focus group interview	English	Erasmus Modern Languages student from Italy; attended LC1 once; regular attendee in another Italian LC at university; socialises very much in English, not in her other foreign languages.
LC1	Valentina	Speaker of Italian	Italian (L1), English and Russian	• Focus group interview	English	Erasmus Modern Languages student from Italy; attended LC1 once; regular attendee in another Italian LC at university; socialises very much in English, not in her other foreign languages.
LC1	Elisabeth	Speaker of Spanish and Russian	Russian (L1), English (L1), Spanish and French	• One-to-one interview • Participant written reflections	Spanish and English	1st year Business student, taking a Spanish elective module taught by the researcher; attended LC1 three times; does not currently socialise much in her foreign languages; immersion experience from a school exchange in Spain when she was 14.
LC1	Rebecca	Speaker of Spanish and French	English (L1), French, Spanish, Nepali	• One-to-one interview • Participant written reflections • Audio-	Spanish and English	Final year History student, taking a Spanish elective module taught by the researcher; regular attendee in LC1; does

				recording of LC conversations		not currently socialise very much in her foreign languages, but has had multiple immersion experiences (e.g., volunteering in Nepal and in Togo).
LC1	Ben	Speaker of Spanish	English (L1), Spanish and French	• One-to-one interview • Participant written reflections • Audio-recording of LC conversations	Spanish and English	2nd year Chemistry student, taking a Spanish elective module taught by the researcher; attended LC1 twice; does not currently socialise very much in his foreign languages; multiple immersion experiences in Latin America and France.
LC1	Molly	Speaker of French and Italian	English (L1), French and Italian	• One-to-one interview • Audio-recording of LC conversations	English	2nd year Modern Languages student; attended LC1 once, but has attended other LCs; socialises very much in French; multiple immersion experiences.
LC1	Kate	Speaker of Spanish	English (L1) and Spanish	• One-to-one interview • Participant written reflections	English	Final year Sociology and Anthropology student, taking a Spanish elective module taught by the researcher; attended LC1 twice; does not currently socialise in Spanish; 4-month volunteering experience in Peru.
LC1	Amy	Speaker of Spanish	English (L1) and Spanish	• One-to-one interview • Participant written reflections	English	1st year Criminology student, taking a Spanish elective module taught by the researcher; attended LC1 three times; does not socialise in Spanish.
LC1	Nathan	Speaker of Spanish, Chinese and French	English (L1), French, Spanish, Basque and Chinese	• One-to-one interview • Participant written reflections	Spanish	2 nd year Geography student; regular attendee in this and other LCs; socialises very much in his languages and has multiple linguistic immersion experiences.

LC1	Robert	Speaker of French	English (L1) and French	• One-to-one interview	English	2 nd year Engineering student; regular attendee in this and other LCs; does not socialise very much in French outside of the LC, but has multiple immersion experiences.
LC1	José	Speaker of Spanish	Spanish (L1), English, and German	• Focus group interview	Spanish	MSc student from Mexico; regular attendee in LC1; socialises very much in English, but not in German.
LC1	Carlos	Speaker of Spanish	Spanish (L1) and English	• Focus group interview	Spanish	MSc student from Mexico; regular attendee in LC1; socialises very much in English.
LC1	Alberto	Speaker of Spanish	Spanish (L1), English, and German	• Focus group interview	Spanish	MSc student from Mexico; regular attendee in LC1; socialises very much in English, but not in German.
LC1	Max	Organiser	French (L1), English, and Portuguese	• One-to-one interview	English	Organiser of LC1; French university teacher.
LC1	Emma	Organiser	German (L1) and English	• One-to-one interview	English	Organiser of LC1; German university teacher.
LC2	Hugo	Organiser and speaker of French	French (L1), English, Spanish and Italian	• Focus group interview • Audio-recording of LC conversations	French	Chemist; organiser of LC2 and regular attendee in this and other LCs; socialises very much in his languages.
LC2	Nadia	Speaker of French	French (L1), English, Arabic and Greek	• Focus group interview • Audio-recording of LC conversations	French	Engineer and researcher; former organiser of LC2 and regular attendee in this and other LCs; socialises very much in her languages.
LC2	Ruth	Speaker of French	English (L1), French, Spanish and Italian	• Focus group interview • Audio-recording of LC conversations	French	Retired French and Spanish school teacher; regular attendee in this and other LCs; socialises very much in her languages.
LC2	Mike	Speaker of French	English (L1), French, Spanish and Portuguese	• Focus group interview • Audio-recording of LC conversations	French and English	Retired accountant with vast international experience; regular attendee in this and other LCs; socialises very much in his languages.

LC2	Joanne	Speaker of French	English (L1), French and Spanish	• Focus group interview • Audio-recording of LC conversations	French	Spanish and French school teacher; regular attendee in this and other LCs; socialises very much in her languages.

Further details about the participants' profiles will be discussed in Chapter 5 as part of the contextualisation of each LC. Next, I describe how the collected data were analysed.

4.4.3 Data analysis

To analyse the emergent data, I used the thematic analysis (TA) approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79), defined as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. TA is a flexible approach to data analysis that is compatible with the constructionist underpinnings of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The authors articulate the process of TA in six phases: (1) familiarising oneself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. However, TA should not be seen as a linear process, but a recursive and iterative one, where researchers move back and forth throughout the phases as they develop their thinking.

Saldaña and Omasta (2018) argue that analysing data in qualitative enquiry should be an ongoing process throughout the research endeavour, rather than a phase reserved for advanced stages in the project. Likewise, Holliday (2015, p. 49) posits that “analysing qualitative data is very much integrated with other stages of the research approach”. Indeed, I did not wait until I had collected all my data to start analysing them. The process of data analysis developed organically alongside the other facets of the research—i.e., fieldwork and data collection, engagement with the literature, and writing up—which were interrelated and informing each other at all times (Holliday, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, I started collecting observational and autoethnographic data through my reflective journal from the early stages of the research project. To familiarise myself with these data, before I started collecting participant data, I read my journal entries and jotted down ideas based on patterns that I could already identify in my writing. As my own generator of data, I also relied upon

“headnotes” or “remembered observations” (Jackson, 1990, p. 5) to complement these data.

Regarding the audio-recorded participant data (from naturally-occurring conversations, interviews, and focus groups), I transcribed them soon after they were recorded. Although time-consuming, the process of transcription is considered “a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology” (Bird, 2005, p. 227, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). While transcribing the data, I also jotted down ideas of potential themes I noticed (Saldaña, 2016). I analysed all data in the original language(s) in which they were generated, so as to interpret meanings as closely as possible in their original linguistic context.

Regarding the second phase—generating initial codes—due to the exploratory nature of the research, concerned broadly with how the LCs were co-constructed and experienced by their participants, there were no limits as to what codes I should focus on at the beginning. Thus, the analysis was inductive and data-driven (Blommaert & Jie, 2010; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hammersley, 2013). I did some initial coding of my researcher reflective journal manually before I started conducting interviews and focus groups. Likewise, I manually coded the written reflections of the participants who completed the pre-interview activity. This process involved reading the data, selecting potentially meaningful extracts, and categorising them with a code name (e.g., “feelings and emotions”, “comparison with the classroom”, or “cultural topics”). A sample of this initial coding is provided in Appendix J. During this phase, I noticed that aspects related to feelings and emotions were emerging prominently in both participant and autoethnographic data. Conversely, I noticed several extracts in participant data coded as “mistakes do not matter”, while this code did not appear in my reflective journal. This is an example of a realisation during data analysis that prompted me to reflect upon my own subjectivities as a language learner, teacher, and graduate in translation studies—i.e., what making linguistic mistakes means to me and how I have come to see the world the way I see it (Berger & Luckmann, 1966)—and to become more aware of my different positionalities within the research. Edge (2011) reminds us that researchers should pay attention to both how they shape and how they are shaped by the research. In that respect, in my doctoral journey, I, too, developed

my own understanding of being multilingual throughout the process of researching LCs.

Once I had collected and transcribed the audio-recorded data, I used a qualitative data analysis software called NVivo to organise extracts from the whole data corpus into meaningful groups or codes. A sample of this initial coding generated using NVivo is provided in Appendix K. Some codes were drawn out of the semantic level (e.g., extracts coded for “feelings and emotions” contained words related to that semantic group), whereas other codes were identified at the latent level (e.g., extracts coded for “identities” or “language ideologies”). As Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 84) explain, by analysing at the latent level, the researcher identifies “underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations—and ideologies—that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data”.

As much as working with NVivo as a tool helped me to further familiarise myself with the data, I felt overwhelmed by the amount of codes (called “nodes” in the software) I generated in the first round. Moving on to the next phase—searching for themes—Nvivo was useful for establishing relationships among codes, and to check their internal coherence by looking at the list of extracts gathered under each one. However, what helped me to work out the narrative across the long list of codes was combining the outcomes from NVivo with my own handwritten conceptual maps and annotations on printed copies of the data (see Appendix L).

As part of the fourth phase—reviewing themes—I created a Word document containing a summary of each interview, where I noted down the unique and most relevant aspects of each of them. This helped me greatly with the rearrangement of my coding—i.e., to reduce the number of codes and find broader overarching themes for them. Engaging with the literature was also useful for identifying correlations between theoretical concepts and themes that were emerging from the data.

In my experience, the last two phases—defining and naming themes, and producing the report—were interwoven (Holliday, 2015). I created the skeleton of each findings chapter with headings referring to the overarching themes, and subheadings populated with data excerpts, with the help of the thematic maps of

codes I had drawn on paper. Writing up my analysis of the data was key to refining my own thinking (Liebenberg, 2016) and to developing the “story” that each theme tells (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, writing up often involved an iterative process of reviewing, redefining, and renaming themes, and even going back to reading again different data sources “to arrive at a logically coherent and rigorous analysis” (De Costa, 2015, p. 253) and discussion of findings that avoids drawing simplistic conclusions.

Having described the data analysis process, I now move to the ethical considerations of the study.

4.4.4 Research ethics

As De Costa (2015, p. 252) points out, researchers need to “balance macroethical guidelines with reflexive microethical practices”. In this section I explain how I followed the macroethical guidelines from the University of Durham School of Education’s “Code of Practice on Research Ethics”, and the *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* from the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018), as well as the microethics involved in the project with actual examples of how I negotiated emergent ethical dilemmas in my research context.

Ethical approval was received from the ethics committee in the School of Education, Durham University, on 07/11/2016 (see Appendix A), before I started attending different LCs and recording my experiences in the reflective journal. A second ethics application was approved on 08/09/2017 (see Appendix B), before collecting data from participants. All data were securely stored and all names were anonymised for confidentiality. I gave participants an information sheet about the research and a formal consent form (see Appendix C, D and E) before they participated in data collection. I invited participants to ask any questions about the project and reminded them of their right to withdraw at any time. In Chapter 5, I use three photographs to illustrate the environment in the LCs, for which I received consent from participants. Also, all faces in the photographs have been blurred so that nobody is identifiable.

Following the principles of nondeception and transparency, I informed participants in the LCs about my research interest in the LC environment, even before I started recruiting participants for data collection. Also, to be as overt as

possible about my research interests in the field, in LC1 I hung some posters on the walls of the venue (see Appendix F) prior to collecting data through the recording of conversations from the LC. The posters included a photo of my face, so that LC attendants could recognise me and opt to avoid me if they did not want to participate in the study.

I adopted a “fluid disposition” (De Costa, 2015, p. 249) to perceive and negotiate emergent ethical issues during fieldwork. For instance, as mentioned earlier, I realised that some students associated the voice recorders with the stress of going through audio-recorded speaking assessments in the classroom. I used my intuition to decide *ad hoc* during the LC events when it was a good moment to ask for permission to record the conversations, based on the relationship of trust that I was able to build with some participants. When I sensed that recording would jeopardise someone’s confidence to speak in the target language, or compromise the naturally informal flow of the event, I did not attempt to record the conversations.

In ethical research, it is important to think about how to be a “researcher as resource” (Sarangi & Candlin, 2003, p. 279) to engage in reciprocity with the people who dedicate their time to contribute to our studies (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014; Ganassin & Holmes, 2020). The educational value of my research topic meant that, generally, participants showed willingness to collaborate with me and learn from the experience. After the interviews, participants often expressed having appreciated the opportunity to discuss with me and reflect upon a very interesting and relevant topic for them. Moreover, I intentionally offered participants a choice of languages for the interview, knowing that some language learners would see the interview as an opportunity to practise their languages with me. This way, I also intended to maintain somehow the multilingual collaborative atmosphere of the language cafés during the interviews. Furthermore, some feedback on their Spanish writing was provided upon request to those who completed the pre-interview activity in this language. More details on how languages played out in the research and how I negotiated power through language use are discussed in 4.4.5.

In the case of LC2, because I developed a closer relationship with its small group of participants, I asked for permission to include the group as a field site for my study

via our private WhatsApp group before I asked them to sign the declaration of informed consent. I conducted the focus group interview with them in my own house and cooked dinner for them as a way to thank them for accepting to participate.

Sharing with participants the outcomes of the research is recognised as one of the researcher's ethical responsibilities to participants (BERA, 2018). One of the issues of conducting doctoral research part time is that it takes a long time (often years) before the researcher can share any findings and research outcomes with their participants. To compensate for this delay, I shared with some participants some of the outputs of my research at different stages, such as accepted abstracts for conference presentations and drafts for publication, so that they would be aware of, and have the chance to comment on, the findings that were emerging from the research.

Transparency of method in qualitative research is considered a key element of ethical research (Holliday, 2015). In that respect, De Costa (2015, p. 254) posits that, ultimately, researchers need to engage in reflexivity "to ensure that ethical practices are observed". Thus, in the next section I address researcher reflexivity, which, in this study, is closely linked to the role that languages played in shaping the research.

4.4.5 Reflexivity and researching multilingually

Qualitative research is "an interactive process shaped by one's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 12). The researcher's role in shaping the research has become critical when working within an interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), and reflexivity and transparency in this respect are important to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the findings (Holliday, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the author of this thesis, I do not present myself as an all-knowing authoritative voice reporting on the objective analysis of data collected from informants (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014), but recognise that I am part of the world I studied (Burawoy, 2003). As Cameron et al. (1992, p. 5) put it, "[r]esearchers cannot help being socially located persons. We inevitably bring our biographies and our subjectivities to every stage of the research process and this influences the questions we ask and the ways in which we try to find answers".

Thus, reflexivity involves awareness of one's different positionalities in the study, and how one presents oneself and is perceived in the social interaction and relational work involved in the research process.

As Rolland et al. (2019, p. 283) contend, “[i]n applied linguistics research, it is particularly relevant to look at how language may foster asymmetrical power relations”. Reflexivity in this study is tightly linked to the multilingual aspects of the research. In other studies conducted on LCs (Balçıkanlı, 2017; Gao, 2007), the relationship between the researcher and the LC, beyond being a mere observer in the field, remains unclear. In some cases (Li, 2004; Murray & Fujishima, 2016; Mynard et al., 2020), researchers mention their insider roles as educators, but not how their multilingual repertoires and subjectivities interacted with those of the research participants’.

The work of Holmes et al. (2013, 2016) has been instrumental in drawing researchers’ attention to the intricacies of using more than one language in the research process. They define *researching multilingually* as:

[t]he process and practice of using, or accounting for the use of, more than one language in the research process, e.g. from the initial design of the project, to engaging with different literatures, to developing the methodology, and considering all possible ethical issues, to generating and analysing the data, to issues of representation and reflexivity when writing up and publishing. (Holmes et al., 2016, p. 101)

The researching multilingually framework comprises three phases: (1) the researcher’s *realisation* of the role of languages in their project; (2) *consideration* of these multilingual aspects *vis-à-vis* the spatial and relational dimensions of the research; and (3) *informed and purposeful decision-making* regarding language use in all research stages, from planning to writing up. These phases should be seen as an iterative reflexive cycle and not a linear process. Rather than developing an increasing awareness of the multilingual possibilities and complexities of their research as it progresses, researchers might develop a “translingual mindset” and reflect upon the role of languages in their research from the outset (Andrews et al., 2018). This reflexive stance enables researchers to make informed and purposeful decisions, that is, to develop *intentionality*, regarding how their multilingual practices may shape their research: “[b]ecoming aware of the potential diversity of linguistic possibilities in research with multilingual dimensions seems both

prerequisite and integral for developing researcher intentionality” (Stelma et al., 2013, p. 313).

To increase critical awareness of the multilingual complexities and possibilities of the research and to develop intentionality, researchers need to consider the spatial and relational aspects of the research (Holmes et al., 2016). The spatiality dimension includes four spaces, described here in relation to this study: the *researched space* or phenomenon (in my case, informal language learning and socialisation); the *research space* where the research is conducted (two multilingual LCs in the UK); the *researcher space* which includes the researcher’s multilingual resources (I can speak Spanish, English, Italian, Portuguese, some French and some Arabic); and the *research (re)presentation space* (a doctoral thesis in an English-medium UK university) and the possibilities of disseminating the research in one or more languages, thus acknowledging the likelihood of a multilingual readership (Ganassin & Holmes, 2020). I now discuss how these different spaces and keeping a translingual mindset played out in my research.

Language spaces and translanguaging as methodology in this study

From the outset of the doctoral project, I recognised that languages would play an important part in LCs (the *research space*). I consider myself an avid (albeit imperfect) language learner, always interested in expanding my linguistic repertoire, and I find joy in the process of language learning for leisure (Kubota, 2011). Thus, I was excited to embark on a research project which would give me the opportunity to socialise in different languages. Regarding my multilingual resources (the *researcher space*), I grew up speaking Spanish as a first language, and learned additional languages during my teenage and university years in Spain. I trained as a professional translator with Spanish, English and Italian as my main languages. I spent a year abroad in Italy, and have since continued to socialise in Italian. Although I studied Arabic and spent some time in several Arabic countries improving my language skills, I never achieved the same communicative competence in Arabic as in my other languages. However, I still feel emotionally attached to this language and keep it part of my life through music, media, and personal connections. My personal network is also the main reason why I learned Portuguese, a language I have never formally studied, and yet I now use at home. I am a migrant in the UK, where I have developed my career as an *ELE* teacher

(*español como lengua extranjera*: Spanish as a foreign language). In the UK, I live a transnational, multilingual life in which English (the dominant language) is only one of the multiple languages in which I communicate and “dwell” (Phipps, 2007) on a daily basis. Thus, my research approach was informed by my complex positionality as an avid language learner, a Spanish teacher, and a transnational individual whose daily life takes place between and beyond linguistic, national and cultural boundaries (García & Li, 2014).

The way I used languages and negotiated my positionality in each LC was different due to the intersubjective and situated dimensions of my multilingual identities in each context. In the context of LC1, because of my affiliation with the university, I was concerned that my Spanish teacher identity would be perceived as more salient than the learner self I wanted to foreground. Considering that most participants in this LC were university students (including some of mine), I thought that participating as a Spanish speaker would put me in a position of power. Age was an important factor too, as these students were around ten years younger than me on average. Therefore, I felt the need to explicitly claim my positionality as a learner of French or, to put it differently, to negotiate my legitimacy as an authentic learner and insider in this environment. This meant, for instance, encouraging my students in class to attend the LCs to socialise in Spanish while telling them that I would be there practising my French. I also held a meeting with university colleagues who were involved in organising the LC in order to outline the scope of my study and explain to them why it was important for me to be seen as a learner in that milieu.

However, it was naïve of me to think that my profile as a teacher could be relegated to a second plane that easily. For instance, the Spanish teacher who used to help organise the Spanish groups in the LC stopped attending, perhaps assuming that having one Spanish teacher present was enough. Other colleagues, too, assumed that I was attending the LC to help students with their Spanish. The interviews were misinterpreted by some student-participants as some sort of feedback sessions about the LC: they often took for granted that I was part of the LC organising team and would, for example, take the initiative to suggest ways to improve the events (e.g., to increase their frequency), or portray the LC positively. I

negotiated this when necessary by being explicit about my interest in LCs as a learner and my own learning experiences in them.

As mentioned earlier, I was motivated to seek opportunities to practise French, and being a genuine learner of this language would allow me to experience the LCs from within and to forge symmetrical relationships with other language learners. Thus, rather than an unspoken requirement prior to fieldwork (Gibb et al., 2020), language learning—and revealing the researcher’s linguistic incompetence—was a conscious strategy to approach this qualitative research (Garrett & Young, 2009), and an opportunity to grow personally as a “whole-person-who-researches” (Attia & Edge, 2017). Nevertheless, Ganassin and Holmes (2013) encourage researchers to practice “flexible multilingualism”, that is, to draw upon, or make strategic use of, the multilingual resources naturally available in the research context in order to accommodate asymmetric multilingual practices. Likewise, Andrews and Fay (2020, p. 77) argue that a translingual mindset can support researchers to be “prepared for the unexpected, dynamic, or even playful uses of language in their research contexts rather than predictable and unchanging uses of language”. Although it was my intention to participate mainly as a learner of French, I ended up adopting a much more flexible approach to the languages I used in LC1, and I drew on my Spanish self more than intended. I was unable to foresee how my multiple languages and identities would play out in the environment. For instance, while less confident Spanish learners in LC1 would feel less at ease with the presence of a native speaker in their conversations, others actively capitalised on such opportunities.

My hands-on experiences in the field and the realisation that many LC participants were language enthusiasts informed my decision to give them the opportunity to choose the language of the interviews. I knew that some participants in LC1 would see an interview with me as an opportunity to practise their languages, especially Spanish. Six out of nine LC1 participants who spoke Spanish as an additional language chose to do the interview in Spanish, even if English (their first language) was also available. I encouraged translanguaging as a way of empowering those who did not feel confident enough to express themselves only in Spanish (García & Li, 2013; Li, 2018). In the case of the three Italian Erasmus students, even if they knew I could speak Italian, they chose to conduct the interview in English, which

was a lingua franca for the four of us. Drawing on my experience as an international student in Italy, I could relate to their willingness to exploit every opportunity to use the local language while abroad. While I agree with Rolland et al. (2019, p. 283) that researchers need to be cognizant of the fact that “participants may be at a disadvantage by using a foreign language” in research interviews, in the context of my study, offering this option was a motivating factor for avid multilinguals to participate in the study, and a strategy for me to give them something in return—i.e., a (trans)linguaging space that would be true to the spirit of the LC. Also, upon request, I gave written feedback to participants who completed the optional pre-interview activity in Spanish.

Due to the different ecology of LC2, I ended up building a different rapport with LC2 participants. This had implications for how I planned and carried out data collection with them. We had become a group of friends who socialised also in the private sphere. Also, although other languages were drawn upon occasionally, the underlying purpose of the group was speaking French, and I did not want to change the group’s ecology by introducing other languages for research purposes alone, even if the idea of conducting interviews in French was daunting for me. In this case, as an intentional, reflexive researcher, I chose to perform my authentic multilingual self (Polo-Pérez, forthcoming) in that I did not prioritise data collection over personal relationships in the field (Attia & Edge, 2017). Furthermore, this way of approaching data collection respected the linguistic ecology and sense of authenticity of the group.

Thus, using “translanguaging as methodology” (Polo-Pérez & Holmes, forthcoming) involved encouraging research participants (including the researcher) to use their full multilingual resources, thus reinforcing their sense of selves as multilingual social beings. This approach had implications for the representation of multilingual/translingual data in the research report, or the *research (re)presentation space*, which I discuss next.

The co-construction and representation of multilingual/translingual data

Researching multilingually and engaging in languaging and translanguaging as part of the methodology to study LCs have implications for how the multilingual data generated are represented in the research report (the *research (re)presentation space*) (Polo-Pérez & Holmes, forthcoming). For instance, I framed the interviews

as translingual by telling participants that they could mesh English and Spanish during the conversation as they pleased. Consistent with a translingual and collaborative orientation to communication (Canagarajah, 2013), I used different strategies to co-construct meaning during the interviews: repeating and paraphrasing information to confirm understanding; responding to non-verbal cues which indexed communication issues (such as laughter, raising intonation, or eye gaze) by filling language gaps when necessary; and using the phatic function of language to express acknowledgment (i.e., “aha, I’m following”). These strategies are illustrated in the verbatim transcript provided in Table 3 below.

However, researchers need to decide the level of detail to include in transcripts from spoken data depending on the purpose of their analysis. They may even create different versions of transcripts for different purposes (Lapadat, 2000). Since my research questions required a thematic analysis of the data with a focus on the *content* of participants’ remarks, I used “intelligent transcription” to prioritise the readability of the data in the presentation of findings. As opposed to verbatim, intelligent transcription preserves the essence of what is said, but leaves the inclusion or exclusion of the characteristic features of spoken language (the “ers”, “uhms”, false starts, or fillers) at researchers’ discretion, based on their meaningfulness vis-à-vis the research questions. This decision was also influenced by the space limitations of the thesis, considering also that excerpts in languages other than English would need to be accompanied by a translation.

Table 3 Example of verbatim transcript versus intelligent transcript

Verbatim transcript	Intelligent transcript <with translation>
Rebecca: Ehm... Me interesa cuando los estudiantes de otros países hablan de la cultura inglés... inglesa Nuria: inglesa, aha Rebecca: y los opin... no, is that right? ¿Opiniones? Nuria: las opiniones, sí Rebecca: opiniones de esa, porque para mí es normal y no tengo que pensar Nuria: Sí	Me interesa cuando los estudiantes de otros países hablan de la cultura inglesa y las opiniones de esa, porque para mí es normal y no tengo que pensar, y cuando otra persona dice algo, me doy cuenta de que tiene razón, así que es una manera de reflexionar sobre mi propia cultura. <It’s interesting when students from other countries talk about English culture and their opinions about it, because for me it’s normal and I don’t

Rebecca: y cuando otra persona dice algo me... I realise... ¿di cuenta? Nuria: me doy cuenta Rebecca: me doy cuenta de que tiene razón Nuria: aha Rebecca: así que es una manera de reflexionar sobre mi propia cultura.	<i>have to think, and when someone else says something, I realise they are right, so it's a way of reflecting upon my own culture></i> (Rebecca's interview, LC1)

Kvale (1996, pp. 172-173) states that “the verbatim transcribed oral language may appear as incoherent and confused speech, even indicating a lower level of intellectual functioning”, and “may involve an unethical stigmatisation of specific persons or groups of persons”. When speakers use a language in which they are not fluent, there is a greater danger of misrepresenting them as inarticulate; therefore, the question of how best to transcribe their speech becomes an ethical matter (Polo-Pérez & Holmes, forthcoming).

Nevertheless, since this study focuses on informal language learning and socialisation, it would be inappropriate to neglect the non-normative ways of speaking which contributed to the co-construction of knowledge and shared understandings between researcher and participants. As afore-mentioned, translanguaging was part of the research methodology to study the LCs (Polo-Pérez & Holmes, forthcoming), and that involved the natural “letting go” of linguistic accuracy in favour of meaning making and mutual understanding (Canagarajah, 2013). Thus, all excerpts across the three findings chapters are presented in their original language and reflect the wording with which participants and researcher chose to express themselves, regardless of grammaticality or linguistic accuracy. In the cases where languages other than English were used, an English translation of the content is provided immediately after; however, any linguistic choices which might be considered ungrammatical in the original are not indicated in any way. Consequently, the multilingual readership of this thesis is also involved in the translingual approach of the study, in that they, too, need to keep a translingual mindset to engage with the data presented therein.

Lastly, reflexivity in this study also entails being explicit about how my voice as a multilingual speaker and learner is represented in the research outcomes, as I explain next.

The (auto)ethnographic self as a resource

In line with the subjectivist epistemology underpinning the study, whereby researcher and participants co-create understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), I had to ask myself to what extent I could (or should) turn to the autoethnographic data I collected through my reflective journal—and not only participants' data—to answer my research questions. My experience in the field was not limited to the enactment of a purposeful role in order to gather rich data for my study, but I brought in my language learner self in the most authentic sense of the term (Polo-Pérez, forthcoming). I decided to be explicit about my (multilingual) “ethnographic self as a resource” (Coffey, 1999; Collins & Gallinat, 2010), and this is why I refer to autoethnographic data throughout the different chapters in the thesis. My study, therefore, integrates the storyteller and the story (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For instance, my own LC experiences feature in the findings chapters alongside the experiences of other LC participants. Thus, reflexivity is not just a separate section within the thesis, but “an act of discoursing” (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014, p. 1) and a stance that is apparent throughout the text. I am consciously including my own positioning in the research report, letting my own voice speak alongside the voices of others, instead of claiming neutrality yet hiding behind participants' voices in order to “tell my own story” or whisper my points “objectively” (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 187). Pavlenko (2003, p. 186) believes that multilingual speakers can develop an academic voice that reconciles “authority (i.e., the right to impose reception, in Bourdieu's terms) with authenticity” (i.e., in my case, the right to retain my own accented voice and my multiple perspectives and inner motives as a researcher, teacher, migrant, multilingual speaker and learner).

I discussed my findings and shared my writing outputs with some fellow language teachers and key participants who had experienced the same LCs as me. One key participant from LC1 (Nathan) read some of my work and, in his feedback, said that my voice as participant-ethnographer in the text was “easily heard” (“se oye muy bien”). He also found that the theories and analysis presented there helped him to articulate his own mixed feelings *vis-à-vis* the LCs (“me ayudan a articular la

mezcla de sentimientos que tengo respecto a los language cafés”), and was particularly fond of the interpretation of LCs as “heterotopias” (cf. Igarashi, 2016). This was not mere participant validation or member-checking (see Harvey, 2015 for a critique), but a dialogic interpretation of events and collaborative reflexivity; e.g., with Nathan I also discussed the importance of being critical towards—and representing that criticality clearly in my writing—the overrepresentation of hegemonic languages (French and Spanish mainly), while more could be done to promote lesser taught languages in LCs.

To conclude, the researching multilingually perspective (Holmes et al., 2016) and researcher reflexivity (e.g., Byrd-Clarke & Dervin, 2014) presented in this section add transparency to the shaping role of multilingual practices in this study, which, in turn, contributes to the trustworthiness of the research.

Summary of Chapter 4

In this chapter I have presented the methodological framework of the study. The research paradigm that helped me to answer my research questions is underpinned by social constructionism (4.1), and follows an interpretivist and ethnographically-inspired approach to qualitative research with an ecological perspective (4.2). I described broadly the contexts of the two LCs involved in the study (4.3), bearing in mind that, in the next chapter (Chapter 5)—which looks at the co-construction of the LC learning and socialisation environments—a much more detailed contextualisation is interwoven with the discussion of findings. I then discussed the research methods employed to conduct the study (4.4). The study draws on a complex set of data which respected the ethics and ecologies of each LC and enabled a holistic understanding of them. I highlighted my early entering the field and use of a researcher’s reflective journal during my prolonged participation in the LCs as an important source of data which reflects my authentic researcher-as-language-learner participation in the LCs. All data were analysed drawing on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) model of thematic analysis. Finally, I discussed the research ethical considerations and offered a detailed account of how reflexivity with a researching multilingually perspective (Holmes et al., 2013, 2016) played out in the development of the research, whose design, fieldwork, and

outcomes were very much shaped by the use of multiple languages and translanguaging practices.

Rather than describing how I followed a set of fixed or prescribed methodological procedures, I have presented the study's methodological approach as emergent, negotiated, and co-constructed intersubjectively and reflexively throughout the different stages of the research process (Attia & Edge, 2017; Giampapa, 2011; Giampapa & Lamoureux, 2011; Holliday, 2007). The transparency that this chapter offers in this respect contributes to the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The next chapter is the first of the three findings chapter. Each findings chapter starts with a vignette drawing on different types of ethnographic data (data from observations, recorded naturally-occurring conversations, and my researcher's reflective journal). The aim of these vignettes is to offer a snapshot (Blodgett et al., 2011) of typical situations or conversations in the LCs that help to set the scene for the discussion of the findings thereafter. Thus, the vignettes work also as a narrative device to take the reader to the LCs.

Chapter 5: The ecologies of the language cafés: co-constructing multilingual socialisation and collaborative learning spaces

Setting the scene

Vignette I: Language café 1

Today, again, I was nervous before coming, and during the day I felt the urge to talk to myself in French to get into the mood. When I arrive, I find the place packed with people. I see Antoine and Molly, with whom I spoke last time. “Je viens de finir mon cours; j’ai donné 6 heures de cours aujourd’hui et je suis un peu fatiguée, mais ça va. Et vous?” It’s a weird feeling pronouncing these words. I feel funny, as if I am playing a game. The words don’t come naturally through my mouth. When will I internalise these kinds of introductory greetings so that I can choose what facial expressions to put while I speak?

Soon other people join our conversation. “Salut! Vous parlez français? Est-ce que je peux me joindre à vous ?” Everyone says what they are studying, what college they are in... Antoine then tells us about his travels around Spain... We discuss Almodóvar’s Volver (a girl who did A Level Spanish says she doesn’t get Spanish humour). At some point, I notice the Arabic conversation near us. Eavesdropping is something I cannot avoid in this language café... One of the guys is making a big effort to form his sentences in Arabic. He asks the others “How do you say in Arabic ‘how do you say...?’” And one of them replies “Mada taql...?” And I almost felt like giving the answer myself.

Some minutes later, a guy approaches us and we all invite him to sit down and join our conversation. And that is how another little conversation group emerges. Participating in this language café feels a bit like being at a party or a sort of reception event, where conversations start and vanish very easily, interrupting people’s conversations to greet your acquaintances is accepted as a normal practice, and there is always something new you learn by interacting with others.

Vignette II: Language café 2

It’s my turn to buy Hugo a drink (he paid last time). Ruth arrives late, but full of energy! She’s just been to the cinema to watch The Salesman, an Iranian movie which she highly recommends. I love her enthusiasm when she talks about movies. And her French is so clear. When I’m older, I want to be like her.

With Regina, it’s only four of us today. The conversation flows so smoothly, from swear words in different languages, to Brazil, and then politics... and everything seasoned with so many interesting personal anecdotes. Everyone is such a good listener! Even when it takes me ages to find the way to convey what I want to say.

When the time comes, we say bye with two kisses. Once again, I’m heading to the train station with a smile on my face. I’m so glad I came. It seems that, after all, I can speak French! And I love this French little bubble we have created for ourselves.

Introduction

This is the first of the three findings chapters, and it addresses the first research question (and subquestion) of the study:

How do participants co-construct language learning and multilingual socialisation in the ecologies of LCs?

Subquestion: What affordances and challenges do participants perceive in this environment?

Drawing on an ecological approach to research, this chapter deconstructs the environments of LC1 and LC2 by exploring their nested levels of scale (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) and the complex interrelationships within them (see 4.3), which offer the ground for the emergence of multilingual socialisation and learning. An ecological perspective does not view context as an external factor or frame from which to understand behaviour within an environment (Phipps & Levine, 2012; van Lier, 2004). Context shapes and is shaped by participant behaviour and what goes on in LCs. As van Lier (2004, p. 11) puts it, the ecological approach “looks at the entire situation and asks, what is it in this environment that makes things happen the way they do? How does learning come about?” Thus, by providing an ecological contextualisation of the two LCs, this chapter feeds into the next two findings chapters, as it offers the basis from which to make sense of the findings therein. In particular, Chapter 6 focuses on how participants experienced their multilingual identities, and Chapter 7 on how they experienced their interculturality in these LCs.

The first section of the chapter (5.1) explores the ecological interconnections between the two LCs and their broader contexts. After that, each of the following two sections (5.2 and 5.3) focuses on one of the LCs respectively to analyse how participants co-constructed multilingual socialisation and collaborative learning spaces in each of them. Both 5.2 and 5.3 start similarly with an overview of the social and the physical environment of the LC: the participants, their aims and motivations for participating in the LC, the LC venue, and the artefacts with symbolic meaning and mediational roles in the environment.

I analyse the social environment by describing the individual profiles of the participants and exploring their aims and motivations for participating in the LC. It

is important to explore individuals' motives for participating in the LCs as these shape their expectations about the events (Murray et al., 2014; van Lier, 2004). Further, participants' multilingual subjectivities—e.g., their language backgrounds, experiences, identities, emotions, ideologies, and motivations—help to understand how they co-constructed the social environment of LCs by coming together and interacting with one another and with the space. As Murray et al. (2014, pp. 234-235) argue, “affordances for learning [...] result from learners' engagement with the environment and, therefore, depend in large measure on their identities”.

The physical environment has an impact on the social dynamics of any communicative event (van Lier, 2004). Thus, I explore the ways in which participants interacted with material realities (e.g., the venue and different cultural artefacts), and the role that these played in the co-construction of the learning spaces. I focus first on how participants experienced and made use of the space, particularly when entering the LC venues, as this helps to contextualise participants' emotions when attending the event for the first time. Then, I highlight the mediational role and symbolic meaning of some artefacts in the environment in each LC. Mediational role refers to the ways in which certain tools or artefacts arbitrate, regulate or intervene somehow in the construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Symbolic meaning is the meaning that individuals infer from signs based on sociocultural conventions and the personal and idiosyncratic value and connotations that those signs evoke to them (Kramsch, 2009). Different details of the physical space foment the informality that characterised these events, as well as the emergence of conversation groups and the power dynamics within these groups.

Following a thorough contextualisation of the social and physical environment of each LC, I analyse the affordances for learning and language socialisation as perceived by the participants, as well as some challenges they encountered. In that respect, through the thematic analysis of data, I identified different themes in each LC. As discussed in Chapter 3, it is important to take into account that “[l]anguages are not only ‘acquired’ and ‘learnt’, but also ‘lived’” (Ros i Solé, 2016, p. 1). Thus, rather than measuring what was learned in LCs, I focus on the affordances of these events for the experience of *linguaging*, described by Phipps and Gonzalez (2004) as being in another language in the whole social world, focusing on meaning

making and developing new human connections through language, and living in and with cultures to become intercultural critical beings. In such an understanding, languaging involves living languages from within and in connection with their material worlds, rather than studying language as an objective reality from a distance. In addition, the term *translanguaging* captures this lived experience when the emphasis is on how multilinguals draw on their full semiotic repertoires in communication (including multiple languages and other multimodal semiotic resources) (Canagarajah, 2013; Li, 2018; García & Li, 2014).

The chapter ends with a summary of the findings and some concluding remarks.

5.1 The ecological interconnections between the LCs and their broader contexts

In this section I focus on the multiple connections between the LCs and other contexts, to argue that LCs cannot be analysed in isolation from its broader ecological interrelations. Reinders and Benson (2017, p. 3) use the term “social ecologies” of language learning to refer to the “interconnected web of learning opportunities” (p. 14) in which learners participate. This idea aligns with van Lier’s (2004, p. 194) criticism of most classroom research—including his own—which “has treated the classroom as a bounded system, and studied the interactions and language in it without explicit connections to other contexts”. He argues that learners and teachers spend a specific amount of time in the classroom, but before that they have been engaged in other activities, and after that they will go to other places, and all this will certainly have an effect on what happens inside the classroom. I show why this was a crucial point to consider, too, when studying the two LCs concerned in this research. In particular, I explore the interconnections between the LCs and the classroom, between the face-to-face environments and their online counterparts, between the LCs and other language-related activities beyond the classroom, and, finally, the implications of the sociohistorical context in which the LCs were situated.

5.1.1 The interconnections between the LCs and the classroom

The connections between the LC and the classroom as a context of formal instruction were salient in the discourse of LC1 participants, since nearly everyone I interviewed from LC1 was enrolled in a language learning programme at the time

of data collection. For many, the classroom was the place that pointed them towards the LC events, since they learned about them through their teachers.

[I]f I hadn't done the Spanish module, I don't know if I would have come to it, because I wouldn't have really known about it. (Kate's interview, LC1)

The LC was presented to them as a good extracurricular activity to support their classroom learning. For Lydia, the fact that the LC event happened right after her class made it easier for her to gather the courage to attend, since she was already "in the zone" and felt more capable to speak French after that.

Nuria: Do you remember your first time?

Lydia: Yeah, I think it was last year, the first one that they did, and I was really scared, like I had to debate for a while if I wanted to do it or not, but it was straight after my French speaking seminar, so I think I was IN the zone, and that really helped me, yeah. I was like "well, I'm here now, so I might just stay".

(Lydia's interview, LC1)

Not surprisingly, for many learners the classroom proved to be a useful point of reference from which to appraise their experiences in the LCs. In the LC1 data, the comparisons between the LC and the classroom experience were recurrent. However, this was not prominent in the LC2 data, since participants there were not enrolled in language courses with high-stakes assessment. Thus, although the classroom remains an external context to the LC, it features prominently in many LC1 excerpts and discussions across the findings chapters.

5.1.2 The interconnections between the face-to-face and online spaces

Both LC1 and LC2 used social media to advertise their events, and these online spaces played an important role in the maintenance of the group. For example, both of them had a Facebook page where the organisers posted the details of the upcoming encounters, and where anyone could post photos from past events. This repository of photos captured lived moments that could bring memories to those who attended the event, and provide a visual depiction of the events to those who had never attended, helping them to visualise the environment they could be part of.

In LC1, someone from the Student Union was in charge of taking photos of the event semi-professionally in order to promote it on social media and attract more participants. In LC2, Sonia was the only participant who took photos during the events. She was concerned about how small the group had become, and wanted to revitalise it. Her way of doing that was by taking a picture from each meeting and posting it in the LC2 WhatsApp group, to motivate those who used to attend to come back.

While social media was key in advertising the events, participants from LC1 and LC2 rarely used the online platforms as an open forum to interact with each other or talk about their experiences in the LCs, unlike participants in the English Club featured in Gao's study (2009). At the individual level, however, some participants (including me) stayed in touch via WhatsApp and interacted privately with others beyond the "official" LC events.

5.1.3 The LCs and other language-related activities

The personal world of multilinguals is filled with many language-related activities (van Lier, 2004; Ros i Solé, 2016) beyond the language classroom and beyond the LC. How participants find opportunities to use their languages in their daily lives has an impact on their aims, behaviours, and general experiences of conversing in LCs. A participant from LC1, for instance, said that, because she already socialised very much in her other languages, in the LC she focused on practising Spanish, which was the one she was missing the most. In general, the findings chapters show that participants were influenced by their own multilingual background and "cartographies" (Ros i Solé, 2013): those who had extensive experiences of living abroad and socialising with friends in their languages did not approach the LCs in the same manner as those who had very little experience using their languages outside of the classroom.

Around half of the participants I interviewed had already had extensive experiences engaging in other LCs or similar groups in this or other cities and countries. In the same city as LC1, there were other language-related events: a multilingual LC organised by a university college; a private (not widely advertised) Italian conversation group created by a student in her final year; another weekly Italian conversation group organised by an Italian teacher in collaboration with Italian Erasmus students; and a weekly French LC organised by French university

lecteurs which took place in the same venue as LC1. A number of university student societies also organised cultural events related to different languages throughout the academic year, and many LC1 participants were involved in them. Likewise, in the city where LC2 took place, there were many other LCs available, most of which could be found in the website [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com). In my experience attending several of these groups aimed at different languages, it was common to find the same people across different events, which felt like becoming part of a small world of French enthusiasts in the city—a particular network of people who were interconnected through their engagement in different local French-related events.

In the interview data and in their reflective pieces of writing, I noticed that many participants often referred to the LC experiences they had had elsewhere to make a point about participating in LCs generally, rather than about LC1 or LC2 specifically. For instance, a participant described an anecdote from a LC in Bilbao (Spain), where a Basque woman assumed that he was from the French Basque Country because of his accent and the words he used from a Basque dialect. This participant wanted to express how he enjoyed being able to use what he had learned about this dialect in the LC, something he had never been able to do in the classroom (this example will be discussed later on). Another participant recalled the sense of achievement that he felt after the first time he attended LC1, and described how he felt similar emotions at another LC in his hometown, whereas another participant, when asked about a memorable conversation she had in the LC, she recalled a conversation with a woman she met also at another LC in her home town. Likewise, three Italian participants who attended the LC mainly to speak with Italian learners drew on their experiences from LC1 during the interview, but also from a similar Italian group which happened weekly in a nearby building. One of the older participants in LC2 also recalled his experiences in a LC in São Paulo (Brazil) in the early 2000s, as he could not forget the feeling of being in an international and multilingual bubble that he experienced during those events.

Examples like the ones above, where participants drew on experiences from similar events elsewhere, were recurrent in the data. This shows that participants found it difficult to establish boundaries between the lived experiences they had in different informal language groups, and that LC1 and LC2 were not the only groups

that were part of their social lives as multilingual language learners. Although each LC is unique in terms of its emerging dynamics and particularities, many participants did not see the LC as a bound system, but holistically as part of their experiences of dwelling in languages (Phipps, 2007), which took place in a myriad of interrelated activities in their personal lives. Rather than discarding participants' comments and accounts in the data when they did not refer specifically to LC1 or LC2, I interpreted these experiences as useful in making sense of participants' understandings of LCs as a social phenomenon.

5.1.4 The sociohistorical, political, and cultural situatedness of the LCs

LCs cannot be studied in isolation from the sociohistorical, political, and cultural context in which they are situated. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, gathering in public spaces to speak languages is not a new phenomenon (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), and even less so is the use of cafés and bars/pubs as hubs for the exchange of ideas among like-minded bohemians, artists, and intellectuals (Davis & Holdom, 2009; Holliday, 2011). The semiotics of these places as cultural hubs, linked with the activity of engaging in foreign language conversations with strangers, made LCs an attractive event for multilingual enthusiasts with an international mindset, as will become clear throughout the findings chapters.

It is important to highlight that LC1 and LC2 were located in the UK and aimed at practising languages other than English. Their audiences included multilinguals who were competent English speakers interested in socialising in other languages. The way English speakers make sense of speaking and learning other languages might be different from the way learning English is viewed in other parts of the world, where investing in English is associated with climbing up the socioeconomic ladder, even when one is not planning to leave their home country (Duff, 2017; Gao, 2012, 2016). Kubota (2011), however, offers a different perspective: she contends that learning at *eikawa* schools in Japan (English language conversation schools outside of formal education) can be interpreted as a form of casual leisure and consumption, where learners enjoy “socializing with like-minded people and being exposed to an exotic English-speaking space removed from daily work or family life” (Kubota, 2011, p. 480).

Attending to the situatedness of the LCs involves considering critically the role of languages in the UK, including the spaces that different languages occupy in

societies (see 1.1 in the introductory chapter). Nowadays, the languages that are more widely taught in UK higher education are French, Spanish, German (these three being the main foreign languages offered at school), Italian, and increasingly more Mandarin. These languages have a higher currency value than others because of the privileged socioeconomic status that their countries have in the neoliberal market of the 21st century (Kramsch, 2014; Ros i Solé, 2022). These were the languages that were more represented in the landscape of UK LCs. If the range of languages represented in LCs depended on proximity and number of speakers in the UK, Polish would be much more on offer, being a European language which, in 2011, was considered the most widely spoken after English in England and Wales (Booth, 2013).

Finally, the outside world informed the inside environment of LC1 and LC2 in many different ways. Seemingly trivial factors, such as the weather conditions, had an impact on the number of participants attending the LCs. The political climate was often the topic of conversations in the LCs and opened up opportunities to engage in dialogue about sensitive contemporary topics, such as Brexit, or the 2017 Catalan independence referendum. Issues happening at a local level also had an impact; one example was the university staff strikes that took place in February 2018, which informed many of the conversations that LC1 participants had on the LC that took place that month. Some participants reported having learned words such as “strike”, “pensions”, “union” in their respective languages during that LC event.

Summary

LCs are not bounded systems, but are nested within interconnected levels of scale (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). As Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010, p. 72) put it, “the different parts of an eco-system are interconnected and (...) changes in any one part of the system will have ripple effects that impact on other parts of the system”. In this section, I have focused on the outermost level of contextualisation to show how LCs are interconnected with other places, and situated in a particular sociohistorical context, which has an impact on what goes on in the here-and-now of participant interactions during the LC events.

Next, I explore LC1's inner levels of scale—its social-interactive and physical environment—and the role they played in the emergence of affordances for multilingual socialisation and collaborative learning.

5.2 Co-constructing multilingual socialisation and collaborative learning spaces in LC1

This section delves into the ecologies of LC1 specifically. The first two subsections explore the social environment: the LC1 participants (5.2.1) and their aims and motivations for participating in the LC (5.2.2). The following two subsections analyse the physical environment: the LC1 venue (5.2.3) and some artefacts that had a mediational role through their symbolic meaning (5.2.4). Then, through the thematic analysis of the data, I identified three aspects that were associated with the affordances for languaging, translanguaging, and collaborative learning in LC1: sense of freedom, agency, and authenticity (5.2.5); joint enterprise and reciprocity, or the idea that “everyone is in the same boat” (5.2.6); and emotion work (5.2.7). The final subsection (5.2.8) focuses on the challenges and constraints that participants perceived in LC1.

5.2.1 The LC1 participants

LC1 was attended by many international students who had come from different parts of the world to study at the prestigious British university associated with this LC. **Carla, Maria, and Valentina** were Italian students on an exchange programme from the University of Catania (Italy); Carla studied English, Spanish, and French; Maria, English and French; and Valentina, English and Russian. The three of them had extensive socialisation experiences in English through different sojourns abroad, but not so much in their other languages. **José, Carlos, and Alberto** came from different parts of Mexico to undertake a master's degree in physics; José and Alberto were also taking German classes at beginner's level. **Amy** was an international student from the United States doing her degree in criminology, and had studied Spanish since high school. **Gemma** was a biosciences student, who was born in Catalonia and spoke Catalan with her family, but had lived most of her life in Switzerland, where her primary and secondary education was in French, English, and German. She also spoke Spanish, although she considered this to be

her weakest language. Other international students that I met in LC1 came from Hungary, Spain, Slovakia, Cyprus, China, and France.

Many other participants came from different parts of the UK. **Molly** studied modern languages (French and Italian), and liked to spend her summers abroad; she mentioned, for instance, undertaking a summer language course in Perpignan (France), visiting her French pen pal in Paris, or doing voluntary work with refugees in Lesbos (Greece). **Rachel** was British, but her mother was Spanish and lived in Majorca (Spain), which she considered her second home. She studied modern languages (Spanish, French, and Italian), and had extensive socialisation experiences in those languages; for instance, she worked as an *au pair* in Madrid (Spain) and Isola d'Elba (Italy). She was also the president of the French society at the University (2017/18), which illustrates how invested she was in that language as well. **Lydia** was British, studied combined honours (English and French), and had been to France in a school exchange as a teenager. **Kate** was a sociology and anthropology student who spent four months in Peru working as a volunteer, after which she decided to study Spanish as an elective module at university. **Ben** was a chemistry student, who studied French at school and had some close relatives living in France, but he did not consider himself a French speaker. He spent four months travelling around Latin America, where he learned Spanish. He studied Spanish as an elective module at university, and had a year abroad in Madrid (Spain). **Rebecca** was a history student, fluent in French, and had experience working as a volunteer in Togo and Nepal, where she learned Nepali. She was studying Spanish as an elective module at university, and thinking about taking up Arabic in order to use it with the Syrian refugee women to whom she was teaching English as a volunteer. **Robert** was an engineering student who was fluent in French; he had made French part of his life by blending it with his hobbies and interests (e.g., listening to French podcasts about science), and he had been on a summer work placement in France. **Elisabeth** was Russian and British. She was brought up mainly in London, and considered herself bilingual in Russian and English. She took Spanish and French classes alongside her Business degree; she had studied these languages at school and remembered fondly her immersion experience from a school exchange in Spain when she was 14.

As these profiles suggest, a great number of these participants were not studying a degree in modern languages, yet most of them were engaged in formal language instruction and had more or less extensive experiences abroad involving language immersion and socialisation. Those who did study modern languages had in common the experience of the year abroad. In British universities, it is a common requirement for undergraduate students in modern languages to undertake an academic year abroad, during which they may be able to choose to study at a different university, do a work placement at a company, or work at a school as an English language assistant. Students may also be able to decide whether to spend the whole academic year in the same country, or split the year with two different destinations. At the time of data collection, Lydia, Rachel and Molly were to embark on their year abroad on the following academic year. In the LC, they had the opportunity to listen to the experiences of others who had already done it.

There were two participants, Alice and Nathan, whose multilingual profiles were particularly impressive, considering their young age (21-22 years old), and that they were raised mainly monolingually in English in the UK. These two participants would fit in what Kramsch (2009, p. 4) (jokingly) describes as polyglots who “collect languages like others collect butterflies”. **Alice** was a modern languages student who had already completed her year abroad in Peru and Italy. The following account shows the complexities of her profile as a language learner:

Nuria: ¿Qué lenguas hablas y cómo las has aprendido?

<What languages do you speak and how did you learn them?>

Alice: Bueno, depende de qué quieres decir con “hablar una lengua”, porque depende. Estudié el francés durante diez años en el colegio, pero no, ahora ya no lo hablo, lo entiendo escrito muy bien, pero no lo hablo. Estudié también español, que estudio todavía y en la universidad comencé a estudiar italiano en el primer año y catalán el segundo año. También fui a Finlandia y aprendí un poco de finlandés, pero es muy difícil. Pero cada vez que vuelvo en Finlandia, tengo que hablar finlandés, no con la familia, pero con la abuela y otra gente, y no he practicado, pero ahora tengo una amiga aquí en [esta ciudad] que practica el finlandés y practicamos juntas. [...] Y hablo... hablo no, pero leo un poco de alemán. Estoy intentando aprenderlo, pero... [laughter] Probablemente ahora debería enfocarme en las tres lenguas de la universidad... [...] [Duolingo] dice que soy 66% fluent [en alemán] pero no es verdad para nada. No, no puedo decir casi nada.

<Well, it depends on what you mean by “speaking a language”, because it depends. I studied French for ten years at school, but no, now I don’t speak it anymore, I understand it if I read it, but don’t speak it. I also studied Spanish, which I still study, and at university I started studying Italian in my first year and Catalan in my second. Also, I went to Finland and learned some Finnish, but it’s very difficult. But every time I go back to Finland, I have to speak Finnish, not with the family, but with the grandma and other people, and I haven’t practised it, but now I have a friend here in [this city] who practises Finnish and we practise together. [...] And I speak... not speak, but can read a bit of German. I’m trying to learn it, but... [laughter] Probably now I should focus on the three languages I study at uni... [...] [Duolingo] says I am 66% fluent [in German] but it’s not true at all. No, I barely can say anything.>

(Alice’s interview, LC1)

Alice starts by problematising what looks like a common, simple question by unpacking what is meant by “speaking a language”. Despite having studied French for ten years at school, she did not consider herself a French speaker, yet she could relate to the Finnish language in a social way—this was the language she spoke with the grandma of her host family—even if she had only spent some months in Finland working as an *au pair*. With this self-evaluation of her multilingual repertoire, Alice implies that neither classroom learning nor well-known tools for independent language learning (such as the app Duolingo) are conducive to fluency if they are not combined with embodied experiences of using the language with others in authentic social ways, which is the tenet of sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978) and the ecological approach to language learning (Kramsch, 2002; van Lier, 2004).

The second example of an avid polyglot (or “languages collector”) from LC1 was **Nathan**. He was from a small village in the British countryside and, in contrast, he saw this university city as “full of life and international people”. Nathan was a geography student who studied French at school and, due to his mother’s work, spent some time in the French Basque country, where he became interested in Euskara (the Basque language), particularly in the Souletin or Zuberoan dialect spoken in Soule (France). He then took a gap year and spent most of it learning Chinese in China. After that, he taught himself some Euskara, made Basque friends who were living in Edinburgh, and spent some months in different parts of the Basque Country in Spain, including two months learning intensively in a *barnetegi*, a boarding school specialised in the teaching of Basque for adults. He was also

fluent in French, Spanish, and was learning Catalan. He had multiple anecdotes of “passing for a native” (Piller, 2002) in most of his languages, which gave him a great sense of achievement.

5.2.2 Aims and motivations for attending the LC

In order to understand the emergence of languaging, translanguaging and collaborative learning in LCs, it is important to attend to the aims and motivations that led participants to engage in these events in the first place. A complex order emerges out of the ways in which participants approach an activity (van Lier, 2004), and their aims and motivations for participating are important for shaping the nature of the activity at hand. In the case of language learners, their approach to learning may play an important role in how they approach the LC as a communicative event (e.g., depending on whether they foreground the instrumental value of learning languages, the recreational value with social and personal rewards, or both).

Drawing on interview data, I identified four main aims and motivations for participating in LC1: (1) to socialise in languages for personal enjoyment combined with instrumental value (2) to socialise in one’s linguistic comfort zone and help others, (3) to expand one’s social networks, and (4) to complete coursework set by a teacher. It is important to mention that participants’ aims and motivations were often nuanced, multi-layered, and also evolved over time as participants developed a relationship with the place. I illustrate each of these motives with excerpts from interview data.

To socialise in languages for personal enjoyment with instrumental value

This aim was relevant for instructed learners who were studying languages at university at the time, and viewed practising outside of the classroom as necessary to become fluent and, subsequently, do well in their exams. Some of these participants saw the study of languages as inseparable from living through them (Ros i Solé, 2016). Rachel, for instance, did not differentiate *studying* languages from making them part of her social life:

lo que más me gusta de estudiar idiomas [es] que forman parte de la vida y la vida social, y hablar siempre quiere decir que comunicamos y nos socializamos.

<what I like the most about studying languages is that they are part of life and social life, and speaking always means communicating and socialising.>

(Rachel's interview, LC1)

For many of these learners, chatting with others and socialising, apart from being an enjoyable activity, was also conducive to greater language fluency and proficiency, or language maintenance in the case of already confident speakers. Alice, for instance, defined the LC as “*una diversión*” (“a fun activity”) which helped her to keep her languages alive: “*después del año en el extranjero no [quería] perder la capacidad de hablar bien la lengua*” *<after the year abroad, I didn't want to lose the ability to speak the language fluently>*. Besides LC1, Alice attended other Italian conversation groups and social events related to languages and cultures organised by the university. Further to the fun aspect of it, she also saw the instrumental value of practising her languages; in other words, her motivation for attending LCs was also influenced by extrinsic factors (i.e., language exams):

También porque tengo exámenes tengo que practicar, por eso también ahora hablo un poco más español en los language cafés, porque hablo más italiano los otros días en la vida, tengo más amigos italianos aquí y, no sé, sé muchas palabras en español, pero como que a veces no lo practico tanto, no sé, la fluidez no siempre viene como querría.

<Also because I have exams I need to practise, that's also why now I speak Spanish a bit more in the language cafés, because I speak more Italian the other days in my life, I've got more Italian friends here and, I don't know, I know many words in Spanish, but I feel like I don't practise it that much sometimes, I don't know, fluency doesn't always come as I would like to.>

(Alice's interview, LC1)

Alice's account is an example of how extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors are not necessarily incompatible, but can feed into each other. Thus, Gardner and Lambert's (1972) distinction between integrative/instrumental motivation, or intrinsic/extrinsic motivation are dichotomies that did not apply here.

Other participants talked about language learning as a pastime, casual leisure, or a hobby. Robert, for instance, compared learning French with playing a musical instrument:

I think [learning French] is something I do because I enjoy it. I mean, I guess last year it was different because for the first time in a while I actually had

to learn, so I had to spend time reading things and writing things and things like that, and then before I went to France I was like consciously just like I need to spend as much time as possible... But I think overall I do it because I enjoy it, in the same way that I play a musical instrument because I enjoy it, and the fact... it's great being able to go and, you know, perform having practised pieces like with a friend or on my own, and that's great, but I do it because I enjoy it, and that's possibly the same with French, like, it's great being able to speak with people and that's really enjoyable, getting to know other people, and it's great being able to spend a month in France, but also just like it's just satisfying and it's fun in itself. (Robert's interview, LC1)

Kubota (2011, p. 475) argues that "learning a foreign language can be a lifelong hobby driven by intellectual curiosity". Some learners do not approach languages from an employability perspective, but from the point of view of serious or casual leisure (Stebbins, 2014). This is especially the case for individuals who "have already established their socioeconomic status at home" (Kubota, 2011, p. 475), and therefore do not see learning a new language as a way up the socioeconomic ladder. In the above excerpt, Robert says in numerous occasions "I do it because I enjoy it" both referring to learning French and playing a musical instrument. He was an engineering student who did not *need* French to pursue his career, but found speaking another language "satisfying" and "fun in itself".

Similarly, Molly, who was a modern languages student, also emphasised the satisfying aspect of being able to speak other languages. At one point during the interview, she said that "languages give a lot back". When I asked her about the kinds of rewards that one obtains from learning other languages, she replied as follows:

So I [laughter]... I just really like chatting to people! So even just being able to sit on the train in France and Italy and being able to have a conversation with someone... Or another really rewarding experience I've had in the past is when I've been able to translate for people, so for example, it's a really random example, but once I had to translate between a Polish person and a French person. The Polish person could speak English, so I was able to communicate kind of between them and that was again really satisfying, to like help other people to communicate... or vice versa, if someone who doesn't speak English can speak French, we can still have that kind of connection and share ideas and like cultural exchange as well. (Molly's interview, LC1)

This participant foregrounded the social aspects of being able to establish new human connections through languaging "on the go" (e.g., having a conversation with strangers on a train) and acting as a linguistic and intercultural mediator

between people who do not share linguistic repertoires. Helping other people to communicate shows the instrumental value of languages in society; yet, beyond the purely transactional function of language (Kramsch, 2021), Molly focused on the effect of this experience on the mediator as a subject herself (“it was really satisfying”) who is affected and transformed by this human connection and exchange of ideas. Thus, Molly, and all of the above participants, offered a perspective on practising languages that transcended the purely linguistic—i.e., practising to achieve linguistic proficiency—and focused instead on the enjoyable, relational, and affective aspects of languaging (Kramsch, 2009; Phipps, 2007; Ros i Solé, 2016).

To socialise in one’s linguistic comfort zone and help others

Carla, Maria and Valentina were three Italian Erasmus students who were doing some teacher training within the modern languages department alongside their studies. Their teacher trainer encouraged them to participate in the LC, as it would be beneficial for their training. They all learned other languages (Spanish, French and Russian), but did not use them in the LC. These three students mentioned several times that it felt good for them to help others to improve their confidence as Italian speakers:

If you can do this for others, it’s just a simple way, we didn’t make a big effort... It feels good, it’s so good! (Carla, focus group 1, LC1)

Nevertheless, helping others was not a role exclusively taken by native speakers. Other proficient speakers, such as Rachel, Alice, and Nathan, also expressed how they supported others with their language, even if that might not have been their initial aim for participating in the events. Rachel, for instance, described how she sometimes negotiated corrective feedback with learners:

intento leer su cara primeramente, y si es una persona como yo, les pregunto: “¿quieres que te corrija?” O a veces si veo que es algo que la persona lo está pasando mal o tienen dificultades para encontrar una palabra, les doy la palabra, y si sonrío o actúa de manera... cómo se dice... thankful... [the interviewer gives her the word “agradecida”] agradecida, sí, continuo así y quizá hago más porque veo que les ayuda

<I try to read their face first, and if it’s a person like me, I ask them: “do you want me to correct you?” Or sometimes if I see the person is having a hard time or having difficulties to find a word, I give them the word, and if they smile or act... how do you say... “thankful”... [the interviewer gives her the

word “agradecida” in Spanish] thankful, yes, I continue like that and maybe I do it more because I see it helps them.>

(Rachel’s interview, LC1)

José, Carlos and Alberto were three Mexican postgraduate students. Two of them were studying German, but did not feel confident enough to use their German in the LC, and preferred to participate to help others with their Spanish:

Pues yo en general iba a... quería aprender cómo funcionaba porque tanto Alberto y yo estamos aprendiendo alemán, entonces esperamos que en el futuro nosotros... estar del otro lado, practicando ese idioma. Pero, como digo, como era la primera vez, dije... bueno, para que sea provechoso, al menos para mí, más como nativo del español, pues puedo ayudar a quien se me acerque y quiera practicar, este... Yo encantado, y así fue.

<In general I went to... I wanted to learn how it worked because both Alberto and I are learning German, so we hope that in the future we’ll be on the other side, practising this language. But, as I say, because it was the first time, I said... well, for it to be productive, at least for me, more as a native speaker of Spanish, I can help whoever approaches me to practise, em... It’s my pleasure, and that’s how it was.>

(José, focus group 2, LC1)

Thus, José preferred to stay in what could be called a “linguistic comfort zone” of socialising in Spanish and helping others, before moving to “the other side” and having a go at languaging in German. Later on in the conversation, José also said that, if he lived in a country where not many people speak Spanish, he would attend LCs not just to help others, but also to have a space to socialise in his own language (“it’s for me to keep speaking my language”). This example will be discussed in depth in chapter 6 in relation to multilingual identities.

To expand one’s social networks

In LC1, many participants were not interested in making friends in the LC and never exchanged contacts with anyone. For these participants, the LC was a one-off social event where they could develop transient relationships which belonged to that context only. In that sense, the LC resonated with the classroom environment in that it afforded meeting others with similar interests without the expectation to maintain and develop that relationship outside of the scheduled gatherings. Some participants, therefore, chose not to act upon the affordance of making friends in the LC. On the other hand, some participants conceived of the LC also as a

networking event. Alice said that she already had friends and a very busy social life. However, she was interested in befriending Italian speakers:

Con los italianos, las chicas italianas, con ellas sí, porque me interesa hacer amistades con gente nativa, con gente de Italia, porque ellas son sicilianas y yo quiero ir a Sicilia, así que, sí, también... quizá no ser amigos pero al menos contactos.

<With the Italians, the Italian girls, with them yes, because I'm interested in making friends with native speakers, with people from Italy, because they are Sicilian and I want to go to Sicily, so, yes, that as well... maybe not being friends, but at least contacts.>

(Alice's interview, LC1)

Likewise, other participants (including me) were hoping they could meet other multilinguals in the LC willing to meet more regularly to increase the opportunities of speaking their languages in their everyday lives, since the official scheduled events did not take place very often (only twice per term). Nathan, for instance, started to hang out with some Chinese friends he met in the LC. He and a Chinese participant bonded as tandem partners and started what Nathan called their own "cultural exchange". He also met up with others who taught him how to play *mah-jong*, a very famous game in China.

To complete assessed coursework

As mentioned before, at the time of data collection I was a Spanish teacher at the university associated with LC1, and some of my students attended this LC. Among them, some attended out of their own initiative, whereas others participated because they could use that experience as part of a classroom assignment called "reflective learning journal", which required students to engage in informal activities in Spanish outside the classroom and reflect upon them. Amy, for instance, admitted that having to write the reflective learning journal influenced her decision to attend LC1 for the first time:

Nuria: So would you say that the first time you came because you had to do the reflective journal?

Amy: Ehm... probably, it's... for me like, with the reflective journal and the whole thing being to do something like Spanish-speaking related outside the class, for me that's an activity that I could easily procrastinate on, like "oh, I'll do it whenever, like I'll do it later", but coming to the languages cafés forced me to like do it on that evening, writing all that and then be done

with it, which is really nice, but now that I've gone to a couple, and even if I didn't have to write a reflective journal, I would still come cos it's a lot of fun and it really helped.

(Amy's interview, LC1)

Similarly, Kate recognised that taking a Spanish module was decisive in her attending the LC:

Nuria: Is this activity something you would do from your own initiative?

Kate: I think I would now, cos I've been to it and I enjoyed it, but I don't know whether I'd be like "oh, I'll just go to it!" without like being like "oh, you should do it" the first time, but then once I've done it now, I'd be like "I enjoy it and I think it's good", so I think I would go again, but I don't know if I hadn't done the Spanish module, I don't know if I would have come to it, because I wouldn't have really known about it that much and stuff.

(Kate's interview, LC1)

Both Amy and Kate felt compelled to look for opportunities to speak Spanish outside of the classroom because they had to complete a reflective task for their Spanish modules. Later on in the interview, Amy also said that one needs to be "passionate about learning" and "committed" to go to the LC, since "it is on your free time and it's not required, so it's just easy to say 'oh, I'll go next time'". Amy continued studying Spanish the year after, but in her module there was no assessment task related to out-of-class speaking experience, and I never saw her again in the LC events. Kate was in her final year at the university. When I asked her what she was going to do after graduating to keep up with her Spanish, she was very vague and said she would not know how to find Spanish groups or other opportunities to speak Spanish in London. She used impersonal sentences to acknowledge that looking out for opportunities to speak "is good for you", yet she did not position herself as someone who would do so.

Murray et al. (2017) discuss the role of educators in encouraging learners to engage in informal learning outside the classroom. To "facilitate the process of gaining entry to social learning spaces" (such as LCs), one of their recommendations is to "provide newcomers with a purpose for being in the space" the first time they visit (Murray et al., 2017, p. 243), and then let them develop their own personal relationship with the place. While it might work in some cases,

there is no guarantee that learners will develop a desire to belong to those communities (Thorne & Black, 2007) or “affinity spaces” (Gee, 2005). Moreover, Knight et al. (2020) argue that, for an activity to be considered informal, it cannot be assigned as a classroom intervention. The lack of “learner-directedness” and the presence of assessment grades will make any informal activity be conceived as formal.

Another participant and student of mine also started attending the LC influenced by her formal assessment, but subsequently showed signs of developing intrinsic motivation to attend LC1:

Nuria: So would you say you came here because you were willing to come, or was it more because you had to do this reflective journal for your Spanish module?

Elisabeth: I’d say the first time it was because of the reflective journal that I had to do, ‘cos I was like... how else am I gonna talk to somebody? And then after that I found that, yes, I had to do the reflective journal but I wasn’t just going because of that, it was also to practise, and because also I enjoyed it. It’s a nice way to spend the evening. And it doesn’t happen very often which means that... it’s a shame if you miss it... Sorry I’m just talking in English now! [She switches to Spanish:] Por ejemplo, en mi colegio, cada semana tenemos dos formal dinners, y normalmente en martes y en jueves, y el café de idiomas es martes, y lo encuentro que prefiero los cafés de idiomas que las formals y por eso cuando otras personas me preguntaban *<For example, in my college, every week we have two formal dinners, and normally on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the language café is Tuesday, and I find that I prefer the language café over the formals and that’s why when other people were asking me>* “oh, are you going to the formal?”, which by the way it’s just another excuse to get drunk... on cheap wine... so I’m not really into it... So I’d just say “no, I’m not, I’m gonna speak Spanish! That’s what I’m doing!”

(Elisabeth’s interview, LC1)

Her account was compelling and she projected herself as a very self-motivated LC participant; however, the year after, she enrolled in a French module, but I never saw her again in the LC. There might be many (personal) reasons why; yet the examples above show that, although teachers can motivate students to try informal language-related activities outside the classroom (Murray et al., 2014), this motivation is not necessarily sustained in time. Eventually, it is up to the multilingual subject to include or not certain activities as part of their leisure time and learning ecologies.

Having discussed the social environment of LC1, with its social actors and their aims and motivations for engaging in this activity, I now turn to the physical environment and how participants interacted with it.

5.2.3 The LC1 venue

The fact that both LC1 and LC2 took place in a public bar or pub had a role in framing the social events and participant expectations and perceptions of them. In particular, the venue of LC1 was not any bar in the city, but the one inside the university Student Union. Despite being open to the broader public, the Student Union bar attracted mainly university students.

Some years earlier, LC1 used to take place in the café of a local cinema. According to the event organisers at the time, many more members of the public attended the LC back then, creating a much more intergenerational environment. However, the local cinema found that the LC events were not profitable, as participants did not buy enough food or drinks. Therefore, LC1 had to change venue and started to take place at the Student Union bar. Ever since then, the bulk of attendants had been mainly students. During the three years that I observed and participated in this LC, only a few members of the wider community attended, and I did not see any of them attend more than once. Perhaps they felt like fish out of water in this student territory.

The Student Union bar is a large open area with tables, sofas, and a snooker and darts area in one of the corners. Generally, as LC attendants arrived, the organiser(s) would point them in the right direction to join a language conversation group. Otherwise, to identify the groups of people participating in the LC event, one had to walk around and eavesdrop to check what languages people were speaking. The following reflective entry written by Ben, supported by the photographs below (Figure 3 and Figure 4), offer a snapshot of what it was like to enter this venue.

La semana pasada asistí al 'Language Café'. En este evento, algunas personas de la universidad se congregan para conversar entre ellos en un idioma extranjero. El evento tuvo lugar en un cuarto muy grande en el [Student Union bar], entonces, cuando llegué, al principio estaba muy confundido, porque había muchas actividades teniendo lugar al mismo tiempo. Por ejemplo, algunas personas jugaban a snooker, otros veían el fútbol en un proyector y otros tomaban una cerveza al bar, entonces no

sabía dónde se encontraba el evento, el 'Language Café'. Afortunadamente un hombre se presentó a mí, y me preguntó: "¿Estás aquí para el 'Language café, y que lenguas quieres hablar?" Respondí, "Solamente español", y después me dio una pegatina con una 's' escrito en ella, y me contó que las personas que hablaban español se sentaban alrededor de una mesa en la esquina.

<Last week I attended the 'Language Café'. In this event, some people from the university gather to chat with each other in a foreign language. The event took place in a large room in the Student Union, so, when I arrived, at the beginning I was very confused, because there were many activities taking place at the same time. For instance, some people were playing snooker, others were watching football, and others were having a beer at the bar, so I didn't know where the 'Language Café' event was. Luckily, a man introduced himself and asked me: "Are you here for the 'Language Café', and what languages do you want to speak?" I replied, "Only Spanish", and then he gave me a sticker with an 'S' written on it, and told me that the people speaking Spanish were sitting around a table in the corner.>

(Ben's reflective writing, LC1)



Figure 3 The LC1 venue



Figure 4 Breakout groups in LC1 having parallel conversations

Ben refers to a state of confusion at the sight of a large room where different activities were taking place simultaneously, with no clear indication of where the LC was. In their study on the L-Café in a Japanese university, Murray, Fujishima and Uzuka (2017) noticed that some people would stand outside the door of the venue, look in, and not enter, as if there were an “invisible fence”. Unlike the settings in my study, the L-Café in Murray et al. (2017) received institutional funding, which they invested on hiring what they called “greeters”: “student workers” who would welcome participants at the entrance and invite them to go in. In LC1, this was done by the teacher-organisers who volunteered to be there. Their role to welcome and signpost participants in the right direction was very important, as Ben conveys in his reflection, although they generally only stayed for a short period of time at the beginning of the event. Ben also mentions the role of stickers as mediational artefacts to sort people out into language groups. I will expand on further semiotic aspects of these stickers later on.

The messiness of the place contributed to the participants’ perception of the informality of the event. One participant mentioned specifically that the background noise helped her feel more at ease:

Preferí este café de idiomas al otro al que fui antes. La atmósfera en [el bar de la Student Union] era más relajado que en [el *college*] porque había más ruido de fondo y se sentía menos formal.

<I preferred this LC over the other one I went to before. The atmosphere at [the Student Union bar] was more relaxed than at the [college] because there was more background noise and it felt less formal.>

(Kate's reflective writing)

In LC1, the music was sometimes quite loud, which was a positive for some participants (like Kate), while others mentioned that it was difficult at times to hear what others were saying. What is interesting in terms of the co-construction of the space is that the background noise and general atmosphere influenced Kate's perception of the place and the LC as an informal event. This perception arguably influenced her autonomy and the actions she took there (Murray et al., 2014).

The arrangement of furniture in LC1 contributed to the formation of different groups around tables. The groups would naturally break out into smaller conversation groups (as shown in Figure 4), meaning that participants would end up talking more with the people sitting next to them—as generally happens in social events. As I illustrate below (in 5.2.5), although each table focused on one language, it was common practice for participants to share multilingual repertoires and co-create their own translanguaging spaces (Li, 2018) and communicative practices within these tables. Further, participants often changed tables to practise different languages during the same evening. This free movement among tables also contributed to the emergence of an atmosphere that was perceived as highly translingual, where language practices were negotiated intersubjectively in every situated interaction.

5.2.4 Artefacts with symbolic meaning and mediational roles

In LC1, the event organisers stayed near the entrance in order to welcome participants at their arrival and give them the stickers with the initials of the languages they wanted to practise. Participants displayed these stickers on their lapel, so that others could see at a glance the languages they wanted to speak, and start a conversation group. Thus, the stickers were physical artefacts that played a clear mediational role in prompting participants to sort themselves out into

language groups. However, there was more symbolic meaning in these stickers than their mere sorting function, as they also represented a snapshot of the multilingual profile of an individual. As such, the stickers also mediated participants' perceptions of the multilingual identities of others, often triggering feelings of admiration. One participant (Rebecca) mentioned that she felt motivated to learn languages when she saw people with many stickers (her original sentence in Spanish was: "Pienso que me da motivación de aprender más idiomas cuando hay estudiantes con cuatro pegatinas"). Since this links with participants' multilingual identities, I will discuss it further in Chapter 6 in relation to the effect that this had on participants' own re-construction of their imagined multilingual selves.

On the other hand, an environment is not only informed by the use of different artefacts, but also by the absence of them. Particularly noteworthy was the absence of the quintessential cultural artefacts that serve to mediate the learning activity: pen and paper (or digital tools for note-taking). These were not common at all in either of the LCs. From my teacher perspective, at first I could not help but see this as a wasted opportunity for learners to work intentionally on their retention of new vocabulary. Interestingly, the few occasions when I saw participants taking out a notebook or their mobile phones to write something down, it was to note down the name of a book, film, band, website, or interesting event that someone recommended. This constitutes an example of the particularities that made the LC environments distance themselves from the (focused, explicit) learning practices of the classroom, and mirror instead the sociocultural practices involved in engaging with the material and social world outside (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004; Ros i Solé, 2016).

So far I have discussed the interrelations between the social and the physical environment in LC1. These interrelations underpinned participants' co-construction of the languaging and collaborative learning experiences in this LC based on three main themes: sense of freedom, agency, and authenticity (5.2.5); joint enterprise and reciprocity (5.2.6); and emotion work (5.2.7).

5.2.5 Sense of freedom, agency, and authenticity

Most LC1 participants were young university students at the time, and mentioned the sense of freedom they felt in the LCs in the absence of common constraints

associated with formal settings. In this section, I illustrate this with excerpts where participants mentioned different affordances of the LCs in contrast with the constraints they found in their classroom, namely: time constraints, the pressure of high-stakes assessment, the need to follow a syllabus with pre-set topics, or the lack of agency to choose different modes of participation, registers, and language varieties.

In the following examples, four participants talked about some of these constraints, particularly regarding the freedom to talk about anything thanks to the lack of pre-set topics:

[E]n las clases no hay muchas oportunidades de hablar, like having extended conversations. (...) Sí, y en clase el tema de la conversación es siempre given, it's a bit more artificial. Y pasé dos meses el año pasado en Togo y fue la primera vez que pasé mucho tiempo usando una lengua extranjera todo el tiempo.

<[I]n class there are not many opportunities to talk, like having extended conversations. (...) Yes, and in class the conversation topic is always given, it's a bit more artificial. I spent two months last year in Togo and it was the first time I spent a long time using a foreign language all the time.>

(Rebecca's interview, LC1)

[In the classroom] there are limits on what you can talk about and how you can talk as well. (Lydia's interview, LC1)

[S]ometimes in the conversation [in class], particularly if it's an afternoon and people are tired, they don't really wanna talk about like the disadvantages of smoking or something, they'd much rather talk about the films that are on the cinema or like their new favourite restaurant that they found in [the city]. (Molly's interview, LC1)

I suppose it's not the classroom because there is no one directing it, it's not like you need to have a debate about this or discuss this topic, so that's why (...) you end up having the same conversations, you know, like five times over, so yeah, I suppose it's less structured. (Robert's interview, LC1)

Rebecca makes a distinction between “speaking” and “having extended conversations”, and links this distinction to the issue of authenticity (in the classroom “it's a bit more artificial”). An authentic conversation for her is one which flows with no time constraints and pre-defined topics. However, interaction in class is normally part of a language assignment embedded in the speech event

“lesson” (Bannink, 2002), which, as a speech event (Hymes, 1964), is recognised by having specific conventions *vis-à-vis* the participants involved, their roles in the event, the business at hand, and any rituals attributed to it. For instance, the right to initiate topics and talk is usually conferred to the teacher in the classroom setting (Bannink, 2002; McHoul, 1978). While the communicative classroom offers many opportunities for speaking and interacting in class, these opportunities are usually framed within explicit instructions following a specific pedagogical purpose. These pedagogical frames can also be perceived as constraints or “limits”, as Lydia puts it. For Robert, however, the lack of structure in the LC became a problem sometimes when participants ended up “having the same conversations five times over”. This had a deterrent effect on two students of mine, for instance, who did not participate in the study, but told me that they found the conversations in the LC very repetitive and superficial, since they kept introducing themselves to others as new people joined their conversation group. Thus, these two students decided they would meet on their own to practise and have more meaningful conversations.

Classes have pre-defined pedagogical aims and outcomes, and the topics (and even vocabulary and structures) for the interaction are usually pre-selected by teachers as learning facilitators. Classes are also time bound, hence the need to limit the duration of these activities in the lesson plan. As Bannink (2002, p. 271) puts it, “[g]enuine conversational interactions cannot be the outcome of preplanned lesson agendas, they have to emerge – and so, by definition, cannot be planned”. She argues that this is not a matter of changing the teaching methodology, since this paradox is “inherent in the pedagogical situation of the classroom” (Bannink, 2002, p. 271), which avoids the “slackness” that is sometimes required for creativity and playfulness to emerge (Lemke, 2002). As opposed to this, one participant mentioned the affordances of the LC to speak freely, which reminded her of being abroad:

Es interesante porque el language café me da estos sentimientos de inmersión que siento cuando voy al extranjero porque hablamos de manera más natural, sin presión de cumplir unas reglas o puntos de enfoque de una clase con vocabulario específico.

<It's interesting because the language café gives me that feeling of immersion that I have when I go abroad because we speak in a more natural way,

without the pressure of following rules or classroom focus points with specific vocabulary.>

(Rachel's interview, LC1)

Since there were no pedagogical instructions in the LC, participants co-led their conversations in unpredictable directions, and this was associated with authenticity ("we speak in a more natural way"). This does not mean that the LC was a space without rules. While there were no pedagogical instructions to follow in the LC, it is to be assumed that the socio-pragmatic and cultural understandings that we live by in our daily lives underlay every conversation.

The sense of freedom in terms of being able to choose different modes of participation was also mentioned in the data as one of the affordances of the LC:

[E]n el language café tenemos la libertad de pasar la cantidad de tiempo que queremos para crear una relación tan profundo que queremos también. [...] Pero a mucha gente le gusta entender y escuchar; por ejemplo el martes pasado hicimos language café y noté que había una chica que no quería hablar mucho, pero solo quería presentarse como "hola, me llamo tal y quiero escuchar tu conversación" y está bien porque forma parte de la inmersión y, si esto le ayuda, pues déjale hacerlo como quiera.

<[I]n the language café we have the freedom to spend as much time as we want to create relationships as deep as we want too [...] But many people like to understand and to listen; for example, last Tuesday we had a LC and I noticed that there was a girl who didn't want to talk much, but just wanted to introduce herself like "hi, my name is X and I want to listen to your conversation", and that's fine because it's part of the immersion and, if this helps her, then let her do it the way she wants.>

(Rachel's interview, LC1)

I think it's nice that you can get a big group of people having a big conversation in the language, so if you don't want to talk yourself as much, if you'd rather listen, you can do that as well, which is really nice. (Lydia's interview, LC1)

These participants referred to modes of participation in terms of personal involvement and social investment (e.g., making friends or not), and also different types of engagement in the conversations (e.g., talkative contributor or active listener). During my time at LC1, the situation that Rachel describes, where someone would approach a conversation group to ask whether they could join as listeners only, was not uncommon. Some did not feel confident enough to speak,

but enjoyed immersing themselves in the language in this other less daunting way. Thus, although the LC drew on the conventions of the discursive social order, it also afforded the co-construction of in-group intersubjectivity with negotiated modes of participation which were seen as acceptable in this particular social space. Remaining silent was a choice made by learners who felt as agentive social beings (Norton, 2000). Cognitive language research has shown that active listeners who remain silent in peer group interactions are as likely to learn from their observations as the active contributors in the conversation (Fernández Dobao, 2016). Furthermore, listening to people speaking a particular language plays an important role in the mobilisation of emotions in multilingual speakers (Kramsch, 2009). Thus, this attitude should not be interpreted as nonparticipation, lack of proactivity, or being a passive learner; silent participants might engage in languaging by practising active listening, engaging their full bodies and emotions in making sense of a new way of communicating.

Another important element of freedom was the absence of formal assessment. In relation to this, Alice compared feedback and error correction in the LC and in the classroom:

No sé, en clase hay veces que los profesores te corrigen, que es perfecto, pero a veces la gente no quiere hacer errores, y quizá en el language café es más fácil, es más relajado. (...) en el language café, si te dan feedback, no sé, no parece una corrección, que has hecho, que has cometido un error, lo hacen solo para ayudarte, y sé que en las clases también es así pero no se siente... no parece así.

<I don't know, in the classroom sometimes teachers correct you, which is perfect, but sometimes people don't want to make mistakes, and maybe in the language café it's easier, it's more relaxed. [...] In the language café, if they give you feedback, don't know, it doesn't seem like a correction, that you have made a mistake, they do it only to help you, and I know in class it's like that too, but it doesn't feel... it doesn't seem like that. >

(Alice's interview, LC1)

It was difficult for Alice to explain why error correction *felt* different in the classroom and in the LC. She knew that in both cases the feedback provider wanted to help the learner, but somehow students prefer not to make mistakes in a formal achievement-oriented context. This connects with matters concerning power dynamics and the asymmetrical relationship that prevails between teacher and

students, especially in high stakes courses where marks have far-reaching consequences for students. In such courses, learners need to achieve a certain level of competence, and perform up to their marker's expectations. Using Dörnyei's (2005) terminology from his theory of possible selves, it seems that high stakes courses force students to focus on performing their "ought-to L2 self"—i.e., the projection of what learners think they need to be and know to avoid disappointing others—rather than their "ideal L2 self"—i.e., how they imagine themselves as multilingual speakers. In the LC, however, participants felt they could focus on *flowing* and trying out who they want to be in French, Spanish, Mandarin, or whichever other language they are learning. In other words, in the LC they could focus on *languageing*.

Finally, in the LC, some participants felt they could use a different register and different language varieties from the ones they used in the classroom. In one of the recordings from naturally-occurring conversations in LC1, it is possible to hear a group of three participants (Ella, Luke and Thomas) going through a pedagogical episode about swear words in French. The three of them were undergraduate students, and they had just met. Ella (a very confident French speaker) had asked Luke and Thomas (learners of French) what they would like to know in French.

Luke: What's the French for "swear words"?

Thomas: Oh yeah!

Ella: "Gros mots"

Luke: "Gros mots"

Ella: Yeah

Luke: Donnez-moi des gros mots

<Give me some swear words>

Ella: Em... OK, bah...

Thomas: Je connais rien

<I don't know any>

Ella: Oh, I'll give you a good one! When you say "I'm messing with you", you go... oh wait, no... "you're taking the piss": "tu me casses les couilles".

Luke and Thomas: [In unison] "Tu me casses les couilles"

(LC1 naturally-occurring conversation, 07/11/2017)

This interaction reproduces a recognisable pedagogical sequence where Ella is the "expert" and "knowledge provider", and Luke and Thomas are her "students". In a way, it follows a very traditional interactive pattern whereby students repeat the new vocabulary after the teacher. However, would students feel empowered enough to say to their teacher "give me some swear words" in a classroom setting? If so, in what conditions? Also, would Luke have said the same if his interlocutor were an elderly person? These social conditions in the LC ecology need to be taken into account to understand the social dimensions of agency (Murray et al., 2014; van Lier, 2010)—i.e., why LC participants felt it was acceptable to act or perform socially as they did.

Regarding the freedom and agency to use different language varieties, Nathan recalled a time when he had the chance to use words from non-standard varieties in a LC in Bilbao (Spain):

Dans la conversation, je me suis mis à utiliser plein de mots du basque français que j'avais appris auparavant, quelque-chose que j'avais jamais pu faire dans ma classe. C'était très cool.

<In the conversation, I started to use a lot of words from French Basque which I had learned before, something I had never been able to do in my classes. It was very cool.>

(Nathan's reflective writing, LC1)

The LC is thus associated with the informal register and language varieties or dialects one uses in the street and with friends. As mentioned earlier, each interaction afforded certain translingual practices (Canagarajah, 2013; Li, 2018), which emerged intersubjectively and were negotiated based on participants' shared repertoires, as the following data illustrate:

Hablé a dos chicas que hablan francés y español y mezclamos los dos idiomas, ¡que fue muy interesante!

<I spoke with two girls who speak French and Spanish and we mixed the two languages, which was very interesting!>

(Rebecca's reflective writing, LC1)

I can hear Ella, Milan, and Luke (at the French table) talking about the languages they speak. Ella explains that she was born in Switzerland, but grew up in Norway, but at home and school she spoke English. She also speaks some Spanish and Arabic. Ella code-switches a lot between French and English. One of the guys says he also learned Spanish, and there is an interesting short exchange between them in Spanish ('Ah, me gusta l'España!' / 'Oui, mais olvido' / 'Hablas un poco... un poquito'). The guys ask Ella to say something in Arabic, and she says 'yalla, yalla, habibi!'. One of the guys says (in English) 'that's like "come on!", right?' (Researcher's notes on audiorecorded LC1 conversations, 07/11/2017)

A common conversation topic in the LC concerned participants' language repertoires and learning trajectories. Participants often became aware of their shared multilingual repertoires in interaction with one another. In these metalanguaging exchanges—involving comments about languaging and language learning—individuals did not perform one particular language identity at a time, but all their multilingual repertoires played a role in how they presented themselves to others. Thus, translanguaging is something that naturally happened in these events.

In summary, LC1 participants perceived that in these events, in contrast with the classroom, they felt free to talk for as long as they wanted, free to talk about whatever they wanted, free to make mistakes without the pressure of being formally assessed, and free to use and learn about slang and different language varieties or dialects which do not feature much in the classroom.

5.2.6 Joint enterprise and reciprocity: "everyone is in the same boat"

As mentioned in Chapter 2 (2.1.3), there are two dimensions that connect LCs with tandem learning, and which set these settings apart from any other social learning context beyond the classroom: reciprocity, and the sense of joint enterprise, since practising languages is foregrounded and the *raison d'être* of the social gathering. In this section I discuss how the sense of joint enterprise and reciprocity played a role in the ways in which LC1 participants perceived the affordances of the social environment and engaged in languaging.

The metaphorical expression “to be in the same boat” was used by two participants to describe the sense of joint enterprise and justify why they saw LC1 as a safe environment, as the following two excerpts illustrate:

Nuria: ¿Cómo describes el language café para alguien que nunca ha venido?
<How do you describe the language café to somebody who has never attended?>

Elisabeth: Ehm... es un lugar que es posible para disfrutar hablando español, italiano, en otros idiomas, y practicar su hablar, pero *<Ehm... it's a place where it's possible to enjoy speaking Spanish, Italian, in other languages, and practise your speaking, but>* you shouldn't be nervous, because everybody is in the same boat. It's a bit like university, you shouldn't be nervous! (...) It's fine to be nervous, but just sort of go for it, don't hold back.

(Elisabeth's interview, LC1)

[In the LC] you're always gonna meet somebody who's been through the same experiences as you or is going through it now, so it's less daunting because everyone is in the same boat, and everyone is there to learn [...] and is there to help each other out. (Molly's interview, LC1)

Having a joint enterprise, and having been through the same experiences of trying to socialise in a different language, is what connects LC participants, and what helps to make this environment less threatening and more power-balanced than other social encounters with native speakers, where having a voice and being listened to cannot be taken for granted (Norton, 2000). In that respect, a question I frequently asked in the interviews was about the differences between the LC and the broader outside world. Alice mentioned in her answer that the sense of reciprocity and collaboration were the main differentiators between the two ecosystems:

¿Cómo es diferente del mundo? Uh... eso es más difícil. Em... Bueno, también la idea de que todos quieren participar, que te quieren ayudar... Si vas al país, si vas a Francia e intentas hablar francés pero tu francés no es perfecto, puede ser un poco difícil, la gente francesa quizás no te quiere ayudar, pero aquí en el language café la gente de todos los niveles pueden hablar, pueden escuchar, y también puedes solo escuchar, no es un problema, en la vida normalmente tienes que hablar, tienes que comunicar con otros, pero en los language cafés no.

<How is it different from the world? Uh... that's more difficult. Em... Well, also the idea that everyone wants to participate, wants to help you... If you go to the country, if you go to France and try to speak French but your French is not

perfect, it can be a bit difficult, French people might not want to help you, but here in the language café people of all levels can speak, can listen, and you can also only listen, it's not a problem, in life normally you have to speak, you have to communicate with others, but in the language cafés you don't have to.>

(Alice's interview, LC1)

As discussed earlier, Alice mentions that the LC affords to choose different modes of participation which are not usually available in other contexts, such as that of active listener who explicitly asks not to speak in a conversation (*"en la vida normalmente tienes que hablar (...) pero en los language cafés no"*). Alice's comments also resonate with Norton's (2000) argument that language learners often struggle to prove themselves worth of being listened to in a language immersion context. In contrast, in the LC "everyone wants to help you" and "people of all levels can speak". Another participant also mentioned that, after speaking with someone in the LC, "you can go home without feeling you need to follow it up with something else, 'cos you have both benefitted from the situation" (Molly's interview, LC1). This strong sense of reciprocity and shared enterprise was also highlighted by Ben, who compared the LC with his experiences in hostels while backpacking in Latin America:

En el language café estoy hablando con personas que son lo mismo nivel que yo, pero es lo mismo como cuando estoy quedando en un hostel, todo el mundo quiere hablar contigo, es como el language café, está sentado con otros y quieres hablar, so you're sort of stuck in that environment of wanting to speak to each other.

<In the language café I'm speaking with people with the same level as mine, but it's the same as when I'm staying in a hostel, everyone wants to speak with you, it's like the language café, you're sitting with others and you want to speak, so you're sort of stuck in that environment of wanting to speak to each other.>

(Ben's reflective writing, LC1)

For Ben, both in the LC and in the hostels he visited, people co-constructed spaces for speaking for the sake of speaking, with no other objective other than maintaining a conversation. Another participant said: "I think people want to help each other out, so it's something that naturally happens" (Lydia's interview, LC1). It seems that, in the absence of specific communicative objectives, what emerges by default is an intention to contribute with something that might be useful to

others. One participant also associated LC participants' collaborative attitude with having shared interests: "somehow just because you have this common knowledge or this common love of speaking languages (...) suddenly there's like an opportunity to help each other" (Molly's interview, LC1). In the English Club he studied, Gao (2009) highlighted the role of the coordinators in maintaining group cohesion, but also the role of participants in receiving first-timers with "emphatic smiles and supportive attention". Lewis (2014, p. 43) asserts that "[t]here is consensus among scholars on the key features of human sociality. These are normally identified as empathy, altruism, reciprocity, a sense of fairness and a predisposition to collaborate". Lewis (2014) showed how these features were present in passages taken from a written exchange among language students in an online forum. This resonates with Tomasello's (2009) idea that cooperation for social good is a natural feature in human beings.

Nevertheless, the perception of participants who went to LC1 to be able to complete their Spanish module's coursework was slightly different. Kate, for instance, did not identify with the idea of looking for people to practise with. As mentioned in 5.2.2, if it was not for the coursework she had to complete, she probably would not have attended the LC. She used impersonal sentences to explain what she thought was important in order to achieve fluency (e.g., "I think you kind of have to make an effort to want to practise it"), but when she talked about her experience working as a volunteer for four months in Peru, she always described having to speak Spanish as a burden or an obstacle:

[I]t wasn't like I'm gonna speak to you because I wanna practise, so it was more like I need to speak to you [...], it was more like I need to learn it, otherwise I'm not gonna be able to do anything. (Kate's interview, LC1)

Likewise, Amy presented herself in her interview as a "perfectionist" and a learner who was not ready yet to voluntarily "throw herself" in the situation of having to speak to others in Spanish. The LC—which she, like Kate, attended in order to complete her coursework—forced her to put herself in that situation, which she saw as "one step closer to being able to just be outgoing in another language". (Both Amy and Kate were studying Spanish at B1 level of the CEFR [Council of Europe, 2001] at the time.)

To conclude, the data show that participants perceived the ecology of LC1 as unique: these events gathered people with a shared enterprise (speaking languages freely and informally, without a teacher), which made it a reciprocal and collaborative space where “everyone was in the same boat”. For these reasons, the LC was perceived as less threatening and more power-balanced than the classroom or other spaces for informal language socialisation. However, participants only realised this after undergoing intense emotion work, which is what I discuss next.

5.2.7 Emotion work

This section focuses particularly on participants’ feelings and emotions regarding the first time(s) they attended LC1, since that is when emotion work became more salient in the data. Also, the first LC experiences were very fresh for the majority of LC1 participants at the time of data collection. I present emotions as pertaining to three different stages: before, during, and after the LC events (Polo-Pérez & Holmes, 2022).

Before the language café. When asked about how they felt the first time they attended LC1, the thematic analysis of interviews and written reflections revealed participants’ use of emotionally intense words such as “scared”, “nervous”, “awkward” and “fear[ful]”. Some participants expressed how the idea of chatting in another language with strangers can be daunting and scary. This is even more so when the LC does not seem to be an *a priori* socially recognisable occasion or “speech event” (Hymes, 1964), such as a lesson, an interview, etc. One participant said that, once at the venue, “it was nerve-wracking having to join a group” (Elisabeth’s interview, LC1), while others admitted being nervous because they thought they were going to be “the worst”.

These feelings and emotions were also recurrent in my reflective journal, even after several times of attending each LC. On one of my entries, I noted down a text message that I sent to my friends on my way to LC2: “What am I doing? I don’t even speak French!” (Researcher’s reflective journal, third time in LC2). On another entry, I reflected upon the awkwardness I felt at the start of the event:

“Je viens de finir mon cours; j’ai donné 6 heures de cours aujourd’hui et je suis un peu fatiguée, mas ça va. Et vous ?” It’s a weird feeling pronouncing these words. I feel funny, as if I was playing a game. The words don’t come

naturally through my mouth. When will I internalise this kind of introductory greetings so that I can choose what facial expressions to put while I speak? (Researcher's reflective journal - third time in LC1).

This excerpt illustrates how even a simple spontaneous interaction to start a conversation in the LC is an embodied, and emotionally intense, languaging experience that involves much more than knowing the words or exchanging information effectively. It is about being comfortable in one's body to perform one's social self in another language, even non-verbally (Busch, 2015). As Phipps and Gonzalez (2004) put it, languaging is about trying to be someone in another language in the whole social world.

Participant emotions before attending the LC ought to be contextualised in the ecology of these events. The LC represents a free and informal space in the absence of teachers and pre-set lesson plans. Freedom, beyond its positive connotations, can also be feared, as it represents the chaotic and the unknown. Thus, the experience of participating in a LC commences before entering the space. On the way to the bar where the event is taking place, first-timers will start wondering who will be there, how it works, what will they talk about, is it safe...? These thoughts, informed by the participants' own prejudices and knowledge of the world, shaped their imagined picture of the unknown place. This unknown can trigger the mobilisation of different physical emotions, such as social anxiety, which might intermingle with feelings of self-doubt in the case of less confident learners who question their legitimacy as speakers of a particular language and, hence, as participants in the LC. Murray et al. (2017) refer to these affective entry boundaries as "the invisible fence" in LCs. This metaphor parallels Kelly's (2018) reflections on why many people resist learning a new language.

During the language café. Once that fence was jumped, metaphorically speaking, participants co-constructed very different emotions during the LC by engaging in face-to-face conversations with one another. Some admitted feeling "relieved" when they realised there were participants of all levels, including lower levels (hence, they were not "the worst"). They described the LC environment as "fun", "relaxed", "supportive", "non-judgemental", "casual", "not stressful", "welcoming", "warm", "enjoyable", "informal", and "free". As in Balçıkanlı's study (2017), participants in my study conceptualised LC1 as a "safe" place: a place where

mistakes do not matter and everyone helps one another. This suggests that, rather than performing language competencies in the LC, participants were engaging in languaging, since they clearly focused on meaning making and human connections over linguistic accuracy (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004).

In cognitive and psychological studies, feelings of anxiety have been associated negatively with the affective filter that can inhibit language learning (Dewaele, 2010). However, participants' narratives from the LC reveal that they regarded participation in these events as emotional investment. As van Lier (2004, p. 140) argues, emotions are not positive or negative, and "[i]n any complex learning activity a multiplicity of social and cognitive factors play an inseparable role: anxiety, curiosity, interest, excitement, fear, confidence, and so on". He further argues that "learning can be a stressful activity, to be sure, but neither the presence nor the absence of stress have any uniform relationship with learning" (van Lier, 2004, p. 140). Participants referred to joy not as a state of painlessness, but a feeling that comes from the relief of pain or anxiety (Kramersch, 2009). Emotions evolved during the LC as a result of the dynamic social relationships that participants developed with the environment and the people in it. This resonates with the "sociality" view of emotions which sees emotions as intersubjective phenomena and co-constructed through social interaction (Ros i Solé, 2016). Anxiety and self-doubt evolve into fun and relief when individuals come physically into contact with others in the LC. As mentioned earlier, this may be because having to "talk for talking's sake" may create a collaborative atmosphere of interdependence and reciprocity that enables participants to feel emotionally bonded to one another.

After the language café. Some participants summarised their experiences in the LC as follows: "glad that I came", "satisfying", "feeling good about yourself", "proud of myself", "it's a good feeling to have", "sense of achievement", "sense of satisfaction". These feelings are also very recurrent in my reflective journal, and they refer to a sense of achievement that can only be appreciated when one "appreciates the trajectory in time and the emotional and physical tension that accompanies it" (Kramersch, 2009, p. 63). Participants' words also suggest that they sensed achievement and ownership over their performance in the LC. To begin with, they exercised their agency when they took the initiative to attend the event

voluntarily. In addition, the fact that there were no teacher-facilitators guiding the conversations meant that, instead of performing their student selves and letting themselves be guided by an “expert”, they owned the dynamics of and interactions within the space as much as anyone else involved in the conversations. (This point will be developed further in the next chapter in connection with participants’ changes in self-perception as multilingual social selves.)

In conclusion, there are no good or bad emotions. One needs to be emotionally connected to one’s actions and speech (Damasio, 2003), and feeling nervous is necessarily enmeshed with other emotions in the daring and adventurous social experience of languaging (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004). Like other elements in the face-to-face ecosystem of LCs, emotions were negotiated and co-constructed intersubjectively (Ros i Solé, 2016), rather than managed individually and privately through resilience or self-efficacy. Feelings and emotions were not lodged in speakers’ minds, but emerged in social interaction as a *mélange*, and they evolved during the course of the LC events. What remained in participants’ memory and body as part of their experience in LCs was a sense of achievement and the pleasure of languaging.

Having focused mainly on the languaging and learning affordances that participants perceived in LC1, I now discuss some of the challenges and constraints of these events.

5.2.8 Challenges and constraints

All of the participants who were available for the study presented LC1 generally in a positive light, particularly those who became regular attendees. As a researcher, I did not have the means to contact people who attended once, but did not enjoy the event and never went back (more on the limitations of the study in Chapter 8 [8.3]). However, this does not mean that the LC experience did not present any challenges or constraints. First, some participants mentioned that conversations were often repetitive and superficial, especially when participants spent too much time introducing themselves to each other, and repeating those introductions every time somebody else joined the conversation. A second constraint was that, while participants found that conversing in the LC could boost speaking fluency and confidence, it did not help to improve language accuracy. Thirdly, a common remark was that the events were not frequent enough. They took place twice per

term, and each event would last around two to three hours, although participants were free to stay for as long as they wanted. Finally, only widely-taught languages were represented, as this participant expressed in an email correspondence with me:

[S]upongo que otra cosa interesante concerniente los cafés es que favorecen los dos idiomas mayoritarios en el sistema educacional (español y francés). Muchas veces, falta gente para practicar italiano, chino, árabe, ruso o incluso alemán, y por tanto los pocos que sí vienen tal vez tengan la sensación de ser el forastero, algo que sin duda impacta en su relación con su(s) idioma(s). Cuando uno va a clases formales, está garantizado que podrá utilizar la lengua en cuestión, por escaso o incompleto que sea el aprendizaje en clase. En los language cafés su experiencia depende en gran medida del perfil lingüístico de los otros participantes.

<I suppose another interesting thing concerning the cafés is that they favour the two main languages in the educational system (Spanish and French). Many times, there are not enough people to practise Italian, Chinese, Arabic, Russian or even German, and therefore the few people that do come may feel like outsiders, something that undoubtedly impacts on their relationship with their language(s). In formal classes, it is guaranteed that one will be able to use the language in question, as scarce or incomplete classroom learning might be. In the language cafés the experience relies to a great extent on the linguistic profile of the other participants.>

(Nathan, LC1, email correspondence with the researcher)

Nathan was particularly sensitive to this limitation given his eagerness to learn and use languages, dialects and varieties which are not widely taught (as illustrated in 5.2.1 and 5.2.5).

Summary

In section 5.2 I explored the co-construction of LC1 and how participants perceived and acted upon its affordances for multilingual socialisation and collaborative learning. First, I focused on contextualising the social environment by providing a brief description of the multilingual profiles of LC1 participants. The interviews prompted them to reflect upon their language learning trajectories and, for some, it was difficult to define their language learning trajectories in terms of linear development or levels of competence (Ros i Solé, 2016). Also, the data illustrated the different aims and motivations that these participants manifested for participating in the LC, showing an emphasis on the recreational value of these events. Secondly, I analysed how the venue and the physical arrangement of

particular elements in it contributed to participants' first impressions of LC1 as a messy and informal event, which also had an impact on the feelings and emotions of first-timers as they walked in. In relation to the physical environment, I also illustrated how the stickers provided by the organisers mediated the formation of language conversation groups, as well as participants' impressions of each other's multilingualisms.

Thirdly, building upon this thick description of the social and physical environment, I discussed the three themes that underpinned the co-construction of LC1 as a place for languaging, translanguaging and collaborative learning: (1) sense of freedom, agency and authenticity; (2) joint enterprise and reciprocity, and (3) emotion work. Participants reported that conversing in the LC felt more authentic than speaking in the classroom, given the lack of time constraints, absence of predefined topics, and absence of formal assessment in the LC. Participants also felt free to use different language varieties, dialects and registers, and free to choose different modes of participation (e.g., listening only), which gave them a sense of agency over their experiences in the LC. Further, the sense of joint enterprise and reciprocity (i.e., seeing that everyone was interested in "using each other" to socialise in languages) is what differentiated the LCs from any other informal contexts of language socialisation. The perception that "everyone was in the same boat", as Elisabeth and Molly put it, enabled participants to co-construct a power-balanced and collaborative environment. Regarding emotion work, the ecology of LCs stimulated the intersubjective co-construction of emotions, which evolved throughout the duration of the event. Participants' feelings and emotions before, during and after the event played a crucial role in their social, embodied, and lived experience of languaging. Having discussed the affordances, the main challenges and constraints associated with LC1 were presented at the end of the section.

I now turn to LC2 to provide a similar detailed analysis of its ecology.

5.3 Co-constructing a multilingual socialisation and collaborative learning space in LC2

In parallel with the previous section, I start the analysis of the co-construction of the multilingual socialisation and collaborative learning space in LC2 with a

contextualisation of the social and the physical environment in this LC. First, I offer an overview of the profiles of the LC2 participants (5.3.1) and their aims and motivations for participating in this LC (5.3.2). Then, I explore how participants interacted with the LC2 venue (5.3.3) and some artefacts with symbolic meaning and mediational roles in the environment (5.3.4). Different from LC1, the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis in relation to the (trans)language and learning affordances of LC2 were two: bonding and building friendship (5.3.5) and appreciating the multiperspective nature of discussions concerning global issues (5.3.6). The last subsection analyses the challenges and constraints of LC2 (5.3.7).

5.3.1 The LC2 participants

While participants in LC1 were mostly young university students who did not know each other, and who showed a tendency to compare the LCs with their classroom experiences, LC2 was formed by a small group of professionals who had known each other for a long time at the time of data collection. Their relationship with each other and with the languages they spoke was different, since they had long left behind the times of high-stakes exams. The group was very intergenerational and was aimed at speaking French only, although other languages were occasionally drawn upon during the conversations (e.g., English, Spanish, Portuguese, or Italian), given the participants' shared multilingual repertoires.

Hugo (the organiser), was French, but had lived in the UK for over 14 years and lived with his Mexican partner, **Pedro**, who sometimes attended the LC too. Pedro was also learning Italian. They were both in their thirties. **Ruth** was a retired British school teacher of French and Spanish, who had travelled the world from a young age, and remembered very fondly the time when she lived in Madrid (Spain). She attended evening classes to study Italian and participated actively in cultural events organised for Italian speakers (e.g., a series of talks about Italian art, history and literature). Ruth's husband, **Mike**, was a retired British accountant who had extensive multilingual socialisation experiences, having worked in many different countries, including Canada, Brazil, France, Spain, Nigeria, Kazakhstan, among others. Apart from English (his first language), he was fluent in French, Spanish and Portuguese. Both Ruth and Mike were in their sixties. **Nadia** (founder of the group), in her thirties, was French and had lived for many years in the UK,

where she completed her PhD, pursued her career as an engineering researcher, and met her Greek husband. She had Lebanese heritage, and had relatives living in Lebanon, France and the UK. Apart from being fluent in French and English, she could speak some Spanish, Greek, and Arabic. **Joanne**, in her fifties, was a British school teacher of French and Spanish, and had extensive socialisation experiences in both languages. She attended regularly a Spanish LC in another bar in the city, and spent sojourns abroad in Spain every year. **Sonia**, in her thirties, was Turkish, but had been living in the UK for many years. She had to stop attending LC2 because she moved to another city. **Miguel**, in his thirties, was Spanish and had recently moved to North England from London because of his wife's job. He had also lived in Belgium. He only attended LC2 once, because of childcare responsibilities and because he and his family moved to Madrid some months later. **Regina**, in her forties, was a Brazilian woman who had lived in the UK for over 20 years, and she enjoyed attending different LCs in the city to socialise in French and Spanish.

LC2 participants could be described as adults who had already established their socioeconomic status; in other words, they did not need to invest in French in order to be “socially and economically integrated into the global workplace” (Kubota, 2011) nor for daily survival (Ryan, 2006). This is an important aspect to take into account in order to understand the aims and motivations that led them to attend the LC, which I discuss next.

5.3.2 Aims and motivations for attending the LC

In this section, I draw on the LC2 focus group data, where I asked participants about their aims and motivations for creating and attending this group. The participants who were involved in the focus group were Hugo, Nadia, Ruth, Joanne, and Mike.

To socialise and find new ways to engage with the local community

When I asked participants during the focus group to comment on how the group started, everyone turned their heads towards Hugo and Nadia (the founders of the group and long-standing friends). They explained that it was an idea that Nadia shared with Hugo in 2013.

Hugo : Elle [Nadia] m'a dit « on va créer ce café de langue pour que les gens puissent parler le français, pas seulement les français mais aussi les gens qui veulent parler le français ».

<She [Nadia] told me: "we are going to create this language café so that people can speak French, not just French people, but also people who want to speak French".>

[...]

Nuria: Mais quelle était ton idée ? Pourquoi tu voulais le faire ?

<But what was your idea? Why did you want to do it?>

Nadia: C'est plus que j'avais envie de faire quelque chose pour la société, et pour moi, en étant française, c'était la chose la plus naturelle à faire. C'était plus que j'avais envie de travailler plus en proximité des communautés, mais c'est à la même époque je crois que j'ai voulu travailler dans le service publique en Angleterre, c'est parce que vraiment je voulais travailler de façon plus proche avec les gens, les locaux, quand tu es un peu déconnecté on va dire de la société. Surtout à l'université, c'est pas vraiment une société qu'on voit...

<It was more like I felt like doing something for society, and for me, being French, it was the most natural thing to do. I wanted to work close to the communities; it was also the time when I wanted to work in the public service in England, because I really wanted to work closer to people, the locals, when you are a bit disconnected from society let's say. Especially at university, it's not really a society that we see...>

Hugo : C'est plus factice, peut-être

<It's more artificial, maybe>

Nadia : Ouais

<Yes>

Nuria: T'as fait la fac ici ?

<You went to university here?>

Nadia: Oui, je travaillais en tant que chercheuse, c'était pas vraiment... pour moi... c'est vrai que j'avais aussi ce besoin de se socialiser, surtout parce que je travaillais dans un milieu très ingénieur où effectivement y avait pas beaucoup d'événements au tour de moi. Donc j'avais vraiment aussi un besoin personnel de socialiser davantage dans la société et...

<Yes, I worked as a researcher, it was not really... for me... it's true that I also felt this need to socialise, especially because I worked in a very engineering-focused environment where there weren't actually many events happening around me. So I really had also this personal need to socialise more in society and...>

Nuria: De socialiser en français ?

<To socialise in French?>

Nadia: Non, en fait en général, et je pense que donner le français c'était la chose la plus facile à donner en étant française, parce que quand même j'avais toujours ce sentiment que j'étais étrangère, mais... Donc il fallait jouer là-dessus en fait si je voulais vraiment donner quelque chose d'intéressant...

<No, in general actually, and I think that French was the easiest thing to give, being French, because anyway I always had this feeling that I was a foreigner, but... So it was necessary to play with that in fact if I really wanted to give something interesting...>

(LC2, focus group)

Nadia explained that she wanted to do something for society, which linked to her personal need to socialise and create new ways for her to engage with her local community. She saw her multilingualism as something of which she could take advantage, and French, her first language, as something to offer. Thus, with the help of her friend Hugo, Nadia exercised her agency to create that new social space for herself and, in turn, contributed to the diversification of the linguistic landscape of the city, offering something to the community: an open space to socialise in French. After she became a mother, Hugo took over the role of organising the LC events, but Nadia continued attending the events as much as she could.

To keep the language alive

Mike, who learned French out of necessity when he worked in Quebec (Canada), saw the utility of this group to keep his French alive:

[U]n petit groupe comme ici c'est une opportunité de limiter que... j'ai oublié beaucoup la langue parce que je n'ai pas pratiqué dans beaucoup des années, mais un groupe comme ici c'est limiter un peu la perte de la connaissance. Pratiquer un peu, c'est meilleur que rien, pour moi.

<A little group like here is an opportunity to prevent... I've forgotten the language a lot because I haven't practised in many years, but a group like this

prevents a bit the loss of knowledge. Practising a bit is better than nothing for me.>

(Mike, LC2 focus group)

Mike was retired and did not need languages to progress in his career anymore. He and his wife, Ruth, did not travel that much anymore either due to caring responsibilities. However, they both had travelled the world and had extensive sojourning experiences abroad from when international travel was not as accessible as it is nowadays. Also, due to his vast international experience working as an accountant in so many different parts of the world, Mike got to learn many languages. He kept Spanish, Portuguese and French part of his life in the north of England by using them whenever he saw the opportunity (e.g., he was acquainted with native speakers who owned or worked at local shops and market stalls in the city). Although he described his motivation for participating in LC2 in cognitive terms (“practise” to prevent the loss of “knowledge”), the fact that this linguistic knowledge had no instrumental value *per se* for him anymore suggests that he may have been driven by the more subjective, emotional forces of languaging (Kramsch, 2009; Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004; Ros i Solé, 2016). A different perspective on the aim to keep the language alive was offered by Miguel, who could not participate in the focus group, but once told me that the LC2 group was very good for him because he missed speaking French. He had lived in Belgium for a year and had a great time there, so he always felt nostalgic about socialising in French.

To socialise in languages for personal enjoyment and intellectual pleasure

Joanne and Ruth mentioned how the social and intellectual aspects of having enjoyable conversations, and the friendships they developed in the group, outweighed their initial aim of practising French.

Nuria : Et alors pourquoi vous avez décidé de commencer à venir dans le groupe ?

<So why did you decide to start attending the group?>

Joanne : D’abord c’était pour... comme l’a déjà dit Mike, c’était pour ne pas perdre la langue [...] Mais, après ça, c’était pour l’amitié, c’était pour les discussions qu’on a eu, et ça c’était à part de la langue, parce que beaucoup de fois on a commencé à parler en anglais, ou en espagnol, ou quoi que ce soit, c’était... c’est beaucoup plus important que la langue maintenant. Mais ça a commencé avec...

<At the beginning it was for... like Mike said, it was not to lose the language [...] But after that it was for our friendship, for the discussions we've had, and it was apart from the language, because many times we started speaking in English, or in Spanish, or whatever, it was... it's much more important than the language now. But that started with...>

Nuria : avec l'intérêt de la langue

<with an interest in the language>

Joanne : Oui oui oui

<yes, yes, yes>

Nadia: Il y a des discussions très politiques et très vives ici, hein ? On a eu le Brexit, on a eu la position des femmes... [everyone laughs out loud]

<There are very political and lively discussions here, huh? We had Brexit, the position of women...>

Hugo: Oui, je me rappelle de ça, avec Sonia, oui, très forte !

<Yes, I remember that, with Sonia, yes, very good!>

Mike: Le grand débat, Joanne et Sonia, fantastique !

<The big debate, Joanne and Sonia, fantastic!>

Hugo: sur le rôle des femmes

<about the role of women>

Mike: Oui, ça c'était super !

<Yes, it was great!>

[...]

[Some minutes later]

Nuria : Ruth, pour toi c'était le même intérêt ? Au début c'était la langue, ou...

<Ruth, for you it was the same interest? At the beginning it was the language, or...?>

Ruth : Oui, c'était la langue et aussi j'aime bien les étrangers, parce qu'ils m'apprennent d'autres choses dans la vie et ça me change les idées...

<Yes, it was the language and also I love foreigners, because I learn other things about life and that changes my ideas...>

(LC2, focus group)

Joanne picked up on Mike's previous comment about preventing the loss of the language, but she explained how this initial aim evolved into something else as she developed a deeper relationship with the members of the group. For Joanne and Ruth, attending this group evolved from being an activity for practising French into a social activity with a greater focus on having intellectually stimulating conversations with friends. Thus, enjoyment and friendship were their main driving forces for engaging in LC2. Some lines before this exchange, Mike had mentioned that French was part of Joanne and Ruth's work as French teachers; however, they made it clear that, for them, speaking French was more than a job requirement, and it was rather "a lifelong hobby driven by intellectual curiosity" (Kubota, 2011, p. 475).

After Nadia mentioned examples of some political discussions they had in the past ("*Il y a des discussions très politiques et très vives ici, hein ?*"), all participants started to recall with great excitement a particularly enjoyable one about the role of women (which happened before I started attending the group in 2016). All participants remembered "the big debate" that arose between Joanne and Sonia very fondly, and all of them (natives and non-natives) seemed to have been equally affected by it as a very stimulating intellectual discussion between two adults with (apparently) very different opinions. This account suggests that describing LC2 as a place to practise French would fall short of its breadth, as much as it would discriminate those who do not identify as *learners*. Instead, viewing LC2—and multilingual and intercultural socialisation more generally—as a social and intellectually stimulating hobby allows to include all participants under the same umbrella, without distinguishing between levels of proficiency, "native" status, and without treating non-natives as perpetual *learners*, ignoring their other social identities (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Gao, 2009; Piller, 2002).

5.3.3 The LC2 venue

LC2 took place at a traditional pub, always on a Thursday evening. Thus, as participants entered the venue, they found the normal lively atmosphere of a pub with music, gatherings of people chatting, people ordering at the bar, etc. Even if

the LC2 consisted of a small group of people, the breakout of the group into different parallel conversations naturally happened here, too.

When I asked participants during the focus group why they chose this pub as a venue for the events, Hugo said that Nadia and him wanted a place where the music was not too loud (*"c'est parce qu'on voulait trouver un endroit où il n'y a pas trop de musique"*). They also thought about another pub they liked, but it was too popular and always crowded.



Figure 5 Photo of LC2 taken by one of the participants (Sonia)

A difference with LC1 is that in LC2 there were no welcoming procedures. The first time I attended, apart from how nervous I felt due to the social anxiety associated with meeting new people in a new place, I was confused and unsure whether I was in the right place.

When I arrived, the bar was full of people and there were no signs of who could be part of the French speaking group, so I decided to ask a waiter: "Do you know if there is a French gathering happening here tonight?". He pointed at two women that he thought were regulars in this event. I approached them and asked them (in English): "Are you the organisers of the French language café?" They were not the organisers, but regular attendants who immediately switched to French, maybe because it coincided with the moment when the actual organiser arrived. He is French. They exchanged two kisses with him, which symbolised to me that even rituals, such as greetings, are done "à la française" in this French environment they have created for themselves. (Researcher's reflective journal, first time in LC2, 17/11/2016)

Miguel, also a newcomer in LC2, had to go eavesdropping around the crowd when he first attended to look for a group of people speaking in French:

Miguel : Oui, j'étais en train de me promener par là mais je savais pas comment [vous reconnaître]... donc j'écoutais...

<Yes, I was walking around, but I didn't know how to [recognise you]... so I was listening>

Hugo : Tu écoutais ouais [laughter]

<You were listening, yeah>

Miguel : Tout le monde parlait anglais, donc c'est ça...

<Everyone speaks English, so that's it...>

(LC2 naturally-occurring conversation, 09/11/2017)

Probably thinking about Miguel's experience, and concerned that the same would happen to other potential new participants, some days later, Hugo, the organiser, chose the following wording for his Facebook announcement of the upcoming event:

Salut à tous !

Prochain rendez-vous au [name of pub], c'est ce jeudi (le 23 Novembre).

Tendez l'oreille ! Si l'on parle français c'est probablement nous. ;-) On sera contents de bavarder avec vous.

À partir de 19h30 ce jeudi donc.

Belle journée à tous !

<Hello everyone! Next meeting at [name of pub] will be this Thursday (23 November). Keep your ears open! If you hear people speaking French, that's probably us. ;-) We will be happy to speak with you. So from 7.30 pm this Thursday. You all have a good day!>

(Facebook post by Hugo, 20/11/2017)

Kramsch (2009) argues that, as opposed to discourse analysts, poststructuralists add a symbolic and historical dimension to subjectivity, and do not see intersubjectivity being constructed only in the here-and-now of the conversation, but "it is to be found in the shared memories, connotations, projections, inferences elicited by the various sign systems we use in concert with others" (Kramsch,

2009, pp. 19-20). For Kramsch, thus, intersubjectivity is synonymous with intertextuality in Bakhtin's dialogical sense, and Hugo's post above would be an example of this: his message needs to be interpreted as emerging from and shaped by a recent social-interactive episode at the LC, that is, Miguel explaining how he struggled to find the LC group and used eavesdropping as a strategy to find them.

Nevertheless, although this pub was the usual meeting point for LC2, it was not the only place where the group met. Once we went to a *creperie* to have a Christmas dinner, and we also went to the cinema together on several occasions.

Furthermore, different members of the group hosted a group gathering in their house. Ruth and Mike, for instance, hosted a summer LC gathering in their garden every year as a tradition. This venue variations indexed important considerations about the evolving nature of LC2, notably that the boundaries between the public and private nature of the events became blurred, and that the core of regular attendees developed a friendship that transcended the language-focused *raison d'être* of the group.

5.3.4 Artefacts with symbolic meaning and mediational roles

Since LC2 took place in a local pub, it was expected that participants would consume something in order to be able to use the space there. The description of LC2 in its Facebook page is illustrative of how drinks played a role in the co-construction of the environment:

Un verre du vin, une pinte de bière, un brin de conversation pour préparer la fin de semaine. 19h30 à Bacchus. Invitez vos amis!

<A glass of wine, a pint of beer, a bit of conversation to prepare the weekend. 7.30 pm at Bacchus. Invite your friends!>

(LC2's group profile information on Facebook)

In western societies, alcohol, coffee and tea are common "social lubricants", that is, beverages which stimulate social interaction and make people feel at ease to socialise with one another. Therefore, these drinks can be considered "socially shared symbols" (Tomasello, 1999, p. 106) with indexical meaning. By thematising "*un verre du vin*" and "*une pinte de bière*" in the event description, the organisers indexed a relaxed and informal atmosphere fostering open-ended conversations and mirroring a social gathering with friends. Certainly, drinking alcohol is not

mandatory in these events, and the description needs to be interpreted with its indexical meaning rather than its literal, denotative one. In other words, people who have been socialised in this part of the world will assume that wine or beer are not the only drinks available, and having a non-alcoholic drink will also be socially acceptable. At the same time, anyone who is not familiar or does not feel comfortable with the pub culture could potentially feel less attracted to attend LC2 based on the above description.

During the LC2 events, the drinks worked as social mediational artefacts of various kinds. Different to every other LC I knew, in this LC it was customary to buy each other drinks, again, mirroring the intimate atmosphere one would create with friends. However, the first time I attended LC2, I did not know about this custom, and I had some preconceived ideas about a stranger buying me a drink, as I expressed in my reflective journal:

Before moving to the table they found available, the organiser asked me if I wanted something to drink and I said yes. At the bar, he told me something, “*je t’invite*”, which I misunderstood as “*où est-ce que tu habites?*” or something like that (I will blame the loud music and my uneasiness about having to speak French), to which I replied “*j’habite à [city]*”. Nice start. He then said it in Spanish “*yo te invito*”, to which I said “¡ah!, ¡no, no...!” in quite an assertive way, so much so that I really felt a distance being set there, so he let me order and pay for my drink first, and afterwards he ordered and paid for his drink. That was probably quite assertive from my part, but I felt it was the right thing to do (why would a stranger buy me a drink? Is this a gendered thing? I don’t know... But just in case...). (Researcher’s reflective journal, first time in LC2, 17/11/2016)

As this excerpt illustrates, a man buying a woman a drink had other meaning-making potential for me, and refusing the invitation was my way of negotiating the relationship and the boundaries I wanted to establish with my new acquaintance. As I became a regular in LC2, I realised I had misunderstood the meaning of his offering. Offering drinks to one another was part of the shared repertoire and history of this community of practice, that is, part of the set of symbols and ways of communicating that they had created for themselves over time (Wenger, 1998). Thus, the episode described in the excerpt above could be explained in terms of what Lave and Wenger (1991) call “legitimate peripheral participation”: legitimate, because the oldtimer (Hugo) saw the newcomer (me) as a new member, and peripheral because it started with an approximation or a safe exposure to the

practice, whereby it is acceptable for the newcomer not to be fully participating (i.e., to pay for your own drink). This is also related to Kramsch's (2009, p. 19) understanding of "in-group intersubjectivity". When newcomers attend the LC, oldtimers understand the need to be kind to them, as newcomers interpret cues and make sense of people's behaviour in the social events. At the same time, newcomers display their understanding of the event (e.g., why they attended). Thus, the LC draws on the conventions of the discursive social order, while, at the same time, it affords the construction of in-group intersubjectivity.

Furthermore, drinks could be also seen as a pacer which determined how long the meeting would last. Something as trivial as inviting peers to have another drink was interpreted pragmatically as an invitation to stay chatting for a bit longer. Subsequently, declining that invitation worked as an opportunity to introduce one's intentions to leave in a communicatively appropriate way. In that sense, the conventions of the discursive social order that applied to this context (for instance, on "how to leave") resembled the ones guiding other informal social gatherings (e.g., a party, a family gathering, a meal with friends, etc.). These conventions are informed by sociocultural norms which can certainly be negotiated intersubjectively, and often one's individual decision may be influenced by the decisions made by the group.

Based on the above contextualisation of the social and physical environment of LC2, in the next two subsections I explore the two themes that became most salient in the data with regard to the co-construction of a space for multilingual socialisation and learning in LC2: bonding and friendship, and appreciating the multiperspective nature of conversations.

5.3.5 Bonding and friendship

As mentioned earlier, LC2 consisted of a small group of regular attendees. The first time I attended, I realised that everyone already knew each other: they greeted each other with two kisses, they bought each other drinks, and they referred to personal information about each other during their conversations, reflecting the long history of the group. After my third time in LC2, I wrote the following in my reflective journal:

Sonia arrives. She brings a couple of books by Turkish authors translated into French and some empty jars for Ruth. She explains to me that Ruth loves making jam and she always welcomes empty jars from friends. Clearly their relationship has a history and it seems that it has developed mainly within the language café. (Researcher's reflective journal, LC2, 23/03/2017)

These greeting and sharing practices indexed that bonding was part of the French languaging experience in this LC, and newcomers were invited to join those practices straight away. For instance, I mentioned in the previous section how Hugo offered to buy me a drink on my first day. Also, the second time I attended, I joined the group for a Christmas dinner together at a *creperie*, which was a tradition. This way of integrating newcomers helped to legitimise their participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and made them part of the in-group intersubjectivity (Kramsch, 2009) and small culture (Holliday, 1999) they had constructed for themselves.

Joanne compared LC2 with another LC she attended in the city for speakers of Spanish:

[The Spanish LC] c'est une expérience différente, parce qu'on n'a pas de... on y va si on peut, et si on ne peut pas on n'y va pas, il n'y a personne qui dépends de toi... alors c'est différent ici [in LC2] parce qu'on est plus intime.

<[The Spanish LC] is a different experience, because we don't have... we go if we can, and we can't, we don't go, there is no one who depends on you... whereas here [in LC2] it's different, because we are more intimate.>

(Joanne, LC2 focus group)

In this excerpt, Joanne indexed the interdependence that characterised the group: the intimacy afforded by the small size of the group also meant that its members felt accountable for the continuity of the LC. In other words, the survival of the LC depended on the individuals' commitment to attend regularly, unlike other LCs (such as LC1 or the Spanish LC mentioned by Joanne), where individual attendance can be transient, as there are always enough participants (both regulars and first-timers) for the event to take place.

Due to the group's lasting relationship, emotion work did not feature as salient in LC2 data. The LC2 focus group participants mentioned enjoyment and pleasure and engaged in bonding practices with each other, but none of them described

their participation as emotional investment with feelings of social anxiety that evolved into sense of achievement. Furthermore, the intimacy they created through bonding afforded the emergence of deep conversations about different topics, as I discuss next.

5.3.6 Appreciating the multiperspective nature of discussions

This theme links to one of the reported aims and motivations for participating in LC2, namely to socialise in languages for personal enjoyment and intellectual pleasure (see 5.3.2 above). As mentioned earlier, participants remembered fondly the “very political and lively discussions” (Nadia, LC2 focus group) they had in LC2, such as Brexit or women’s position in society. These discussions were informed by the different perspectives that each participant contributed with based on their transnational attachments and position in society, as Nadia remarked:

Nadia : [...] depuis que je suis ici [...] j’ai rencontré beaucoup de personnes de toutes les nationalités et finalement, oui, quand on parle, qu’on essaye enfin une discussion dans une langue étrangère... bon, pour moi le français c’est ma langue, mais je dis si je parle avec quelqu’un qui essaye de faire une discussion dans une langue étranger on va quand même explorer des sujets...

<Since I’m here [...] I’ve met many people from all nationalities and eventually, yes, when we speak, when we try to have a discussion in a foreign language... well, for me French is my language, but I mean if I speak with someone who tries to have a discussion in a foreign language, we are going to explore topics...>

Hugo : ...assez variés

<quite varied>

Nadia : Oui, voilà, et c’est pas forcément lié aux des cultures, mais plus à comment les gens arrivent à se replacer dans la société. Et les connexions sont différentes, en fonction d’où les gens viennent, non ?

<Yes, that’s it, and that’s not necessarily linked to cultures, but rather to how people manage to position themselves in society. And the connections are different, according to where people come from, aren’t they?>

(LC2 focus group)

Nadia’s comments encapsulate the idea that languaging and multilingual socialisation in LC2 were connected to learning about other worldviews and

multiperspectivity, which refers to the ability to decentre from one's own perspectives while discovering new ones (Barrett et al., 2014; Byram, 1997). Ruth displayed this decentring disposition, for instance, when she said that she not only attended the LC to speak French, but also because she “loves foreigners” (*“j’aime bien les étrangers, parce qu’ils m’apprennent d’autres choses dans la vie et ça me change les idées”*, see 5.3.2). Furthermore, Nadia’s remarks above move beyond the deficit or competence-based models which view “non-native speakers” as linguistically deficient and eternal language learners (Canagarajah, 2013; Phipps, 2018; Phipps & Levine, 2012; Risager, 2006). For Nadia, rather than language learners, LC2 participants whose first language was not French were speakers who contributed to the multiperspective nature of the group’s discussions with their own idiosyncrasies, knowledge, life stories and worldviews to learn from—i.e., with their “languacultures” (Risager, 2007).

Since multiperspectivity is closely linked to manifesting cosmopolitan and intercultural dispositions (Byram, 1997; Ros i Solé, 2013), the concept will be revisited and discussed in depth in Chapter 7 (7.2), where I analyse specific examples of LC2 discussions involving multiperspectivity drawing on Holliday’s (2011) grammar of culture.

5.3.7 Challenges and constraints: “*le noyau résistant*”

The main challenge in LC2 was the size of the group, which meant that Hugo (the organiser) sometimes had to ask about participants’ availability in the WhatsApp group before confirming a date for the meet-up, to make sure that at least three of us would attend. Sonia, who had moved city and was not regularly attending LC2 anymore, came once to the meeting and she started asking about people who used to attend:

“Et Nadia, elle va bien? Tu la vois? Et Gennaro, il va bien? Tu le vois?”
 <“What about Nadia, how is she? Do you see her? And Gennaro, how is he? Do you see him?”> They chat about other people that used to come to the group but not anymore. Sonia takes a selfie to send it to the WhatsApp group, so that everyone can see it and maybe feel motivated to come next time. She really wants to revitalise this groups and jokingly tells Fred off for not pushing people enough to attend. (Researcher’s reflective journal, LC2, 23/03/2017)

As Nadia explained during the focus group, LC2 used to be bigger at the beginning:

[A]u départ, le groupe était beaucoup plus grand, mais après on est restés un noyau en fait, parce qu'il y a des gens qui étaient de passage, et au départ on avait beaucoup fait la publicité, mais petit à petit on l'a laissé vivre comme... oui, dans une position d'équilibre.

<At the beginning, the group was much bigger, but then only a core [of participants] remained, because there were people who were only passing through, and at the beginning we advertised the event a lot, but little by little we left it to live like... yes, in a position of balance.>

(Nadia, LC2 focus group)

Later on during the focus group, Mike mentioned a participant who attended the group “once or twice”, but created some tension partly due to his drinking habits (“il prenait de la bière en quantités impressionnantes” *<he drank beer in striking quantities>*). At that point, Nadia interrupted Mike and gave further details about other potential reasons why the group had been reduced to a “resistant core”:

Non, en fait c'est bizarre parce que dans notre groupe on a tendance à garder des gens, mais des fois il va y avoir un élément un petit peu perturbateur qui va s'ajouter au groupe [everyone laughs] et ça va faire partir une grosse partie du groupe, mais il y a toujours un noyau qui est très résistant au changement... [everyone laughs louder]... et qui reste au fil des ans, mais c'est vrai qu'on est commencé comme un gros groupe et après il y avait des éléments perturbateurs et d'autres qui voulaient plus venir parce que voilà il y avait tel et tel qui venaient... et donc du coup on a perdu beaucoup beaucoup.

<No, in fact it's weird because in the group we have a tendency to keep people, but sometimes there is going to be a slightly disruptive element who is going to join the group [everyone laughs] and that is going to put off a big part of the group, but there is always a core that is very resistant to change... [everyone laughs louder]... and who remains over the years, but it's true that we started as a big group and then there were disruptive elements and others who no longer wanted to attend because this and this were attending and... so we lost many many [of them].>

(Nadia, LC2 focus group)

The other participants' laughter in this passage suggests that this was a thorny issue which Nadia managed to verbalise gracefully in euphemistic terms (“a slightly disruptive element”—which could be also translated as a “troublemaker” or “agitator”—“a core that is resistant to change”). As a researcher, I sensed that it was not comfortable for them to delve into the details of what happened, and I respected that. However, this piece of data was revealing of the fact that bonding in

LC2 had its challenges. While bonding facilitated the emergence of deeper discussions and meaningful multilingual social relationships, Sonia implied that it also became a problem when participants who did not like someone in the group stopped attending altogether. The remaining participants became, therefore, a “resistant core” who seemed to adapt well to the changes that different people brought to the environment, thus showing intercultural dispositions.

Summary

Section 5.3 has analysed the ecology of LC2 considering the different elements in the social and physical environment that shaped the co-construction of this multilingual socialisation and collaborative learning space. First, a brief description of the participants’ profiles showed the intergenerational, multilingual and transnational nature of the group, which informed their different aims and motivations for participating in this LC: (1) to socialise and find new ways to engage with the local community, (2) to keep their French alive, and (3) to socialise in languages for personal enjoyment and intellectual pleasure. Second, regarding the physical environment, I drew on different data to illustrate what it was like to enter the LC2 venue, and also highlighted the hybridity of this LC as a public event which occasionally shifted into a private gathering.

The co-construction of this social, multilingual space was underpinned by two aspects: bonding and friendship, and appreciating the multiperspective nature of conversations. The data demonstrated that language learning was not foregrounded in LC2. Participants focused on other types of learning from each other about the world, but they were less concerned about the development of skills or proficiency as a result of these encounters. Thus, portraying LC2 participants as native and non-native speakers or learners would shift the focus from the most important aspect that united them all: the fact that they were all French speakers who enjoyed socialising in this (and other) language(s) and learning about the world from multiple perspectives.

Summary of Chapter 5

This chapter has contextualised LC1 and LC2 drawing on thick description (Denzin, 1994) and considering three nested levels of scale: first, the interconnections of the LCs with other (learning) spaces and their sociocultural, political and historical

context; second, the physical environment and its impact on the social dynamics of the events; and third, the social environment. This contextualisation informed the analysis of the co-construction of both LCs as complex spaces for multilingual socialisation and learning.

Some of the findings have shown clear differences between how LC1 and LC2 participants made sense of their experiences in each LC due to their different ecologies. For instance, comparisons between the classroom and the LC were frequent in LC1 due to the fact that LC1 participants were young university students, whereas the continuity and long history of the group in LC2 favoured a focus on maintaining stable multilingual relationships. However, other findings, and the conclusions that can be drawn thereof, may be applicable to both LCs, as I summarise below.

Many participants, both in LC1 and LC2, had complex transnational attachments and multilingual repertoires, and were highly mobile individuals, for whom global mobility was the starting-point, rather than the end-point, of learning languages (Fenoulhet & Ros i Solé, 2011). Many of them—even the young university students—had experienced living in different parts of the world, and some were used to living in intercultural, multilingual households. These life experiences “may have helped them to develop a cosmopolitan outlook” (Jin, 2020, p. 573), for which they could be described as “cosmopolitan” multilinguals (Block, 2002, 2003; Brimm, 2010). “Transnationality” and “cosmopolitanism” are, therefore, key aspects to understand the emergence of certain affordances and social dynamics in the LC ecosystem, which, in turn, informed the ways in which participants made sense of their experiences there. These aspects will be further discussed in Chapter 7 in relation to interculturality.

Regarding the aims for participating in the LCs, the data included the voices of those who participated as language learners or confident proficient speakers, and those who participated to speak their first language, the latter being underrepresented as investigated subjects in previous studies on LCs. This chapter has conceptualised LCs as more than just spaces to practise languages, showing that there are many layers to them. Notably, the aims for participating in LCs were not clear-cut or defined in static terms, but were usually multi-layered and moving across a continuum between, at one end, for purely recreational purposes (e.g.,

socialising and making friends) and, at the other end, for instrumental purposes (e.g., to practise for an oral exam or to complete coursework). Participants had various aims and motivations situated in different parts of the continuum. The educational and the social formed an inseparable whole for some of these learners (e.g., Rachel and Alice), who saw the LCs as contact-zones with blurring boundaries between learning and leisure. Moreover, some participants admitted that their aims and motivations evolved as they developed a deeper personal relationship with the events (e.g., Elisabeth, Joanne and Ruth). This suggests that the social environment of LCs was emergent, dynamic, and intersubjective: it was not made of the sum of the individuals, but the complex realities and affordances they co-constructed together in interaction with each other and with the environment. As Davis and Sumara (2008, p. 118) posit, “[i]t is not the individual organism that shapes the environment, and it is not the environment that necessarily conditions the organism; rather, they are engaged dialectically in a mutually specifying choreography where, all at once, each specifies the other”. Ushioda (2014, p. 48) makes a similar point when she affirms that “learners are not simply located in particular contexts, but inseparably constitute part of these contexts. Learners shape and are shaped by the context”.

The LCs were about individuals acting socially and co-constructing learning based on interdependence. A salient feature of these encounters was the availability of multiple *linguae francae* with the conscious, agreed decision among interlocutors to bring one of them to the fore. The two LCs attracted multilinguals who saw speaking languages and learning from others as a pleasure, and language learning as a social and intellectual hobby (Kubota, 2011) which “gives a lot back” (Molly, LC1) in terms of personal development and social and interpersonal benefits. As opposed to the utilitarian or instrumental view of language learning, these participants invested in the language not necessarily for better employability opportunities or to climb a socioeconomic ladder, but because of the joy they experienced in being able to connect with people in more than one language.

The data in this chapter suggest that the separation between (trans)linguaging and experiencing multilingual identities and interculturality is an artificial one. Linguaging cannot be disentangled from experiencing and performing multilingual

identities and interculturality. The next two findings chapters address these aspects of the LCs.

Chapter 6: Experiencing multilingual identities in the language cafés

Setting the scene

Vignette: Multilingual identities

This vignette draws on a naturally-occurring conversation from LC1, which was recorded on 05/12/2017. The conversation includes three British students whose first language was English, and me (Nuria), the participant-researcher. Alice was a Modern Languages student and was fluent in Italian, Spanish, Catalan, and also spoke some Finish and German. Rebecca was a History student, who was studying Spanish and was fluent in French. Ben was a Chemistry student, who was learning Spanish. Both Rebecca and Ben were my students at the time: Rebecca was studying Spanish at A2 level, and Ben, at B1 level (according to the levels of the CEFR). That evening at LC1, I had been speaking French with Rebecca, and then we switched to Spanish, at which point Alice and Ben joined us. I felt comfortable enough with them to ask if I could record our conversation. Thus, we started talking about why I was interested in LCs for my research and, soon after, the conversation unfolded as follows.

Original

- 1 **Alice:** [...] No, yo vengo... cada vez que hay un language café aquí vengo
- 2 **Nuria:** ¿Sí?
- 3 **Rebecca:** Yo también
- 4 **Alice:** Sí, me encanta. También porque aquí, como hay una universidad, hay muchos estudiantes Erasmus que vienen, así que puedes practicar con hablantes nativos
- 5 **Nuria:** Claro
- 6 **Alice:** Porque hablo en italiano con mis amigos aquí, pero son amigos ingleses que estudian italiano, es... es diferente. Sí, dijimos antes que hablar con otra persona inglesa está bien, nos entendemos, y cuando vamos a España...
[laughter]
- 7 **Ben:** Sí
- 8 [We all laugh]
- 9 **Nuria:** [laughter] Ya, yo creo que depende un poco del nivel, porque... porque yo, por ejemplo, con mi nivel de francés, que es bastante básico...
- 10 **Rebecca:** Yo pienso que habla bien en francés [laughter]
- 11 **Nuria:** [laughter] Pero muchas veces no tengo vocabulario, y Rebecca por ejemplo me ayuda un montón
- 12 **Rebecca:** [laughter]
- 13 **Alice:** Es verdad que...
- 14 **Nuria:** O sea, Rebecca no es nativa, pero habla francés mucho mejor que yo
- 15 **Alice:** Es verdad, y también yo... porque cuando fui a Italia, hice

English translation

No, I come... every time there is a language café here I come

Really?

Me too

Yes, I love it. Also because here, because there is a university, so there are many Erasmus students who attend, so you can practise with native speakers

Sure

Because I speak in Italian with my friends here, but they're English friends who study Italian, it's... it's different. Yes, we said before that speaking with an English person is good, we understand each other, and then when we go to Spain...

[laughter]

Yes

[We all laugh]

[laughter] I know, I think it depends a bit on the level, because... I, for example, with my level of French, which is quite basic...

I think she speaks well in French [laughter]

[laughter] But often I don't have the vocab, and Rebecca for instance helps me a lot

[laughter]

It's true that...

I mean, Rebecca is not a native, but speaks French much better than me

It's true, and also I... because when I went to Italy, I was on

	Erasmus y tenía amigos italianos, tenía también amigos Erasmus, pero hablamos en italiano, y yo tenía mucha confianza a probar nuevas frases, nuevas, no sé, con ellos, porque no son italianos	<i>Erasmus and had Italian friends, had Erasmus friends too, but we spoke Italian, and I felt very confident to try out new phrases, new, don't know, with them, because they're not Italian</i>
16	Nuria: Claro	<i>Yeah</i>
17	Alice: Ellos también están intentando hablar y decir nuevas cosas, así que sí, ayuda... ayuda mucho. Te dejan hablar un poco más; cuando son nativos no puedes hablar porque ellos hablan y no tienes el tiempo para pensar, pero sí... con ellos... sí	<i>They're also trying to speak and say new things, so yes, it helps... helps a lot. They let you speak a bit more; with natives you cannot speak because they speak and you don't have time to think, but yes... with them... you do</i>
18	[...]	<i>[...]</i>
19	Nuria: Yo, eh... Mi experiencia en Italia, tenía... porque la ciudad donde yo hice Erasmus es muy pequeña y... y entonces mi grupo de amigos, tenía bastantes amigos italianos, pero luego amigos Erasmus, o de otros lugares: una ucraniana, un francés, una alemana, una chica brasileña... luego españoles... y todos hablábamos italiano; o sea, hoy en día, mi amiga ucraniana, que ahora vive en Londres, yo con mi amiga ucraniana hablo italiano, porque nos conocimos en Italia y entonces quedó como...	<i>I, em... My experience in Italy, I had... because the city where I did my Erasmus is very small and... and so my group of friends, I had many Italian friends, but then also Erasmus friends, or from other places: one Ukrainian, one French, one German, a Brazilian girl... and then Spanish people... and we all spoke Italian; so nowadays, my Ukrainian friend, who lives in London, with my Ukrainian friend I speak Italian, because we met in Italy and it stayed like...</i>
20	Rebecca: Aaahhh [smiling]	<i>Aaahhh [smiling]</i>
21	Nuria: Y es una cosa... para mí italiano es una lengua que... no sé, que le tengo mucho cariño	<i>And that's something... for me Italian is a language that... don't know, I feel very fond of</i>
22	Alice: Sííí... qué bien. ¿Estás todavía en contacto con...?	<i>Yeeesss... how nice. Are you still in touch with...?</i>
23	Nuria: Sí, pero ya... no hablo tan bien como antes pero sí, sí que...	<i>Yes, although I don't speak as well as I used to, but yes, I do...</i>
24	Alice: Por ejemplo, yo con mis amigos en Perú es difícil con...	<i>For example, with my friends from Peru it's difficult with...</i>

- em... ¿cómo se dice 'time difference'?
- 25 **Nuria:** La diferencia horaria
- 26 **Alice:** La diferencia horaria, sí. Es un poco difícil llamarnos, pero quieren llamar y hablar, pero por teléfono es más difícil y yo
- 27 **Rebecca:** ¡Sí!
- 28 **Alice:** Es que antes hablaba mejor en español, pero ahora... sí, porque lo hablo desde hace una hora, pero si me llaman y no sé...
- 29 **Nuria:** ¡Es que por teléfono...! ¡Es muy difícil por teléfono!
- 30 **Rebecca:** Pasé... ¿pasé?
- 31 **Nuria:** Sí
- 32 **Rebecca:** ...dos meses a Nepal y aprendí la lengua, y ¿pude? hablar bastante bien, pero ahora mis amigas me llaman y no puedo entender, es muy difícil...
- 33 **Alice:** Sí...
- 34 **Nuria:** Ya...
- 35 **Rebecca:** porque he olvidado todo.
- 36 **Nuria:** Ya... sí, es un poco frustrante, ¿no? ¿Y por Skype, por ejemplo? Si... con la pantalla a lo mejor...
- 37 **Rebecca:** No, porque... no puedo practicar la lengua aquí... y he olvidado todo.
- 38 **Nuria:** Ya, hm...
- 39 **Alice:** Mi amiga peruana me llamó cuando estaba en Italia y no podía decir nada en español [laughter] y yo: "¡Lo siento,
- em... how do you say 'time difference'?
- [Nuria gives the answer:] La diferencia horaria
- La diferencia horaria, yes. It's a bit difficult to call each other, but they want to call and chat, but on the phone it's more difficult and I
- YEAH!
- I used to speak better Spanish, but now... yes, because I've been speaking for an hour, but if I get a phone call...
- On the phone... It's so difficult on the phone!
- I spent... spent? [checking if the verbal form that she is using is the appropriate one]
- Yes
- ...two months in Nepal and I learned the language, and I could? [checking again her verbal form] speak quite well, but now my friends call me and I can't understand, it's very difficult...
- Yes...
- I know...
- because I forgot everything.
- I know... yes, it's a bit frustrating, isn't it? What about Skype, for instance? If... with the screen maybe...
- No, because I can't practise the language here... and I've forgotten everything.
- I see, hm...
- My Peruvian friend called me when I was in Italy and I could not say anything in Spanish [laughter], I went: "¡Lo siento, lo

lo siento! ¡Mi dispiace, no, lo siento! ¡Aaarg!”

40 [...] [We talk about Rebecca’s experience as an English teacher in Nepal]

41 **Ben:** ¿Qué lengua hablan en Nepal?

42 **Alice:** Nepalí

43 **Rebecca:** Nepalí. La... [making a gesture for writing with her hand]

44 **Nuria:** ¿La escritura?

45 **Rebecca:** Sí, es la misma escritura de India

46 **Nuria:** Del... ah, como el hindi, sí

47 **Rebecca:** Pude escribir también

48 **Alice:** ¿Sí? ¡Wow! Es difícil

49 **Rebecca:** Olvidé

50 **Alice:** [laughter] Es un problema con las lenguas...

51 **Rebecca:** [laughter]

52 **Alice:** [looking at Ben] ¿Y tú hablas español y inglés, y...?

53 **Ben:** Solo... [laughter]

54 **Nuria:** [laughter]

55 **Alice:** Bueno, ya es una...

56 **Ben:** Poco francés, pero... como AS level, pero no hablé para mucho tiempo.

57 **Alice:** Pero ya hablas más lenguas que un inglés normal, está bien

58 [we all laugh]

59 **Ben:** Lo siento...

60 **Alice:** ¡No!

siento! ¡Mi dispiace, no, lo siento! ¡Aaarg!” [‘Lo siento’ means ‘sorry’ in Spanish, and ‘mi dispiace’ means ‘sorry’ in Italian]

[...]

What language do they speak in Nepal?

Nepali

Nepali. The... [making a gesture for writing with her hand]

The writing?

Yes, it’s the same writing from India

From... ah, like Hindi, yes

I could write too

Really? Wow! It’s difficult

I forgot

[laughter] That’s the problem with languages...

[laughter]

[looking at Ben] And you speak Spanish, English, and...?

Only... [laughter]

[laughter]

Well, it’s already a...

A little French, but... like AS level, but I haven’t spoken in a long time.

But you already speak more languages than an average English person, that’s good

[we all laugh]

I’m sorry...

No, don’t be!

Introduction

Chapter 5 conceptualised the conversational experiences of LC participants as *linguaging* experiences. The concept of *linguaging*, as understood by Phipps and Gonzalez (2004), encapsulates the complexities involved in speaking an additional language as an embodied, social, and intercultural activity. Thus, the term offers a lens to view what people do in LCs as much more than practising speaking skills in a foreign language, since linguaging involves “the effort of being a person” (Phipps, 2007, p. 12) in the language(s) through which one is trying to socialise and connect with others. As such, talking about linguaging brings identity—and, more specifically, multilingual identity—into the discussion. In fact, the possibilities for performing, developing, discussing, and sharing multilingual identities through linguaging (and metalanguaging) in the LC emerged prominently in the data in different ways. Thus, this chapter addresses the second research question in my study:

How do participants experience their multilingual identities in the language cafés?

While others have studied the ways in which individual psychological phenomena and identities affect participation in LCs (Mynard et al., 2020), the focus of my study is on the emergence and the intersubjective dimension of identities, that is, on how these are co-constructed, shaped or developed in interaction during and after the LC. This is in line with Firth & Wagner’s (1997, p. 285) call for an “enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use”. Thus, I draw on a poststructuralist view of identity, which can be defined as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how a person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2013, p. 45). The relevance of the research question addressed in this chapter lies in the belief that developing new multilingual ways of relating to the world and others may enhance social cohesion in increasingly diverse societies (Fisher et al., 2020). Also, the idea that learners hold about themselves as multilinguals have a great impact on their motivation (Dörnyei, 2005) and willingness to invest in their linguistic repertoires (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2003).

Instead of studying language as a distant reality, languaging involves living languages from within and bringing them to the here-and-now, “stepping out of one’s habitual ways of speaking” and “develop[ing] different, more relational ways of interacting with the people and phenomena that one encounters in everyday life” (Phipps, 2011, p. 365). Henceforth, the term *languaging* is used in the chapter when referring to speaking as more than a skill, and in order to underscore the embodied and intersubjective nature of socialising in languages.

In Chapter 3 (3.3), I defined *multilingual identity* as an “umbrella” identity for individuals who use more than one language and are aware of their multilingual repertoires and subjectivities. This is different from *linguistic identity*, which refers to “the way one identifies (or is identified by others) in each of the languages in one’s linguistic repertoire” (Fisher et al., 2020, p. 449). My understanding of multilingual identity is underpinned by Kramsch’s (2009) notion of the “multilingual subject”: a speaker whose biography, feelings and idea of self are closely linked with the languages they know and use. Consistent with a translanguaging perspective (see 3.2), which emphasises the fluidity and hybridity of linguistic repertoires, in this study I focus on the experience of multilingual identities and subjectivities as a whole, irrespective of the distinct roles that different named languages may play in the formation of those identities.

The chapter is organised around three main overarching themes: sharing multilingual biographies and subjectivities through metalanguaging (6.1); (re)connecting with one’s multilingual social self, with a particular focus on enjoyment (6.2); and (re)constructing a sense of self as multilinguals with imagined identities (6.3). These three themes allow me to explore how identities emerge in the LCs “at the crossroads of the past, present and future” (Block, 2009), as participants share the memories and affectivities they built up throughout their past language learning and multilingual trajectories, their experiences of performing the multilingual self in the here-and-now of LCs, and their projections for their future selves with imagined identities.

To address the first theme, I draw on this chapter’s opening vignette to explore how, through metalanguaging, multilingual subjectivities emerged in interaction in the LC, as participants shared their memories and affective attachments linked to their language learning trajectories and multilingual biographies.

6.1 Sharing multilingual biographies and subjectivities through metalanguaging

This first section discusses an important aspect of the languaging experiences in LCs which I call *metalanguaging*. Metalanguaging refers to languaging when the conversations revolve around participants' language learning experiences, the languages they know, and their subjective relationships with them (Polo-Pérez & Holmes, 2022).

6.1.1 The experience of metalanguaging

As discussed in Chapter 5, the context of LCs is unique, and it would be difficult (and perhaps irrelevant, too) to draw a line between the social/recreational and the educational dimensions of the LC event. In ecological terms, the semiotic resources available in the LC environment stimulate the emergence of certain types of language and discursive practices. Since languages are foregrounded as the *raison d'être* of these events, a very common topic of conversation among the participants in both LC1 and LC2 is that which brought them together: languages.

The opening vignette in this chapter—extracted from the transcript of a naturally-occurring conversation in LC1—illustrates a typical metalanguaging exchange in the LC environment. Two main themes emerge from this vignette in relation to sharing language learning trajectories and multilingual subjectivities, namely: language ideologies (e.g., beliefs about the native-speaker ideal, and beliefs about what constitutes knowing a language); and other subjectivities related to participants' emotions, relationships, and memories associated with the languages they speak.

The vignette begins with Alice valuing very positively the opportunities that LCs offer to interact with native speakers of the languages she is learning, which she recommends as a way to cushion the blow one may experience when trying to communicate while abroad (lines 4-8). She says: "speaking with an English person [in Spanish] is good, we understand each other, and then when we go to Spain..." These words are followed by a general laughter, which indicates that everyone can relate to what she is saying, so much so that she does not need to finish her sentence: we all have been there, in a context of immersion, struggling to

understand ways of speaking that never featured in our textbooks (see van Lier, 2012).

Piller (2011, p. 158) defines language ideology as the “beliefs about language, the ideas we hold about what good language is and what ‘the right thing to do’ linguistically is”. Through their language ideologies, people value some languages over others and, by the same token, some speakers over others. In relation to language ideology, Alice’s comments are reminiscent of the “native-speaker model”, or *native speakerism* (Holliday, 2006): the belief that learning with native speakers is better, since the ultimate language learning goal is to be able to communicate with natives (and sound like them as much as possible). However, in lines 9-12 I problematise this view by arguing that I find peer interaction in French with Rebecca very beneficial for my own learning. The interaction going on in lines 9-12 is a good example of how I tried to balance power dynamics during my participation in the LC by explicitly claiming the space of a French learner who is helped by others. My comments blurred the teacher-student relationship by inverting the roles: here, it was me (the teacher) who was learning from Rebecca (the student), who was also a learner of French, yet much more articulate than me. Moreover, at the time, through the reading of Holliday (2006), Cook (1999), Rampton (1990), and Byram (1997), among others, I had become increasingly aware of the inherent limitations of the native-speaker model in applied linguistics. Thinking retrospectively, I view my reaction to the participants’ comments on the benefits of speaking with natives as a subtle attempt from my part to problematise the “native/non-native” dichotomy. Following Bakhtin’s (1986) dialogism, my utterances were heteroglossic in that they were informed by my ongoing dialogue with the voices of others; in this case, the work of the aforementioned scholars. Having positioned myself (both consciously and unconsciously) in relation to those ideas, I was discursively invested in them and performing accordingly in interaction with others.

Alice immediately takes my point in line 15 (“It’s true, and also I...”), and recalls her languaging experiences in Italy to reflect on how different interlocutors afforded different types of participation for her: with non-native speakers of Italian, Alice felt more comfortable to try out new phrases and hold the floor (“they let you speak more”); with native speakers, it was difficult to chip in because “they

speak and you don't have time to think". This is illustrative of the situatedness of multilingual identities, and how speakers occupy different positions in social communication (Norton & Toohey, 2011), in this case *vis-à-vis* social interaction with natives and with non-natives. In turn, it shows an understanding of linguistic competence as situated (Piller, 2002), which explains why multilingual speakers perform differently in different social situations (e.g., when talking with natives and non-natives).

Another aspect featuring in the vignette in relation to language ideologies is participants' beliefs about what type of competence is needed in order to be considered a speaker of a language. These beliefs are likely to be informed by common socially constructed ideas on what constitutes linguistic competence (Fisher et al., 2020; Ortega, 2019; Piller, 2011). Interestingly, although Ben studied French for at least five years at secondary school, and even sojourned in France as a child staying with some French relatives, he does not include French in his answer when Alice asks him about the languages that he speaks (lines 52-56), implying that he does not identify as a speaker of that language. By contrast, he embraces Spanish as part of his repertoire, although he started to learn it much later while travelling solo around South America. As Piller (2002, p. 188) notes, this suggests that, regarding attainment and success in language learning, "learner's motivation and agency, the control they have over their own learning, might be much more important than the age at which they begin". Another excerpt from Ben's interview data will be discussed in section 6.2.1 to illustrate his perception that only the languages which involved meaningful social and relational experiences—such as his experience speaking Spanish in Peru—are legitimate languages in his multilingual repertoire.

I have discussed so far how Alice and Ben revealed their language ideologies in the vignette's metalanguaging episode. Regarding other multilingual subjectivities, the vignette offers a snapshot of a conversation where LC participants comment on how they relate to some of the languages they speak. An underlying theme throughout this interaction is the fact that linguistic repertoires are situated and develop alongside one's biography (Busch, 2012), meaning that different languages occupy different spaces in the life course of multilingual speakers. Thus, for Alice and Ben, Spanish at the time was not as present in their daily lives as it

used to be, and the same happened to me with Italian, and to Rebecca with Nepali. An additional constraint for Rebecca is that Nepali is barely available in her environment (“I can’t practise the language here”), and it is certainly not represented in LCs, unlike the widely-taught languages which are privileged in UK education.

In cognitive terms, a natural consequence for speakers who stop using a language is language attrition, a frequent source of frustration for multilinguals when they realise they have forgotten the language, or the words in that language do not come out through their mouths as easily as they used to (“that’s the problem with languages...”, in line 50). Related to attrition, the interference between languages is also presented as frustrating or embarrassing (“¡Lo siento! ¡Mi dispiace, no, lo siento! ¡Aaarg!”, in line 39). From a purist perspective, interference symbolises that the speaker is not able to conform to the monolingual norm (using one language at a time, with no mixing). The frustration and lack of linguistic confidence associated with interference derives from the purist ideology of language separation that is prominent in the language classroom (García & Tupas, 2019; Ortega, 2019). A translanguaging approach to multilingualism (García & Li, 2014; Canagarajah, 2013) has the potential to help multilingual speakers embrace their complex linguistic repertoires—or “truncated repertoires”, as Blommaert (2010, p. 103) calls them—and use them in more encompassing ways as resources. This would require a move away from language purism and the monolingual bias (Trentman, 2021).

Language attrition notwithstanding, languages, and the languaging experiences attached to them, can become part of one’s identity and cultural capital as a “multilingual subject” in irreversible ways (Kramsch, 2009). Thus, multilingual subjectivities are built up independently of language competence. Spanish, Italian and Nepali are referred to in the conversation as attached to fond memories of travel and sojourns abroad, which often entailed personal growth and self-transformation (e.g., Rebecca’s teaching experience in Nepal, Alice’s and Ben’s sojourns in Peru, and my study abroad in Italy). These experiences abroad associated with languages are retrieved as a common topic of conversation among individuals with similar world experiences in the LC environment. This is why the metalanguaging episodes that emerge in naturally-occurring conversations in the

LCs are important *vis-à-vis* multilingual identities: these conversations promote the co-construction of shared identities in the LC as multilinguals with subjective life experiences attached to languages.

Next, I present another example of a metalanguaging episode from a naturally-occurring conversation in LC2 where the focus is on the *pleasures* of languaging. Here, the group in LC2 were discussing the difficulty in finding intermediate or advanced language courses for lesser-taught languages in the UK:

Miguel : Mais ça c'est le problème de l'Angleterre, que... bon, ils pensent que avec l'anglais il n'est pas nécessaire de connaître des autres langues, parce que tu peux aller par tout dans le monde et utiliser l'anglais, mais on ne connaît... on n'apprend une autre langue juste pour être utile, on l'apprend pour le plaisir de parler ou, par exemple, le français pour le plaisir de lire Albert Camus, ou des écrivains françaises, on l'apprend pour ça... [...]

<But that is the problem in England, that... well, they think that with English it's not necessary to know other languages, because you can go all over the world and use English, but you don't know... you don't learn another language just because it's useful, you learn it for the pleasure of speaking it or, for instance, you learn French for the pleasure of reading Albert Camus, or other French writers, that's what you learn it for...>

[...]

Hugo : C'est vrai que parler une langue étrangère, c'est un plaisir aussi...

<it's true that speaking another language is also a pleasure>

Nuria : Ouais, ouais, pour moi...

<Yeah, yeah, for me...>

Hugo : ...ouais, ouais, de pouvoir exprimer quelque chose, de pouvoir raconter une histoire, de pouvoir faire une blague et que les gens devant toi te comprennent et rigolent ou comprennent ton histoire, c'est un plaisir et... ouais, c'est agréable.

<yeah, yeah, being able to express something, being able to tell a story, being able to tell a joke and that people understand you and laugh or understand your story, that's a pleasure and... yeah, it's nice.>

(LC2 naturally-occurring conversation, 09/11/2017)

This excerpt illustrates how multilingual speakers in the LCs talk about languages as much more than “useful” skills, and speaking as much more than information

exchange. When participants describe speaking languages as *un plaisir*, they index a type of empowerment that has to do with personal fulfilment and a new sense of self in the world (Kramsch, 2009), pointing towards becoming “intercultural beings who laugh and cry and read and sing and love and learn in other languages” (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004, p. 63). Although Hugo points to the idea of competence (e.g., “being able to tell a story”), he does so with the underlying idea that competence is always situated in social participation and enmeshed with establishing meaningful human connections. As Kramsch (2009, p. 4) notes, “the language-learning experience itself is neither successful nor unsuccessful. It can be lived more or less meaningfully and can be more or less transformative, no matter what level of proficiency has been attained”. Thus, the pleasure of being able to tell a story does not emerge just from getting the tenses right (i.e., managing the code), but also from the social and personal rewards that languaging affords the multilingual speaker, such as eliciting pleasant subjective responses in their listeners.

The opening vignette (from LC1) and the excerpt above (from LC2) demonstrate that metalanguaging is closely linked with conveying multilingual subjectivities, such as language ideologies, and the memories, emotions, and personal attachments one associates with the languages they speak (Kramsch, 2009). Thus, metalanguaging episodes mobilise shared identities among LC participants by bringing their multilingual identities to the fore.

Nevertheless, it is also important to know what participants think of this common practice in the LCs. Having explored metalanguaging episodes from naturally-occurring interactions, in the next subsection I aim to explore participants’ views on metalanguaging by drawing on interview data and on the reflective writing of LC1 participants.

6.1.2 Participants’ views on metalanguaging practices in the LCs

Metalanguaging is not necessarily a positive or negative aspect of LCs *per se*, but one that was certainly associated with the prototypical conversations people have in LCs. This section illustrates the different views that participants manifested about this practice.

First, in the interviews and further anecdotal data, some participants admitted seeing metalanguaging as too frequent in the LC conversations and, therefore, as a shortcoming of these events, because the topics can be repetitive. As mentioned earlier, two students of mine at the time, for instance, told me that they decided to meet on their own to practise Spanish instead of going to the LC, to avoid going over the same iterative conversations they had there (i.e., introductory conversations about where they are from, what they study, the languages they speak, etc.).

On the other hand, a number of participants talked fondly about the joy of meeting other multilinguals in the LC and engaging in stimulating conversations about their personal language journeys and the pains and pleasures of dwelling in languages (Phipps, 2007). In fact, when asked about any memorable conversations they had at the LC, several participants from LC1 recalled metalanguaging episodes. In the pre-interview reflective writing activity, for instance, five out of eight participants wrote specifically about stimulating conversations which involved talking about languages. The following is an example of how Rebecca replied to the prompt: “An interesting conversation that you had in a language café: why was it interesting; how did the conversation flow; why do you think you remember it”:

Hablamos de los idiomas que conocemos y de los usos de estos idiomas. Dos chicas que estudian el catalán dijeron que, aunque muchas personas dicen que no es un idioma útil, para ellas es útil porque tienen amigos que aprecian que hablen en catalán con ellos. Dijeron que la importancia de los idiomas es distinta para cada persona. Para mí, fue muy interesante porque nunca había pensado en los idiomas de esta manera antes.

<We talked about the languages we know and using these languages. Two girls who study Catalan said that, although many people say it's not a useful language, for them it is useful because they have friends who appreciate that they speak Catalan with them. They said that the importance of languages is different for each individual. For me, it was interesting because I had never thought about languages this way before.>

(Rebecca's written reflections, LC1)

In the above excerpt, Rebecca recalls a conversation that led her to reflect critically upon her language ideologies and envision other ways of looking at languages beyond the utilitarian standpoint, whereby some languages are seen as more worth learning than others (Piller, 2011). Contrary to instrumental arguments for

learning languages, many multilinguals in LCs do not talk about the accumulation of skills to widen opportunities for employability, but highlight the social enjoyment of engaging in new human connections through languaging (e.g., the two girls who told Rebecca about the importance of learning Catalan for them to converse with their Catalan friends).

Later on, during the interview, Rebecca mentioned again how the LC represented a place to have interesting conversations about languages, and a place to meet, admire, identify with, and get inspired by other multilinguals.

Normalmente nunca hablo de los idiomas en otras situaciones. Y es interesante hablar de los idiomas que los otros estudiantes aprenden. Pienso que me da motivación de aprender más idiomas cuando hay estudiantes con cuatro pegatinas. *<Normally I never speak about languages in other situations. And it's interesting to talk about the languages other people are learning. I think it motivates me to learn more languages when there are students with four stickers.>* [...] It's just like nice to know that other people are learning languages... And I think it's really easy to not learn other languages. Like especially... like I know in Europe it's very important to learn English, but if you speak English it's not... necessary. Like you can get a good job with that. So it's nice because it makes you be like "hey! I do like learning languages".

(Rebecca's interview, LC1)

For Rebecca, the LC represents a contrast with what she perceives as a monolingual habitus in her environment. She does not often find herself in places where everyone is multilingual and likes talking about languages. Thanks to these events, she is reminded of how much she enjoys learning languages and being part of this multilingual community.

The stickers that Rebecca mentions in the above excerpt refer to the ones participants in this LC use to indicate what languages they would like to practise during the event (see 4.3.1). She might be slightly downplaying herself as a multilingual when she says that it is "interesting to talk about the languages that other people are learning". Although she fits in this type of conversation, being a polyglot herself (she speaks English, French, Spanish and Nepali), she seems to consider that others are "more multilingual" by virtue of knowing more languages, and she sees that as an aspiration for her future self. The stickers in this environment work as symbolic, meaning-making, mediational artefacts (see 5.2.4),

which seem to portray multilinguals as polyglots “who collect languages like others collect butterflies” (Kramsch, 2009, p. 4).

In conclusion, metalanguaging was viewed by some LC1 participants as a repetitive practice that prevented them from discussing topics other than language learning during the events. For others, however, metalanguaging was an opportunity to enjoy sharing and learning from each other’s multilingual journeys, and provided them with a sense of belonging to a community of multilingual speakers.

Summary

Multilingual identities emerge strongly in the LC social environment, where everyone is connected by a shared interest: languages. In this section I demonstrated that participants perform their multilingual identities in the LCs not only through languaging, but also by means of meeting other multilinguals and engaging in metalanguaging with them, which involves sharing language learning experiences, emotions, beliefs, and memories associated with their multilingual repertoires. Metalanguaging episodes were salient in the different types of data collected (e.g., data from naturally-occurring conversations, from interviews, and from participants’ reflective writing). Norton and Toohey (2011, p. 420) observe that identity is both “context-dependent and context-producing, in particular historical and cultural circumstances”. In the LCs, the coming together of multilingual subjects (with their own multilingual subjectivities) (Kramsch, 2009) created a context where multilingualism became the most salient identity feature for all. It was inevitable, therefore, that multilingualism was the topic that underpinned many LC conversations.

Through metalanguaging, participants encountered the way others value languages and language learning generally (Fisher et al., 2020), and they related this to their own language ideologies, subjectivities, and aspirations as multilingual subjects (Kramsch, 2009). The multilingual trajectories and subjectivities that participants shared with each other in LC1 and LC2 often indexed a view of speaking different languages as a pleasure, and languages as much more than useful skills to have in the job market.

This idea of pleasure ties in with the next theme, which explores the ways in which the LC experience helped some participants to reconnect with the joy of flowing multilingually in a social context.

6.2 (Re)connecting with one's multilingual social self: a focus on pleasure and enjoyment

This section is concerned with the affordances that participants perceived in the LC to connect with the joyful social aspects of speaking other languages—perhaps for the first time for those who only learned them in institutional settings—or reconnect with these social aspects they had experienced many times before, but were less available in their current circumstances. The data shows that feeling the joy of speaking languages connects speakers with their sense of multilingual social selves, that is, with their voice as social beings who like to dwell in different languages. The section is divided into three subthemes: the joy of languaging versus speaking to display classroom knowledge (6.2.1), invoking the multilingual social self from immersion experiences abroad (6.2.2), breaking with the (monolingual) monotony (6.2.3).

6.2.1 The joy of languaging versus speaking to display classroom knowledge

LC participants who were simultaneously taking language classes at the time of data collection often compared their languaging experiences in the LC with the types of interactions they have in class (see section 5.2.5 in the previous chapter). An emerging theme in the data is that the social experience of speaking an additional language in the LC seemed to reconnect participants with their motivating force to learn it.

During the focus group with Valentina, Carla and Maria—the three Italian Erasmus students who attended LC1—, Valentina recalled a touching experience from a different Italian café they also attended. This other Italian café took place once a week at the same university, and Valentina, Carla and Maria volunteered as “language assistants” there to engage in informal conversations with students of Italian. It was the Italian department at the university who asked Valentina, Carla and Maria to act as language assistants in this Italian café, in exchange for a certificate that would enhance their CVs. This is why Valentina uses the word “class” or says that they were “just doing their jobs”; however, in practice, this

Italian café was as informal and unstructured as LC1. This is the touching experience they recalled from the Italian café:

Valentina: Something I found really interesting... once, a girl... I met this girl during the lessons of the first year, and she came to the class [the Italian café] on Wednesday, and after that she told me that during this class she found again a will to study Italian, because she sort of lost it, (...) and she spoke for two hours in a natural way and then she said “I understood again why I want to study Italian”, because, I mean, she had been having many difficulties, with the language, with the grammar, so she felt really scared, but that way she said “that’s what I want to do: I want to speak”. And I felt really proud! Because okay, we were doing our jobs, it’s how it’s supposed to be, because we are there to help them, but not only on the grammar way, also with the confidence, and I think...

Carla: Also the culture

Valentina: Yeah, and I think the language café is a similar idea, because when you are there speaking with people who are studying languages who are trying to improve themselves, I think it gives you the opportunity to understand why we are doing this, why we are studying languages

(Focus group 1, LC1)

Valentina refers to this learner of Italian as someone who had lost confidence in herself as an Italian speaker, as she was struggling to use the linguistic code with the level of competence that was expected in her classroom. Perhaps in the classroom she felt compelled to perform her “ought-to L2 self”, adjusting to what she thought was necessary to know and do in order to please her teachers (Dörnyei, 2005). By contrast, the LC afforded her to perform other relational identities in Italian, which were not constrained by the institutional roles that social actors assume in the classroom (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Rivers & Houghton, 2013). The experience of chatting informally with other Italian speakers felt like a recovery of her voice in Italian (van Lier, 2004), and a revival of the joy it was for her to speak this language, so much so that this experience made her reconcile with her reasons for learning it in the first place: “that’s what I want to do: I want to speak”. Thanks to the experience of socialising in Italian in the LC, her self-concept transitioned from that of a “student” or “deficient communicator” to connect with that of a socially-flowing Italian speaker.

Drawing on Norton’s (2000) ideas, although this learner was highly motivated, she was not *invested* in the practices of the classroom. These practices did not enhance

her desire and commitment to learn the language; quite the opposite, the classroom experience seemed to have contributed to the dissipation of her self-confidence as an Italian speaker, and with it her will to continue learning it. Kramsch (2009, p. 18) contends that '[b]y rallying the body, heart, and mind connection, the foreign language experience can open up sources of personal fulfilment that might be foreclosed by an exclusive emphasis on external criteria of success'. Similarly, Ros i Solé (2016, p. 66) argues that learners' becomings and self-identities do not always develop vertically based on "levels of achievement", but they grow laterally in unexpected directions. Thus, there are no single benchmarks for the language learner, but rather a myriad of combinations and possibilities for development and transformation of the self. In this case, the learner reconnected with a self whose motivation to speak languages was "based on pleasure" (Balboni, 2012, pp. 86-89).

Ben, too, points to the idea that external criteria of success did not fit in well with his desire to use his languages socially:

[Speaking in the language café] es hablando español sin... solamente practicando y hablando <it's speaking Spanish without... just practising and speaking> just sort of, just saying, just sort of speaking as I would English, without thinking about it, that sort of thing, but speaking Spanish instead. As in not trying to be complicated about what you're saying, not trying to like impress your teacher or anything... I mean, it's just nice, because the whole reason I'm learning is to speak it and it's nice to actually do that. I mean that's why you're learning it. [...] And [in class] it's like "talk about this", "hmmm". But it's obviously better practice for learning [in class]. I... This point is a good point, I... I think maybe that's why I didn't enjoy learning French, cos it was... I never spoke it in a casual social sense, and even in the classroom it wasn't like that at all, it's very like you're sitting in the classroom, the teacher's giving you notes about grammar, he's not giving you like... sort of, "oh we're gonna have a conversation today". Like it wasn't like that. So you never understood "why am I learning it, I don't know how to use it in a social sense". (Ben's interview, LC1)

A key idea in Ben's account is that, in the LC, nobody is trying to impress a teacher; instead, he feels he can perform his social self in Spanish, something he feels unable to do in French, despite having spent several years learning the language at school (until the age of 17). Ben refers to his failed French in several occasions, both in the interview and in the LC conversations I recorded. He used to get good grades in French, but never enjoyed learning it, as he never experienced "using it in a social sense". When he was asked by other participants in the LC about the

languages he speaks, he did not include French in his answer (see line 53 in the chapter's opening vignette). This is revealing of his language ideologies: that it is necessary to be able to socialise in a language in order to identify as a speaker of that language. Obtaining good results in French exams for Ben did not equal being fluent, since he could not claim he knew how to use the language "in a social sense". In other words, despite his good grades, he had not developed his own voice in French.

For van Lier (1996), three conditions are necessary for learners to speak with their own voice: *awareness* of language and learning, *autonomy* and self-determination in using the language and in the learning processes, and *authenticity* in speaking events. However, Ben indexes a lack of autonomy and authenticity in his classroom experience. He sees the classroom as a power-imbalanced context where identity options are restricted: he sees students as passive receivers ("sitting in the classroom"), and the teacher as the knowledge provider ("giving you notes about grammar") and the authority ("now talk about this"). Thus, Ben points to the intersubjective nature of identities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, 2011), in this case, heavily informed by the institutional roles that interlocutors assume in the context of the classroom (Rivers & Houghton, 2013).

In contrast, he explained later in the interview that he experienced learning Spanish in a naturalistic way during his 3-month travels around South America. Upon his return, he enrolled in a Spanish elective module at university, as part of his degree in chemistry, in order to expand his Spanish repertoire, which he felt had reached a plateau. Although he recognised the value of systematic learning in the classroom, he felt he could not "recreate the conversations" he had in South America in class, not least because his classmates did not engage in casual small talk in Spanish with him despite his attempts at doing so (for instance, by asking them "¿qué hiciste la semana pasada?" <*what did you do last week?*> before the class began). A possible reason why Ben did not show explicit criticism to his Spanish teacher during the interview is because that teacher was me. However, he did mention the difference between having to follow a syllabus in class, and the social experience of conversing in the LC, where he reconnected with the joy of speaking Spanish freely in authentic conversations—the very reason why he was learning the language. For Ben, rewarding social experiences in Spanish, such as

the ones he got from the LC, mobilised his sense of self as a multilingual speaker in a way that goes far beyond the satisfaction he might get from a good grade.

As a language teacher, this finding in my study, alongside the reading of Kramsch's work, led me to be more reflexive and critical with my teaching practice, and reconsider the ways in which "myth" is dealt with in my classroom. Kramsch (2009, p. 14) argues that

[m]any who return from a lived experience abroad can't identify with the language they find in the classroom and drop out of the game altogether. The challenge for the teacher is how to use myth wisely, in a way that will not only corral the learners into conventional ways of speaking, but awaken the subjective relevance the language can have for them.

Myth refers to the quality of language to go beyond its referential meaning and evoke other things in the world. The power of myth focuses on the aesthetic aspect of words and the affective impact words can have on those who see or hear them. "As the subjective dimension of language, myth encompasses the imagined, emotional resonances that people associate with the language they speak and hear" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 12). This is precisely what I discuss next: how the experience of languaging in LCs can evoke memories of past socialisation experiences, thus helping speakers to reconnect with their multilingual social self.

6.2.2 Invoking the multilingual self from immersion experiences abroad

Some participants recalled emotions and sensations experienced in past sojourns abroad and retrieved them through languaging with others in the co-constructed space of the LC:

Me recuerdo de Sudamérica y hablando allá.

<It reminds me of South America and speaking there.>

(Ben's interview, LC1)

Es interesante, porque el language café me da estos sentimientos de inmersión que siento cuando voy al extranjero, porque hablamos de manera más natural.

<It's interesting, because the language café gives me these feelings of immersion that I feel when I go abroad, because we speak in a more natural way.>

(Rachel's interview, LC1)

These comments show how LCs were lived as transient worlds of escapism to experience multilingualism. The LC environment had the capacity to invoke a sense of translocation or, as Rachel puts it, “feelings of immersion” that one normally experiences while abroad.

Both Ben and Rachel admitted they struggled to identify with the language they found in the classroom. Instead, the LCs evoked personal memories, past socialisation experiences and the sensations impressed on their bodies as a result of them (Kramsch, 2009). Linguaging in the here-and-now of LC events connected languagers with their historicities, multiple cultural alliances, and their “nomadic and borderless lifestyles” (Ros i Solé, 2013, p. 327). Linguaging experiences abroad are sensations impressed in their memories and bodies because they involved the awkwardness of engaging the body in new tasks of translation; they included the misunderstandings and stumblings that characterises communication (Phipps, 2007); and they led to a sense of achievement of having experienced new connections with the language and with people who speak it. Whereas we cannot underestimate the value of systematic learning in the classroom (Woodin, 2018), and teachers and students can certainly negotiate opportunities for languaging inside the classroom (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004), the natural ecologies of the LC environment afford this full embodied experience of informal language socialisation and the emotions associated with it.

Another aspect related to past experiences abroad is the nostalgic feeling some multilinguals hold towards their languaging, social selves abroad. One day, after a meeting with the French group from LC2, I walked part of my route towards the train station with Miguel, a Spanish guy who was new to the group. He started telling me about how much he had enjoyed meeting the group, and that he really missed speaking French. He told me that, after he graduated, he lived in Belgium for a while, so he had a very emotional connection with French and he missed using it. I said that I felt the same with Italian.

Although Miguel did not participate, because by then he was not living in the city anymore, those nostalgic feelings came up again during the focus group I conducted with the other LC2 participants. The following excerpt shows how I

picked up on my Italian nostalgia as we were discussing as a group whether the LC is a place for learning, or a place to improve our French.

Nuria : [...] quand j'étais rentrée en Espagne après l'année Erasmus en Italie, ça me manquait beaucoup de parler l'italien, alors c'était pas... quand je rencontrais quelques italiens, c'était pas juste pour pratiquer mais parce que ça me manquait [Joanne nods with visible empathy], je voulais vraiment, c'était un peu plus relationné (sic) [associé] avec l'émotion d'être quelqu'un en italien, et je sais pas...

<It's different for example, when I came, when I went back to Spain after my Erasmus in Italy, I really missed speaking Italian, so it was not... then when I met Italians, it was not just to practise but because I missed it [Joanne nods with visible empathy], I really wanted, it was a bit associated with the emotion of being someone in Italian, don't know...>

[...]

Joanne : Oui, et quand on parle une autre langue, on découvre une autre partie de toi-même, en parlant l'autre langue, et c'est peut-être aussi un peu que... c'est cette partie de toi-même qui te manque quand tu ne parles pas l'autre langue

<And when you speak another language, you discover a part of yourself, when speaking the other language, and it's maybe also a bit that... it's that part of yourself that you miss when you don't speak the other language>

Mike : Peut-être, je sens ça avec le portugais du Brésil

<Maybe, I feel that with Brazilian Portuguese>

(LC2 focus group)

In talking about what it meant to me to speak Italian after my year abroad in Italy, I initiated a negotiation of the meaning of speaking a language as more than “practising”. Thus, I introduced the idea of looking for opportunities to speak a language to reconnect with one’s multilingual self (“it was not just to practise, but because I missed [...] the emotion of being someone in Italian”). While I was saying this, Joanne was nodding with visible empathy, as if she was recognising herself in my words. Then, she conveys an idea that is closely linked to developing a multilingual sense of self: “when you speak another language, you discover a part of yourself”, and “it’s that part of yourself that you miss when you don’t speak the other language”. This resonates with Pavlenko and Lantolf’s (2000) view of language learning as a social process which always entails a reconstruction of the

self. Also, Joanne's remark hints at Kramsch's (2009) notion of the "multilingual subject" as someone who is aware of the subjective dimensions of language learning, and who discovers in and through an additional language "subjectivities that shape their lives in unpredictable ways" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 3). Instead of adopting a cognitivist perspective of speaking as practising to become more skilled, the remarks in the above excerpt allude to speaking a foreign language as *linguaging* (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004), that is, a whole embodied experience which involves recuperating a part of oneself—the multilingual self—that is missing. Perhaps this is what many multilingual speakers seek in the LC: an opportunity to mobilise their multilingual subjectivities in relational ways, which, as Ben and Rachel mentioned, connect them with the good memories of being abroad. This is particularly important for individuals whose immediate social networks tend to be rather monolingual, as I discuss next.

6.2.3 Breaking with the (monolingual) monotony

Some participants saw in the LC an opportunity to socialise in a different language than the one dominating their daily encounters at the time. Participating in the LC was a way for them to reconnect with the joy of socialising face-to-face in other languages.

Nathan referred to the gathering of people who speak different languages in the same place as a pleasure in itself.

Toda una sala de gente aprendiendo o hablantes de idiomas que no son el inglés. ¡Qué gozada!

<A whole room full of people learning or speaking languages other than English. How wonderful!>

(Nathan's reflective writing, LC1).

If it were not for the LCs, and the many other opportunities he created to keep connected to the languages he knows, Nathan admitted that his socialisation experiences at university would be mostly in English. The LC provided a time/space for him to live multilingually, "even if just for a few hours".

From my experience participating in different LCs, in these events it is common to meet highly proficient multilinguals who seek to break with their monolingual monotony. That was the case of Gemma, whom I met in LC1.

Gemma joined our conversation. She was first speaking French, but when the French speakers left, she came to our table. She was quiet most of the time. But there was something really interesting that she told me before we left. She said that she came to the language café because she is used to living multilingually (she is from Catalonia, but has always lived in Switzerland, so, apart from English, she speaks Catalan, French, Spanish, German...), and in [this city] her life has become rather monolingual, so she was hoping that in the language café she could enjoy listening to different languages other than English. (Researcher's reflective journal, LC1, 27/02/2018)

The LC for Gemma was a breath of fresh air from a university environment dominated by English as a lingua franca. She did not attend to “practise” her languages for learning purposes, but to socialise and dwell in the languages she considers as part of her identity. Later on, I was not surprised when I learned that Gemma was an international officer at her university college, volunteering to organise different events (such as the Chinese New Year celebrations) for the international student community. Gemma's example suggests that LCs in the higher education context can be seen as part of the range of social activities that universities can support to promote internationalisation at home (Murray & Fujishima, 2016; Mynard et al., 2020).

In a context of language immersion (whether it is due to migration or short-term sojourns abroad), some people might find the experience of living in another language on a daily basis quite saturating. Robert, a British LC1 participant, told me that when he was working in Lille (France), where he stayed for a month, he found a weekly English LC there, where he would relax, take a break from French, and enjoy socialising in his first language with others for a while. José, a Mexican LC1 participant, also imagined doing the same if he found himself in a similar situation:

José: También aparte [el *language café*] es un lugar para socializar. Yo, poniéndome en... suponiendo por ejemplo que estoy viviendo en algún otro país por ejemplo, no sé, Finlandia, donde hay gente que hable menos español, me gustaría ir de repente a eventos así para practicar y hablar mi idioma, pues al final de cuentas pienso y todo lo que hago lo hago pensando en español, no en finés, no en inglés o en otro idioma.

<Also [the language café] is a place to socialise. I imagine... if I were living for example in some other country, for example, I don't know, Finland, where there are fewer people who speak Spanish, I would like to go maybe to events like this to practise and speak my language. At the end of the day, I think and

everything I do I do it thinking in Spanish, not in Finnish, not in English or in another language.>

Nuria: Como una forma de conectar con gente que habla tu idioma en otro país, ¿no?

<As a way of connecting with people who speak your language in another country, right?>

José: Sí, independientemente de que sean nativos o no, pues es para seguir yo hablando mi idioma.

<Yes, whether or not they are natives, since it's for me to keep speaking my language.>

(Focus group 2, LC1)

All of the excerpts in this section featured highly proficient multilinguals who did not seek to learn any languages in the LC, but to break somehow with their monolingual monotony. They saw the LC as a place which afforded them the possibility of occupying different language positions than the ones they normally occupied in their immediate environment. At work, at university, at home, or with friends, some people are constrained to use only a small part of their multilingual repertoires. Thus, the LC affords dwelling in an alternative space where multilingualism is the norm, and where participants can exercise their agency to perform their multilingual social selves in the language(s) of their choice.

Summary

In this section I have discussed three themes in relation to (re)connecting with one's multilingual social self: the joy of languaging as opposed to speaking to display classroom knowledge; invoking the multilingual social self from immersion experiences abroad; and breaking with the monolingual monotony.

Regarding the first theme—the joy of languaging versus displaying classroom knowledge—the data showed that, thanks to the absence of institutional roles, the LC enabled young learners to reconnect with their multilingual social selves by focusing on the joy of flowing socially in a language, instead of “trying to impress a teacher”. This is important because developing language-related personal attachments and relationships that go beyond the academic or instrumental value

is key in developing multilingual identities (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007).

The second theme concerned participants with extensive immersion experiences abroad who saw in the LCs the opportunity to recuperate a part of themselves that is missing when they do not use their full multilingual repertoire. That part of themselves is often associated with past experiences abroad, and they reported that the feelings associated with those experiences were mobilised through socialising in the languages of their choice in the LCs. This links with the third theme. Breaking with the monolingual monotony was particularly relevant for proficient multilingual speakers who found in the LC a sort of “linguistic comfort zone” where they could occupy a multilingual space that is not readily available for them in their most immediate social environments.

Having explored how participants (re)connected with their multilingual social selves, I now turn to the third way in which participants experienced their multilingual identities in the LCs: (re)constructing their sense of selves as multilinguals.

6.3 (Re)constructing a sense of self as a multilingual

The multilingual subject is always in the process of constructing, through subjective experience, their sense of self *vis-à-vis* their multilingual repertoires (Kramsch, 2009). Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) argue that learning a new language involves participation in new discursive communities (and not just the acquisition of a code) and, therefore, it always entails a reconstruction of the self. While these identity processes have been studied in contexts of immersion (migration or study abroad, for example), in this section I show that the experience of the LC, albeit short in duration, also affords some sort of reconstruction of self, which emerges from changes in self-perception as multilinguals (6.3.1), and self-projection in successful others (6.3.2).

6.3.1 Changes in self-perception as multilinguals

While participants with extensive socialisation experiences in their language(s) reconnected with their multilingual social selves and recalled fond memories in the LC, learners with fewer socio-emotional attachments to their new languages

underwent a different type of cathartic experience. Some of these participants reported having similar realisations after the LC:

At the start of it [the LC] I never thought I would be able to have a conversation in Spanish, and then in class you don't really have a proper conversation, so I through: 'Ah! I didn't know I could do that!' (Rebecca's interview, LC1)

I just spent the last hour speaking in a different language and I managed! (Amy's interview, LC1)

Actually, I spent an hour talking in French and it wasn't a massive disaster! [...] Oh, I actually can speak French! (Robert's interview, LC1)

At the time of their participation in the LC, Rebecca, Amy and Robert were enrolled in Spanish/French language courses very much informed by communicative approaches (Littlewood, 1981). Likely, these participants had spoken French or Spanish before, and engaged in some meaningful interaction in class. It would be plausible to think that, although these participants knew they could speak the language, what they did not know they could do with it was *linguaging*. Although they had performed their "student selves" before, they had not experimented with their whole social selves in this language in authentic ways outside the classroom, to have, in Rebecca's words, "a proper conversation". Thus, through living the language in connection with the leisurely activity of having a drink with others, these participants engaged in a new sense of multilingual social selves. The LC experience generated a positive "self-as-multilingual image" (Henry, 2017) in these participants. They became *linguagers* who began to *live* the language from within; and they enacted new forms of dwelling, reconnecting with the pleasure of language learning as they experienced in their bodies what it feels to sound and flow socially in another language (Phipps, 2007).

Another source of satisfaction and changes in self-perception derives from LC episodes in which speakers become pleasantly surprised about being able to come up with a word or expression they were seeking in conversation.

There was once, I forgot what word it was now, I don't remember what the conversation was about, but someone was like "oh, how do you say this?" and I actually knew! Like "it's this!", and I don't remember what the conversation was about but I remember being like "yeah, I actually knew one of the words! That's awesome!" (Amy's interview, LC1)

None of us knew how to say “to sign” so I said “they wrote their names”, it’s perfect! (Elizabeth’s interview, LC1)

Additionally, when discussing the weather, someone asked me how to say “ice”. I was unsure and took the guess of “la glace” (knowing the link to ice cream) and, when someone looked this up, it turned out that my guess was correct. Having guessed correctly, I feel that I am more likely to remember this piece of vocabulary in the long term. (Lydia’s reflective writing, LC1)

As Fisher et al. (2020, p. 453) posit, from a poststructuralist point of view, language identity is conceptualised as “ever-shifting, dynamic and inextricably bound up with language performance”. Language performance plays an important role in the changes in self-perception as multilinguals that these participants experimented. Learners became more aware of their linguistic repertoires and how far they could go with them in relational and social interactions. Becoming more appreciative of their multilingual repertoires might influence the way they see what it means to “know” a language and be multilingual (Fisher et al., 2020).

Furthermore, some participants mentioned that their confidence was boosted when others praised their speaking abilities in the LC. This resonates with my own experience, as reflected on these comments from the third LC1 entry on my reflective journal:

It’s been great. I’ve talked with different people, I’ve felt a bit more confident speaking French, and I’ve been told for the first time that my French is good! (Researcher’s reflective journal, third time in LC1, 31/01/2017)

Being praised for one’s linguistic abilities is a confidence boost that can positively affect the way learners see themselves as multilinguals. The case of Nathan offers an example of how this may go sometimes hand in hand with “passing for a native” (Piller, 2002). Nathan was an avid polyglot who achieved high fluency in several languages, including French, Spanish, Basque, and Mandarin. His first language was English. It is noteworthy that all the memorable LC anecdotes he wrote about in his reflective pre-interview activity had something to do with obtaining good feedback on his speaking skills, or passing for a native:

Anecdotes:

Il y en a plein! Pendant la première Language Café rencontre du trimestre, j’ai passé du temps à causer avec quelques mexicains. Dès la toute première phrase, ils m’ont demandé si j’étais espagnol. Je leur ai dit que non, que

j'étais anglais, mais ils ne cessaient de répéter que j'étais espagnol, sur et certain. Ça fait plaisir, vu que quand je suis en Espagne, à Bilbao ou dans le Gipuzkoa, j'ai toujours la nette impression que je suis «l'anglais», ou au moins, «l'étranger». Quand les mexicains me l'ont dit j'avais la sensation de faire partie d'un groupe espagnol exclusif !

Hier je me suis éclaté avec un petit groupe de chinois. J'avais déjà connu l'un d'entre eux durant la précédente rencontre de Language Café. On passait couramment [sic] de l'anglais au chinois et vice-versa. On faisait des blagues autour des langues et des cultures de notre deux pays. Avant que l'on se soit allés, le gars chinois, un interprète, m'a dit "t'as failli atteint le niveau (en chinois)". Cette sorte de commentaire pourrait se prendre bien ou mal, mais la façon dans laquelle il me l'a dit m'a donné énormément de confiance.

Finalement, durant un Language Café à Bilbao. C'était uniquement pour pratiquer le basque, et moi, comme à l'accoutumée, j'étais le seul à ne pas être basque. Je me suis présenté à un par de gens. La femme, qui aurait eu une soixantaine d'années, était convaincue que je venais du Pays Basque français, au début à cause de mon accent, je crois. Dans la conversation, je me suis mis à utiliser plein de mots du basque français que j'avais appris auparavant, quelque-chose que j'avais jamais pu faire dans ma classe. C'était très cool.

<Anecdotes:

There are many! During the first Language Café meeting of the term, I spent some time chatting with some Mexicans. From the very first sentence, they asked me if I was Spanish. I said no, that I was English, but they would keep saying that I was Spanish, without a doubt. I enjoy that, given that when I'm in Spain, in Bilbao or Gipuzkoa, I always have the impression that I am "the English guy", or at least "the foreigner". When the Mexicans said that, I got the feeling that I belonged to an exclusive Spanish group!

Yesterday I had a great time with a small group of Chinese people. I had already met one of them in the previous Language Café meeting. We were switching frequently between English and Chinese. We made jokes about the languages and cultures of our countries. Before leaving, the Chinese guy, an interpreter, told me "you nearly got the level (in Chinese)". You could take that sort of comment in a positive or negative way, but the way he said it gave me so much confidence.

Finally, during a Language Café in Bilbao. It was to practise Basque only and, as usual, I was the only one there who was not Basque. I introduced myself to a couple of people. The woman, who must have been in her 60s, was convinced that I was from the French Basque Country, because of my accent, I think. In the conversation, I started to use a lot of French Basque words that I had learned, something I had never been able to do in class. It was really cool.>

(Nathan's reflective writing, LC1)

Nathan's accounts resonate with those by Piller's (2002) participants, for whom the likelihood of passing for a native was a way of measuring their achievement in an additional language. However, contrary to the traditional view of competence as static and measurable, Piller (2002) found that passing for a native was described by these highly proficient speakers as temporary: a performance that is very much context- and audience-specific. Passing is context-specific because it is generally "only relevant to a very specific interactional context: that of first encounters" (Piller, 2002, p. 192), like the ones Nathan described from the LCs. Also, passing practices work only with particular audiences: Nathan, for instance, was positioned as "the Spanish guy" with the Mexicans in the LC, yet as "the foreigner" when he was in Spain. Furthermore, Piller (2002, p. 192) argues that passing for a native often involves exhibiting "high levels of awareness of regional and social variation within a language". That was the case for Nathan in the context of the LC in Bilbao (the capital of the Basque country, Spain), where he proudly exhibited his knowledge of the Souletin or Zuberoan Basque dialect, which afforded him to pass for a native speaker from Soule (France), the region where this dialect is spoken. Drawing on van Lier's (2004) ideas, the LC conversations afforded Nathan the opportunity to find his voice in different languages, and to construct and validate his identities as a multilingual.

In his written accounts, Nathan presents himself as one of those learners who, in order to satisfy their multilingual goals and achieve their ideal L2 self (Dörnyei, 2005), need to adhere as much as possible to the language norm of a certain community of speakers (Borghetti, 2016, p. 163). Becoming aware of his ability to perform certain identities—other than that of "the foreigner"—was described in his writing as "cool" and enjoyable ("*ça fait plaisir*"). Moreover, by learning about how others in the LC perceived him as a proficient speaker, he changed and developed his own self-perception as a multilingual, with the subsequent boost in his confidence ("*[ça] m'a donné énormément de confiance*").

Developing a sense of multilingual social self can have an impact on learners' readiness to invest in their languages (Fisher et al., 2020), especially on learners who are not used to socialising in their additional languages, as was the case for Amy:

Yeah, every time, I think at the end of like all the language cafés I've been to, I felt kind of like "oh! I just spent the last hour or so like speaking in a different language and I managed and I didn't just revert back to English and I didn't sit in silence the entire time!" And I think even just having that sense of satisfaction makes you want to do more, and makes you think like "oh, next time I'm gonna do this and it's gonna be..." or "next time I'm gonna be even better!" I think it's really important, especially when you're learning another language, to have those moments of satisfaction because it keeps you coming back and it keeps you like trying more and learning more... keeps you committed." (Amy's interview, LC1)

Like Amy, many participants (including me, as participant-researcher) reported feeling an impetus to continue investing in the language due to the satisfaction they felt after participating in the LC ("it keeps you coming back", "it keeps you committed"). Thinking of learning as participation in ecological terms (Kramsch, 2002; van Lier, 2004) implies a view of learning "as a process of becoming a member of a certain community", which entails "the ability to communicate in the language of this community and act according to its particular norms" (Sfard, 1998, p. 6). However, the most immediate desire of some LC participants after they attend the LC events is to go back next time and demonstrate to themselves that they can flow even better in their languages with other multilingual speakers. Their desire is concretised into a short-term goal for the immediate future that they can easily envisage ("next time I'm gonna do this, and it's gonna be..."). The LC is not an abstract or distant "target language community", but one that participants co-create themselves and that has been reified through tangible and concrete relationships with people with identifiable faces, voices, and accents in the here-and-now of one's local surroundings. Likewise, the LC is not a "target culture" which requires a period of adaptation from the part of the learner. LC participants do not need to integrate in some community of speakers with cultural norms which are foreign to them. Rather, they co-create and negotiate those norms and shared repertoires as members of the community.

What is less clear is the extent to which learners' motivation after attending the LCs is durable. As discussed in Chapter 5 (5.2.2), Amy, for instance, continued studying Spanish at the university the following year, but never attended LC1 again. One possible explanation might be that the LC did not hold any links with her Spanish module assessment anymore, unlike the previous year, when her

module included a compulsory assessment task which required students to reflect on out-of-class learning activities.

To sum up, in all the examples presented above, the LC experience made participants view themselves as more capable than they initially expected. This was manifested in three ways: (1) post-event thoughts and self-evaluative comments linked to the sense of achievement (“I managed!”, “I actually can speak French!”); (2) episodes where the speaker surprised him/herself by being able to fill a communicative gap (e.g., by providing others with the words or means to express something); and (3) episodes where the speaker was praised for their linguistic competence, or even passed for a native (as in Nathan’s case). These changes in self-perception emerged as a result of meaningful participation in social interaction, which shows that multilingual identities are “inextricably bound up with language performance” (Fisher et al., 2020, p. 453); in other words, they are situated and co-constructed intersubjectively (Norton, 2000). Moreover, the data illustrated that these changes in self-perception can have a positive impact on language motivation and investment with short-term and concrete goals (“next time, I’m gonna be even better!”). Rather than studying language as an objective reality from a distance, participating in LCs allows multilinguals to “live languages from within” (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004) and in connection with the here-and-now of their own material and human surroundings (Phipps, 2007).

Another way of reconstructing one’s sense of self as a multilingual is through self-projection in successful others, that is, through a construction of the future self with imagined identities (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). This is what I explore next.

6.3.2 Self-projection in successful others

Like the LC participants in Murray and Fujishima’s (2016) and Mynard et al.’s (2020) studies, my participants showed a natural tendency to compare their linguistic abilities with each other. On first encounters, just a few sentences were sufficient for interlocutors to tacitly map each other’s approximate levels of proficiency: who sounded more fluent, who seemed to have a similar level, who was struggling and needed more help. One indication of this, which I observed during fieldwork, was the use of gaze to obtain *ad hoc* feedback during individual interventions. As I observed, in a matter of minutes and without verbalising it

explicitly, all speakers knew how to use their gaze strategically to read the faces of those whom they considered more knowledgeable, in order to see reflected on their faces whether what they were saying made sense. Also, participants addressed any questions on vocabulary or grammar to these more knowledgeable participants, without these roles or levels of knowledge being explicitly stated beforehand.

By comparing with each other, participants were constantly reassessing and adjusting their positionings in the conversation, which, in turn, led to a reassessment of their self-perception and self-projection as multilinguals. In relation to this, and slightly related to learning motivation, “jealousy” was frequently mentioned in interview comments as a feeling that emerges in interaction with more competent others in the LC:

Whenever they [other LC participants] are actually doing a language degree and they talk better than me, I accept it, but I’m very jealous at the same time, ‘cos I’m like “I wish I could talk like that!” (Elisabeth’s interview, LC1)

I’m always very jealous of other people’s accents. When someone has a really nice accent I’m like “oh! How do you do that?!” (Rebecca’s interview, LC1)

What Elisabeth implies with her statement about people doing a language degree is that, with time and investment, she could be as fluent as those more able communicators she meets in the LC. Interacting with advanced speakers can arguably support the construction of learners’ imagined identities or “possible selves” (Markus & Nurius, 1986) based on attainable goals, which move away from the unattainable model of the native speaker. On the other hand, when Rebecca says that she is jealous of other people’s accents, she probably refers to how some non-native speakers manage to sound close to native-like. Although this is reminiscent of the ideologies embedded in the problematic native-speaker model, at least in the LC she was presented with “realistic role models of successful L2 users rather than the monolingual native speakers [she] can never be” (Piller, 2002, p. 201). Later in the interview, Rebecca explained that this feeling of “jealousy” was positive, in that it translated into motivation for her to keep learning languages. She also experienced this feeling in the LC when meeting people who would speak several languages:

Pienso que me da motivación de aprender más idiomas cuando hay estudiantes con cuatro pegatinas.

<I think I get motivation to learn more languages when there are students with four stickers>

(Rebecca's interview, LC1)

As explained earlier, the stickers that individuals displayed represented the languages they were seeking to speak in the LC. Therefore, apart from their mediational role as tools to sort out language groups in LC1 (see 5.2.4), the stickers represented a snapshot of the multilingual profile of an individual, which could provoke admiration. Rebecca projected her future self in successful multilinguals with multiple stickers, and that boosted her motivation to learn more languages.

Other examples of inspiring others emerged in intergenerational conversations between young students and older and more experienced multilingual speakers. When asked about a memorable moment from an LC, Molly recalled a conversation from her hometown LC with a British woman who successfully embedded multilingual practices in her professional career:

I do remember one [conversation] in particular, actually. There was a lady who... It was really interesting for me 'cos I obviously had just applied to study French at university, I hadn't thought very much about like career or anything like that, and I spoke to this lady who had worked for Société Générale in London but also in Paris, and I just really remember, 'cos it was really encouraging... (...) and she was just saying how much she enjoyed being able to speak both her languages in the office and it kind of just introduced the idea of being able to... maybe I could work in the UK and in France, and I just remember it being like a really nice positive conversation, very encouraging, about having really such a successful career (...) So it was quite a nice way of like start thinking about the future (Molly's interview, LC1)

At the time of that conversation, Molly was about to start her modern languages degree at university, and this woman was retired. While they were both British, there was at least around 40 years of age difference between them, which imprinted an intercultural or "interdiscursive" dimension to this conversation (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). This woman had a powerful, inspirational effect on Molly's construction of her imagined identities as a future professional with the rewarding experiences of working in multilingual environments and dwelling in languages. By listening to whom she considered a successful Other, she projected

herself in the future, creating a desirable imagined subject position for herself in imagined communities of speakers (Block, 2009; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007).

Drawing on my own experience, Ruth (a participant from LC2) had a similar effect on me (see the opening vignette in Chapter 5). In my reflective journal, I wrote about how I identified with her lifestyle as a lifelong learner of multiple languages, notably at an age where the instrumental value of languages for broadening career opportunities is not relevant anymore, as she was already retired. I simply admired her extensive travel experience, including long sojourns in different parts of the world, and the ways in which she embedded her multilingualism in her hobbies, social networks, and everyday life (by attending different LCs, for instance).

Imagination is an integral part of ongoing identity work (Wenger, 1998), and so is desire, understood as “a basic drive towards self-fulfilment” (Kramsch, 2009, p. 14). By projecting ourselves in others whom we considered successful multilinguals, it can be argued that both Molly and I developed our imagined identities and “ideal multilingual selves” (Henry, 2017). This would be in contrast with projecting specifically an “ideal French self”, as per Dörnyei’s (2005) L2 motivational self system. Instead, our projected selves featured a holistic and cosmopolitan view of multilingualism as connected with “nomadic and borderless lifestyles” (Ros i Solé, 2013, p. 327).

Risager (2006) points to the discussion of how we “ought to upgrade and include non-native speakers as linguistic models in language teaching and language practice” (p. 130). Similarly, Byram (1997) argues that the native speaker model sets an impossible target for learners and evaluates the wrong kind of competence; instead, language learners should aim at becoming intercultural speakers. The data discussed in this section suggest that, in the LCs, successful multilingual speakers can act as referents and a powerful source of inspiration for learners, as they support the reconstruction of learners’ imagined future identities based on embodied and achievable goals that move away from the unattainable and disembodied model of the native speaker (Cook, 1999; Dewaele, 2018).

Summary

In section 6.3, I explored an important aspect of experiencing and developing multilingual identities, namely the (re)construction of one's sense of self as a multilingual speaker (Kramsch, 2000; Ohta, 2001; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). The findings show that multilingual identity formation is a participative process (Fisher et al., 2020), and that the social and relational affordances of the LC environment enabled participants to perform (in some cases even meet for the first time) their multilingual social selves, and construct their imagined possible selves in the future.

In the first subsection, the data showed that some LC participants underwent positive changes in self-perception as multilinguals. These changes were driven by a post-event sense of achievement, by particular episodes of personal communicative success during the event, or by the flattering comments they received on their linguistic abilities in the LC. The second subsection addressed the reconstruction of self through self-projection in successful others. The excerpts illustrated the powerful effect that interacting with more experienced multilinguals can have on learner's imagined identities (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007), hence shaping learners' ideal multilingual selves (Henry, 2017) based on attainable goals and moving away from the untenable model of the native speaker (Byram, 1997; Cook, 1999; Dewaele, 2018; Holliday, 2006; Piller, 2002; Risager, 2006). Furthermore, consistent with current motivation theories, this section has shown that the reconstruction of self as a multilingual can encompass feelings of reassurance which support language learning efforts and investment, as learners imagine new and encouraging possibilities for their future multilingual selves (Norton, 2013).

Summary of Chapter 6

In this chapter, I explored how participants experienced their multilingual identities in the LCs. The chapter gathered illustrative accounts to show how participants' multilingual subjectivities emerged in the LCs.

The first section (6.1) explored examples of metalanguaging: episodes where participants engaged in sharing their language subjectivities with one another, such as their language learning experiences, emotions, beliefs, ideologies, and

memories associated with their multilingual repertoires (Kramsch, 2009). The data showed that these conversations enabled LC participants to share and perform their identities as multilinguals with subjective life experiences attached to languages. While some participants viewed metalanguaging as a repetitive practice in the LC and a constraint to the range of topics that could be discussed during the events, others enjoyed the opportunity to meet other multilinguals and talk about their shared interest in languages.

In the second section (6.2), drawing on a poststructuralist view of identities as intersubjective and co-constructed in interaction (Block, 2009; Norton, 2000), I proposed the concept of *multilingual social self* to refer to a self-concept that is co-constructed through social interaction and involves an image of self as able to socialise and flow in multilingual environments through the mobilisation of complex repertoire and multilingual subjectivities (e.g., the memories, emotions, and personal attachments linked to different languages). Multilingual identities can be “dormant” when one’s surroundings do not provide many opportunities to use different language repertoires socially and meaningfully. The findings in section 6.2 suggested that the LC provides affordances for reconnecting with one’s multilingual social self, that is, with one’s voice as a social being who uses (and takes pleasure in using) more than one language in their life. In doing so, the examples also illustrated that multilingual identities are relational, contingent to human sociality (Norton, 2000; van Lier, 2004), and emerge when language is used for its most basic function: to establish and sustain human relationships (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

The third theme (6.3) focused on how some participants reconstructed their sense of self as multilingual speakers in the LC (Kramsch, 2000; Ohta, 2001; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Some LC participants underwent positive changes in their self-perception as multilinguals driven by the sense of achievement they experienced after the LC event, where they became aware of their communicative abilities, or were even praised for those abilities. Other participants experienced the effect that interacting with more experienced multilinguals had on their imagined identities (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007), and the reconstruction of their ideal multilingual selves (Henry, 2017). Interacting with successful multilingual others enabled them

to imagine new and encouraging possibilities for their future multilingual selves (Norton, 2013).

This chapter showed that participants' LC experiences are multiple and diverse. Those with fewer social experiences with the language they were learning discovered new multilingual subjectivities in the LC, for instance, through connecting with their multilingual social self for the first time, changing their sense of self as multilinguals, or projecting their imagined identities in successful others. On the other hand, those with extensive socialisation experiences, and who were already proficient speakers, found in the LC a space to invoke their social selves from multilingual experiences abroad, or a space to break with the monolingual monotony and validate their multilingual identities.

Chapter 7: Experiencing interculturality in the language cafés

Setting the scene

Vignette I: Language café 1

Both Ben and Alice have been to Peru and travelled around the country. They talk about the public transport there, and Ben tells us about his adventures travelling from Cusco to Lima with the cheapest bus company. Then, Rebecca tells us about her experience volunteering as an English teacher in Nepal. It's quite impressive that she managed to learn to communicate in Nepali while she was there.

Alice and I have in common that we have both been on Erasmus in Italy. I have an interesting conversation with her about how Italian students struck me as very participative and confident in class, compared to what I was used to at my university in Madrid. I tell her that, since most exams across the Italian educational system are oral exams, I think that students develop these amazing oratory skills from a very young age. She says that she had never thought about it that way.

Vignette II: Language café 2

We speak about Trump, Brexit, the next elections in France, the government in Spain... We also talk about the recent attack in Manchester Arena. Nadia says that her sister lives there and she uses a hijab (unlike her), so she's a bit scared of a possible rise of islamophobia. I can tell Hugo is really into international politics. He is humble, but he knows so much about current issues around the world. He finds Chilean politics very interesting as they are different from the rest of Latin America; Chileans have had quite successful and progressive left-wing governments. These conversations make me want to read more about everything we talk about. I share some of the discussions about politics that I've recently had with my dad, who has become a bit conservative with age. I'm surprised that I'm sharing such personal information with people whom I barely know! However, everybody is such a good listener and we all show a lot of interest in each other's experiences and opinions. I find that people in this group are very open-minded and sensitive to stereotypes. They are very tactful when talking about politics and cultural differences. They seem to be curious people, and not superficially interested in decontextualized, "exotic" cultural facts.

What unites us all, apart from a shared interest in maintaining this French-speaking social bubble, is our socio-economic situation and the fact that we have all travelled and lived in different countries. The group is open to everyone, yes, but I wonder how people who struggle economically or who have fewer cosmopolitan experiences would fit in the group.

Introduction

In Chapters 5 and 6, the findings demonstrated that participants in the LCs experienced their full, embodied, social selves in one or more languages (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004)—with the feelings, emotions, and memories involved in that experience (Kramsch, 2009, Ros i Solé, 2016). Some aspects of the intercultural dimension to language socialisation have emerged at different points throughout the discussion so far. In Chapter 5, I described LCs as hubs for multilingual people with transnational attachments, while in Chapter 6, in discussing multilingual identities, I suggested that LCs afford the reconstruction of selves as multilingual social beings, and the formation of imagined identities with cosmopolitan dispositions (Ros i Solé, 2016). Given that intercultural learning tends to be an assumed outcome of collaborative language encounters (e.g., Belz, 2007; Murray & Fujishima, 2016; O'Dowd, 2007), in this chapter I seek to question this assumption and analyse the nature of the “intercultural” in LCs and how participants experience it. I focus on the participants’ experience of learning and socialising, rather than what is learned, thus shifting the focus from the skills-based cognitive aspects of learning to its social and personal dimensions (Kramsch, 2009; Phipps, 2007; Woodin, 2018). Thus, this chapter addresses my study’s third research question:

How do participants experience interculturality in the LCs?

Participants in the two LCs that I studied were not given specific tasks in order to increase their chances of intercultural development in the LCs; in other words, there was no pedagogical intervention from the organisers or from myself as a researcher. My research aim was, therefore, to understand the nature of the intercultural in these events, and look at the affordances for intercultural engagement that LCs “naturally” offer. In fact, in this chapter I interrogate to what extent the LCs can be understood as intercultural contexts purely because they

involve interaction among people from different national backgrounds and native languages (Woodin, 2018).

The first section of the chapter (7.1) looks at participants' understandings of the LC as an intercultural space. I then analyse participants' accounts on multiperspectivity (7.2)—i.e., the opportunities that the LCs offer for learning about each other's worldviews. For instance, participants often shared memories of "their experience of travel to unfamiliar domains" (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017), as illustrated in the chapter's first opening vignette. The final section (7.3) focuses on the two LCs as a cosmopolitan activity, and offers a critical reflection on the socioeconomic dimension that is embedded in it and sometimes overlooked in intercultural language education research.

7.1 Participants' understandings of the LC as an intercultural space

In this section, I explore whether participants describe the LC as an intercultural space and, if so, how they describe it. I also explore the importance that participants ascribe to the intercultural dimension of their LC experience.

7.1.1 International as "intercultural"

My view of the intercultural aligns with that of theorists who see intercultural communication as much more than communication between people who come from different countries (e.g., Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Amadasi and Holliday (2017, p. 259) distinguish between two types of intercultural narratives or discourses about culture: the "block" narrative, "which promotes the idea of national cultures as the prime, defining and confining units of cultural identity"; and the "thread" narrative, "which focuses attention on diverse aspects of our pasts that mingle with the experiences that we find and the threads of the people that we meet". Thread narratives "support a critical cosmopolitan discourse of cultural travel and shared meanings across structural boundaries that act against cultural prejudice" (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017, p. 254). However, "threads are by no means the default way in which people talk about culture" (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017, p. 260) and, as others have noted, "essentialist notions of culture, identity and language continue to dominate political discourse, advertising, the media, and popular literature, and therefore continue to exert a powerful influence on how

people perceive and construct cultural Others” (McKinley et al., 2019, p. 12). Similarly, Piller (2012) observes that “international” is often associated with “intercultural” in everyday language, and Borghetti (Borghetti, 2019, p. 27) acknowledges that the identification of “culture” with specific national or ethnic groups “usually happens in common thought”. This was noticeable in my data, making obvious the gap that exists between the development of intercultural theories towards a non-essentialist view of “culture”, and the common understanding of this notion in the everyday interactions of language learners.

During the focus group with the LC1 participants José, Carlos and Alberto, I showed them a prompt with the following words (in Spanish): “collaborative”, “learning”, “emotions”, “intercultural”, “social”, and “identities”. In an attempt to elicit some discussion around the themes that had emerged as important in my observational data, I asked the participants if they could relate any of these words to their experiences in the LC. This is what José replied in relation to the word “intercultural”:

Intercultural... bueno, ahí sí se me hace que totalmente, todo válido. Me tocó conocer a una chica de Chipre, ¡en mi vida creí que iba a conocer a alguien de Chipre! [Laughter] Y a otra chica de Nigeria que vive en Londres, o sea, de repente me contaban la historia de su vida y eso se me hace muy padre.

<Intercultural... well, I think that's totally spot on. I had the chance to meet a girl from Cyprus, I never ever thought I would meet someone from Cyprus in my life! [Laughter] And another girl from Nigeria who lives in London, so they would tell me the story of their lives and I thought that was very cool.>

(José in focus group 2, LC1)

For this postgraduate student from Mexico, meeting people from Cyprus and Nigeria in the LC was an unexpected and pleasant experience. For him, being able to listen to the life stories of others from such remote places was an interesting intercultural experience in itself. In contrast, Robert and Ben (also LC1 participants) were not sure whether they would describe the LC as an intercultural experience, as they mainly interacted with people from their same country:

Em... possibly yeah...? I mean, for the most of the times I've been it's mostly British people, I mean definitely not exclusively, but I suppose possibly as much as it would... in that you're just meeting new people and maybe people who want to do... who want to speak another language are more likely to... you know, not be like... British, or are more likely to have some

other cultural background, so it's exposure to that, I suppose just in the group that is like a gathering of different people... Yeah, possibly, I don't know... Yeah, I suppose also if there is a native speaker and that's great, you can pick their phrase and you ask "oh what's this, or what's that"... I think around Christmas last year or something we had a discussion about what's Christmas like in France and what sort of things you find there, how do you find Christmas here, things like that... so yeah, I guess it depends... I guess especially if there are native speakers there you get the chance to sort of ask things like that, yeah... (Robert's interview, LC1)

[E]l language café es solo un lugar para conversación, no pienso que... <*The LC is only a place for conversation, I don't think that...*> it doesn't have a, it's not directed specifically towards learning about other cultures, well, I don't think so. [...] [E]l tipo de personas que vienen son muy similar a mis amigos: son estudiantes de [name of the city] y la mayoría vienen de Inglaterra. <*The kind of people who come are very similar to my friends: they are students in [name of the city] and most of them come from England.*> (Ben's interview, LC1)

The amount of hesitation in Robert's response suggests that it was not easy for him to define his experiences in the LC as intercultural. The first thing he comments on is the nationality of the people he recalled having talked with. Based on his experiences, he would not define the LC as intercultural straight away, as the people he mingled with were mostly British. He then tries to nuance his answer by saying that people who want to speak other languages "are more likely to have some other cultural background", and therefore the LCs offer exposure to those people. His example of a cultural discussion around Christmas in different countries evokes a comparative "block" approach to culture where the nation is taken as the unit of analysis, and superficial facts and cultural products about "large cultures" (Holliday, 1999) are discussed uncritically and impersonally. Culture is seen as a product, and as something that be described in static terms.

Similarly, Ben does not highlight interculturality as an important aspect of the LC, again, based on his personal experiences of having talked mostly with students from England who were "very similar to his friends". In everyday communication, it is common for people to think of intercultural communication as one that happens between people from different countries (McKinley et al., 2019; Piller, 2012). The participants illustrate this standpoint as they seem to consider national diversity as the primary factor in their understanding of the term "intercultural". These ways of speaking perpetuate understandings of others in essentialist and culturalist ways (Borghetti, 2016; Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 2011; Scollon & Scollon,

2001). However, these essentialist views can be challenged upon further reflection. I will use two excerpts from LC2 focus group to illustrate how discourses about cultural identities can easily switch from block to thread (Amadasí & Holliday, 2017).

As with the LC1 focus group mentioned above, during the LC2 focus group I also showed participants a piece of paper with the words (in French) “collaborative”, “learning”, “emotions”, “intercultural”, “social”, and “identities” in order to elicit discussion around these themes. Ruth was the first one to comment on the prompt, and she described LC2 as intercultural without a doubt:

Ruth: Interculturel, je dirais interculturel.

<Intercultural, I would say intercultural.>

Nuria: Interculturel. Et comment tu vois l’interculturalité ici ?

<Intercultural. And how do you see interculturality here?>

Ruth: Alors, il y avait au début, bon... quand on était là pour la première fois j’ai vu une brésilienne, un allemand et puis plusieurs français qui étaient là, je sais pas, mais c’était interculturel.

<So, there was at the beginning, well... when we were here for the first time, I saw a Brazilian, a German, and then many French people who were here, I don’t know, but it was intercultural.>

(LC2 focus group)

By Ruth’s comments, it seems that her understanding of what constitutes an intercultural environment tends to be associated, at least as a starting point, with diversity in terms of national backgrounds. She recalled the early days of the group, when there used to be participants from a wider variety of national backgrounds. However, after these remarks, I asked the group whether it was comprehensive enough to consider nationality as the most salient identity marker of the members of the group, given that they all spoke different languages, and had travelled and lived in different countries. Thus, as a researcher, I was implicated in a narrative shift: this was an explicit attempt from me, the researcher, to problematise essentialist views of (national) identities constructively with my participants by initiating a “thread narrative” that would encourage a more

“critical cosmopolitan discourse” about identities (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017). An interesting dialogue emerged around the need to recognise that having transnational attachments was a connecting link among people in this LC, all of whom had seen their (national, cultural, multilingual) identities enriched from extended periods of travel or living in different parts of the world, and the intercultural relationships they had built throughout their lives. Notably, both Hugo and Nadia highlighted that they felt incomplete to be defined by others as French only, having lived in England for so many years.

Il y a l'autre côté pour moi qui maintenant me gêne... c'est quand les gens me poussent, me repoussent vers... enfin, essayent de toujours me recadrer sur une identité française parce que... à cause de mon accent, on va toujours me dire « oui, mais tu es française... », enfin on va toujours me qualifier de française et des fois j'ai l'impression que ça rend mon identité vraiment incomplète parce que... oui, je suis française mais j'étais là depuis tellement d'années, pourquoi est-ce qu'on est toujours obligé de me... comme s'il fallait absolument le cadrer dans toutes les conversations.

<There is another side for me that now bothers me... that's when people push me, push me back to...well, they always try to pigeonhole me as French because...because of my accent, I'm always told “yes, but you are French...”, so I am always described as French and sometimes I have the impression that this makes my identity really incomplete because I...yes, I am French, but I've been here for so many years, why always this need to...as if it were absolutely necessary to highlight that in all the conversations.>

(Nadia, LC2 focus group)

Being reduced to less than what one is can be frustrating, and it is the crux of the problem with essentialism (Holliday, 2011; Jin, 2017). Nadia, who had complex intercultural identities arising from her biographical pathways (see section 5.3.1 in Chapter 5), feels that her transnational belongings are rarely recognised in her daily interactions in the UK identity, as the identity that is “ascribed” to her (Block, 2009) is essentialised as French only due to her accent (“*les gens essayent de toujours me recadrer sur une identité française à cause de mon accent*”). By qualifying her as French, people ignore how her identities might have been shaped by different structures or “large cultures” due to her personal trajectories (“I’ve been here [in England] for so many years”) (Holliday, 2011). Hugo empathised with Nadia and made similar remarks about his experience of being always ascribed a French identity in the UK. They both made a strong link between accent and having foreign identities (or being positioned as foreign). When a person’s

accent is different from the local accent, regardless of how long they have lived in the area, they are destined to be asked the same question over and over again: “Where are you from?”, which often carries an implicit “why are you here?” (Dervin, 2016).

Both Nadia and Hugo showed the group that focusing only on their national background and accent, without considering their personal trajectories, was an incomplete way of defining their identities. However, the data are inconclusive regarding the effect that these reflections had on the other participants in the focus group (Joanne, Ruth and Mike), as the conversation continued with Mike’s joking remarks about the importance of learning to speak with a northern British accent, and Joanne’s description of LC2 as a place to escape temporarily from the dominant culture of her everyday life. This latter idea ties to the next section, where I discuss how participants understood the LC as an intercultural space by describing it as an alternative world.

7.1.2 The intercultural as “*otro mundo*”

By organising and participating in LCs, participants found a way to create their own spaces for language socialisation—wherever they resided—in order to live in and through languages. In the above-discussed excerpt, Ben did not see the LC as a place to learn about other cultures; nevertheless, he said during the interview that LC1 reminded him of being in South America and speaking Spanish there. This is because, as argued in previous chapters, multilingual subjects associate the languages they speak with very personal memories of travel and cultural immersion which were mobilised during the LC (see also the chapter’s opening vignette).

Similarly, Elizabeth, Joanne and Nathan noticed that breaking the habit of speaking mainly English and engaging in conversations in different languages made them feel like being in a bubble:

Literally, I completely forget that I’m in England when I’m there!
(Elizabeth’s interview, LC1)

C’est bizarre parce que peut-être que pour nous [les britanniques] c’est une manière d’échapper un peu de notre... la culture... notre culture, et d’expérimenter dans quelques heures, une heure, ce que ce soit, quelque chose de différent, dehors de la culture dominante.

<It's weird because maybe for us [British] it's a way of escaping a bit from our... the culture... our culture, and a way of experiencing for a few hours, one hour, whatever, something different, outside the dominant culture.>

(Joanne's interview, LC2)

Toda una sala de gente aprendiendo o hablantes de idiomas que no son el inglés. ¡Qué gozada! (...) Mis intercambios y noches en los LCs significan periodos de alegría, ya que puedo comunicar en idiomas y ponerme en otro mundo que no tiene nada que ver con [esta ciudad], aunque solo sea por unas pocas horitas.

<A room full of learners or speakers of other languages that are not English. What a pleasure! (...) My exchanges and evenings in the LC mean times of happiness, since I can communicate in languages and put myself in another world that has nothing to do with [this city], even if just for a few hours.>

(Nathan's reflective piece, LC1)

Even I express a similar feeling in my reflective journal when I refer to LC2 as a “French little bubble”. These comments reveal that LCs are conceptualised as transient other-worlds. LCs can be worlds of escapism to experience “something different, outside of the dominant culture”, albeit only “for a few hours”. When people leave the event, they must reconcile that they have not travelled physically anywhere far, a sensation that is contested by the feelings of having been in another world (“*otro mundo*”). As Nathan hinted in his first sentence, these feelings are afforded by the vibrant multilingual atmosphere that people create. It is not so much about the place, but about what multilingual people create by coming together, in contrast to their dwelling in a local society where they appear to perceive monolingualism as the norm. These language positionings make participants dwell temporarily in “otro mundo” and connect them with fond memories of travel and socialising in their languages abroad. Some of these participants are motivated learners who often do not identify with the language they find in the classroom.

Igarashi (2016) draws similar conclusions from the LC in her study, which participants described as “a totally different world”. Igarashi (2016) observes that the LC invokes a sense of displacement: it is a place where regular social positionings are disturbed, and where people feel comfortable and uncomfortable simultaneously. For her, the LC is a *heterotopia*: a place that “is capable of

juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault, 1986, p. 25).

Ros i Solé (2016) argues that

[T]he extraordinary worlds of language learners are not necessarily spatially bound to particular objective and territorialised cultural formations. Rather, they may belong to an altogether different kind of cultural imaginary, one that is not based on abstract “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1991), but rather on the ordinary and the banal of language practices, the lived experiences and the worlds of possibility that multilingual subjects create for themselves. (Ros i Solé, 2016, p. 72)

By seeking languaging opportunities in the context of their everyday lives and leisure time, LC participants repurpose and redefine the physical environment they live in to co-create alternative worlds of their own, in order to dwell (temporarily, at least) in different language spaces (Phipps, 2007). Thus, the language is not learned as an objective reality that exists at a distance (Phipps & González, 2004), but it is integrated in the here and now of their everyday lives. These languages are not located in some distant land, but become part of their everyday leisure activities.

Linked to the heterotopic sense of displacement, the multilingual environment of the LC altered the social and language positionings that participants normally occupied in other contexts in their daily lives. For instance, Hugo and Nadia used English at work, and in their daily lives in the UK were often positioned as foreigners, whereas in LC2 they were the French “hosts”.

The blurring of dichotomies such as host/guest or local/foreigner was noticed by Joanne in one particular occasion. It was summer, and Ruth and Mike—a British couple and regular attendees in LC2—invited the members of LC2 to an evening meal at their place. It had become a tradition for them to host a summer dinner party with the group. Four of us attended: Joanne (British), Richard (British, Joanne’s partner), Hugo (French, the organiser of the group), and me, Nuria (Spanish, the researcher). Despite the fact that we were not in our usual LC venue, and that Richard was an outsider to the group and could only speak English, we still kept French as our *lingua franca*. That means that Richard was often excluded from our conversations, except when someone translated for him.

At one point, an interesting exchange occurred:

Ruth: [Pointing to a board of different types of cheese.] Pour les étrangers, il y a des fromages de la région.

<For the foreigners, there is some local cheese>

Joanne: Mais qui sont les étrangers ici ?

<But who are the foreigners here?>

[Everyone laughs.]

(Researcher's reflective journal, LC2, 12/07/2018)

Joanne's simple question indexed her noticing the juxtaposed layers of positionings that were at play simultaneously in this environment, as characteristic of heterotopias (Foucault, 1986). Although nobody commented on it further, the laughter that followed was symbolic: everyone was aware of the complex subject position dynamics at play. Joanne seemed to be implying with her question that, since Hugo was the organiser and the only French person in the group, he was the "host" in this French-centred space we created for ourselves, making the rest of us the "foreigners" or "guests" in our capacity as speakers of French as an additional language. However, in his everyday social encounters outside of the LC, Hugo said that he was positioned as a foreigner. At the same time, he was a guest in Ruth and Mike's house, like everyone else. Furthermore, one could argue that Richard's position as a non-French speaker made him an "outsider" to the group, despite him being a local in the area.

Kramsch (2009, p. 20) uses the term "subject position" to refer to "the way in which the subject presents and represents itself discursively, psychologically, socially, and culturally through the use of symbolic systems", recognising that identities are always multiple, multi-layered and historically and socially contingent. The example above illustrates the ways in which multilingual speakers can occupy different multi-layered subject positions simultaneously depending on what languages are at play in interaction with others, a salient aspect in LC interactions. As I also concluded in Chapter 6, this episode shows how subject positions are situated and socially constructed in interaction (Kramsch, 2009). Moreover, it shows that languaging in LCs affords the co-construction of

alternative social spaces where conventional dichotomies such as local/foreigner, host/guest, and self/Other become blurred. These constructed social spaces are abstract, but, at the same time, they are grounded in, and emerge from, the real materialities of face-to-face interaction and the relationship between learners with their surrounding physical environment (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004; Ros i Solé, 2016).

Summary

The data show that participants' understandings of the LC as an intercultural space refer to two different aspects. On the one hand, the "intercultural" was associated with diversity in terms of national backgrounds. Thus, participants described their experience in the LC as more or less intercultural depending on the national diversity of the people they had spoken with during the events. On the other hand, some participants perceived the LC as a bubble, heterotopia (Foucault, 1986), or an alternative world ("otro mundo"), where they could experience language immersion and the sensation of being abroad in the here-and-now of their local community.

Regarding the first theme, there was a tension between how I position myself as a researcher invested in non-essentialist intercultural discourses and how my participants perceived and expressed their experiences in culturalist ways (i.e., associating international with intercultural). In an attempt to negotiate and reconcile that tension, during the LC2 focus group I looked for "threads" (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017) and my implication in the conversation led some participants to share how they perceived that framing their identities only based on their accent and national background was reductionist and incomplete. However, the data are inconclusive on whether this shaped or changed in any way the other participants' understandings of cultural identities.

I now turn to participants' experiences of learning about other people's worldviews and having the chance to share their own in the LCs.

7.2 Multiperspectivity: Learning about each other's worldviews

This section is concerned with the experience of multiperspectivity: "the ability to decentre from one's own perspective and to take other people's perspectives into

consideration in addition to one's own" (Barrett et al., 2014, p. 20).

Multiperspectivity and decentring dispositions are central to the development of intercultural attitudes. In Byram's (1997) model, these are "attitudes of curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviours" (Byram, 1997, p. 34). Intercultural speakers engage in multiperspectivity when they are interested in "discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices and products" (Byram, 2021, p. 63).

One way to engage in multiperspectivity is through interaction with culturally diverse others—understanding cultural diversity as multidimensional (drawing on age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, religious beliefs, language, socioeconomic background, ideologies, etc.). In this section, first, I discuss how participants capitalised on the international environment of LCs to engage in multiperspectivity. I then draw on two episodes from LC1 and LC2 to illustrate that not all native speakers were welcome in the same way. After that, I analyse different examples of intercultural narratives which emerged in LC conversations and helped participants to learn about the self and each other's worldviews.

7.2.1 Capitalising on the internationality of the environment

As highlighted in previous studies on LCs (e.g., Gao, 2012), participants valued highly the international diversity of the LCs as an opportunity to learn from others. Woodin (2018, p. 3) contends that learning a "foreign" language is often seen as learning the language of someone else and, therefore, "by its design, language learning invites us to learn something which is 'other'". Consistent with the previous section, where I showed how interculturality was seen by many participants as involving communication between people from different countries, the type of cultural diversity that participants seemed to highlight and value the most in the LC environment was associated with national diversity. While some LC1 participants barely had the chance to interact with international peers during the events, others praised the LC for fostering opportunities to talk with people from different countries and learn from them.

Siempre encuentro que hay muchos participantes que vienen de otros países y esta vez conocí a una chica española, un chico italiano, un chico

japonés y un chico holandés, así que fue muy interesante hablar de las culturas distintas y de sus experiencias en Inglaterra. ¡Puedo aprender mucho más de los idiomas!

<I always find that there are many participants who come from other countries and this time I met a Spanish girl, an Italian guy, a Japanese guy and a Dutch guy, so it was very interesting to speak about the different cultures and their experiences in England. I can learn a lot more about languages!>

(Rebecca's reflective writing, LC1)

Rebecca refers to the international diversity of the group as an opportunity to engage in multiperspectivity and to access other worldviews. These worldviews did not necessarily concern only the cultures associated with the language one is learning. While Rebecca's motivation for attending the LC was to practise Spanish and French, in the LC she found that, by using these languages, she could learn about the languages and cultures of others, irrespective of their connections with the Spanish and French speaking worlds. Thus, participants filled language with culture, but with a transnational approach (Risager, 2006), showing that languages are not territorially bound, but they are mobile "to the extent that their users are mobile" (Risager, 2016, p. 35).

Rebecca also found it interesting to hear about the experiences of these foreign others in her own country, a point she picked up also during the interview:

Me interesa cuando los estudiantes de otros países hablan de la cultura inglesa y las opiniones sobre ella, porque para mí es normal y no tengo que pensar, y cuando otra persona dice algo, me doy cuenta de que tiene razón, así que es una manera de reflexionar sobre mi propia cultura.

<It's interesting for me when students from other countries talk about English culture and their opinions about it, because for me it's normal and I don't have to think, and when someone else says something, I realise they are right, so it's a way of reflecting upon my own culture.>

(Rebecca's interview, LC1)

With "reflecting about my own culture", Rebecca refers to the ability to decentre from her own perspectives in order to view the self through the eyes of others (Byram, 1997). A parallel example comes from Ruth's remarks during the LC2 focus group. When asked if her motivation to attend the LC was to practise French, Ruth replied the following:

Ruth : Oui, c'était la langue et aussi j'aime bien les étrangers, parce qu'ils m'apprennent d'autres choses dans la vie et ça me change les idées.

<Yes, it was the language and also I love foreigners, because they teach me things about life and that changes my ideas.>

(LC2 focus group)

In personal communication, Ruth also said that she likes reading and watching films in foreign languages because it is like "being out of yourself" to see things from a different perspective. In one occasion in the LC, I recorded in my reflective journal that Sonia arrived and gave Ruth two books (see Chapter 5 [5.3.5]). They were written by Turkish authors and translated into French. Ruth said that she loves reading new authors, especially when they are from different countries, because she discovers new stories and different perspectives.

Rachel, from LC1, expressed similar views:

Rachel: [En el language café] aprendemos cosas culturales o aspectos culturales, costumbres, o rutinas de la gente nativa, y nos da la permisión de explorar lo que es la vida francesa o italiana o española y compararlas al mismo tiempo, que lo hace destacar un poquito más.

<[In the language café] we learn cultural stuff or cultural aspects, customs, or habits of native people, and it allows us to explore what French, Spanish, or Italian life is like, and compare them at the same time, what makes it stand out a bit more.>

Nuria: Para eso tienes que tener curiosidad, ¿no? A ti te encantan estas situaciones de comparar y...

<For that you need to have curiosity, right? You love these situations of comparing and...>

Rachel: Porque abre la mente, ¿no? Porque no quiero pensar que mi vida es la única manera en que puedo vivir una vida, porque yo creo que relaciona con el hecho de que nunca podríamos estar completamente contentos con lo que tenemos o considerarlo como lo normal, ¿qué es lo normal? Tenemos que pensar en otras maneras de vivir o considerar las cosas.

<Because it opens your mind, right? Because I don't want to think that my life is the only way in which I can live a life, because I think it's related to the fact that we could never be completely happy with what we have or consider it like normal, what is normal? We need to think of other ways of living or considering things.>

(Rachel's interview, LC1)

Later on during the interview, when I asked Rachel if there was a conversation she remembered particularly fondly, she recalled a conversation with a Belgian boy, and how she enjoyed the opportunity of meeting someone from Belgium and learning with him some words and expressions from his linguistic variety.

The world is becoming increasingly interconnected and needs people willing to understand a wide range of possible ways of living (Phipps & Levine, 2012). All of the above excerpts (from Rebecca, Ruth and Rachel) indicate that these participants enjoyed engaging with otherness, showing intercultural “attitudes of curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others’ meanings, beliefs and behaviours” (Byram, 1997, p. 34). Being a voluntary activity, curiosity and openness seem very important attitudes to have in LCs. Although these attitudes may be further enhanced through the LC experience, I wonder whether they are not a prerequisite to feel attracted to these events in the first place. For newcomers, LCs involve speaking with people they have never met before. Since attending LCs requires the agency of the individual to capitalise on opportunities to speak their languages, it would make sense to think that the prototype of a LC participant is someone willing “to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness”, or with an “interest in discovering other perspectives” (Byram, 1997, p. 34). In the same way that the findings highlighted *enjoyment* and *pleasure* as important emotions embedded in the experience of being able to socialise in a new language (or the experience of *linguaging*), here, too, it seems that these emotions are part of the intercultural experience of LCs. Rather than developing these attitudes in the LCs, curiosity and openness may be a prerequisite for participation, or what motivated these participants to participate in the first place.

One interviewee from LC1 mentioned that also *intranational* diversity provided valuable affordances for learning from each other:

Nuria: También la parte cultural es interesante, ¿no? Porque hablas con mucha gente de orígenes diferentes...

<Also the cultural side of it is interesting, isn't it? Because you talk with many people with different origins...>

Elisabeth: Sí, sí, even if they are from England! Porque hay muchas ciudades en Inglaterra que no he visitado, y por eso cuando alguna persona mencionó que was born, que nació en Leicester, por ejemplo, es muy interesante, porque no sé mucho de Leicester y me gusta aprender de otras ciudades.

<Yes, yes, even if they are from England! Because there are many cities in England that I haven't visited, so when a person mentioned that they were born in Leicester, for instance, it's very interesting, because I don't know much about Leicester and I like learning about other cities.>

(Elisabeth's interview, LC1)

What these excerpts have in common is a focus on access to other worldviews over linguistic competence, demonstrating that “[l]anguage learning goes beyond the purely linguistic in the communicative experience” (Ros i Solé, 2016, p. 30). As Woodin (2018, p. 8) puts it,

[l]earning a language in any amount of time, whether for specific personal/professional purposes or for deep cultural understanding, takes us in the direction of unknown territory, where we are forced to doubt, to question, to accept and to interact. These are skills and attitudes which are paramount in a changing world, which bring communication alive as a human activity through language in all of its complexity. To limit language learning to linguistic accuracy would be to deny the human, personal and relational aspects of language, the human need for ‘knowing other minds’ (Givón, 2005), and the opportunity for understanding others from their perspectives.

The excerpts in this section show that participants saw in LCs a space to engage in the personal and relational aspects of language, and “the opportunity for understanding others from their perspectives”, which defines multiperspectivity. Furthermore, the participants pointed to the idea of multiperspectivity in relation to finding joy in difference (“I love foreigners, because they teach me things about life and that changes my ideas”). To replace the idea of the intercultural speaker as a mediator in between nations, Ros i Solé (2013, p. 336) proposes the concept of “cosmopolitan speaker” as an encompassing “cultural identity for the individual who ‘dwells’ in a variety of languages and cultures”. For instance, as a cosmopolitan speaker, Ruth chooses proudly to be influenced by other cultures and sees this practice as enriching and constitutive of her permanent process of becoming (Ros i Solé et al., 2020). Also, the fact that LC2 was focused on speaking “French only” does not mean that participants discussed only cultural topics

related to France or other French speaking countries, in the same way that Rebecca in LC1 enjoyed knowing about other people's countries and languages, albeit not related to Spanish or French specifically (see also the chapter's opening vignettes).

Ros i Solé et al. (2020, p. 400) regret that "[t]he field of intercultural communication [...] has traditionally been less one of joy and discovery, and more one of focusing on the negativity of new encounters". While in other contexts—e.g., in the workplace—people may be constrained to communicate with cultural others in order to achieve their goals (see Mortensen, 2017, on transient multilingual communities), engaging in multiperspectivity—or meeting, talking with, and learning from cultural others—is a joy and a goal in itself for many LC attendants.

Chapter 6 (6.1) showed that the LC is a space that brings together people interested in languages. Thus, participants find in the LC a safe space where they can share their multilingual subjectivities—i.e., the memories, emotions, and personal relationships they associate with their different languages—with others who have had similar learning experiences and multilingual trajectories, or aspire to do so. In a similar vein, the data discussed in this chapter show that the LC experience involves an exploration of otherness and diversity, as much as the co-construction of a "leisure small culture" (Holliday, 1999, p. 239) as participants engage in interaction with like-minded, cosmopolitan, multilingual speakers with shared goals and interests. However, not everyone was able—or enabled—to conform to the cohesive behaviour that emerged in the small culture formation of LC1 and LC2, as I discuss next.

7.2.2 Capitalising on "native speakers"—but *any* native speaker?

Linked to the appreciation of international people in the LC events, some participants rated their LC experiences according to the number of native speakers they had the chance to interact with. Nathan, for instance, made a distinction between language groups in LC1:

El francés en el Language Café no es tan bueno como el chino o el castellano, porque nunca hay nativos, y muy pocos de los estudiantes se atreven a hablar.

<The French [conversation group] in the Language Café is not as good as the Chinese or the Spanish, because there are never any natives, and very few students dare to talk.>

(Nathan's reflective writing, LC1)

Indeed, Nathan's most memorable anecdotes from LC1 concerned the conversations he had with Chinese and Mexican people, in Chinese and Spanish respectively. Sometimes he even chose which conversation table to join based on the presence or not of native speakers in them. Comments like his came normally from confident speakers who already had extended socialisation experiences abroad in the target language, such as Alice:

[A]precio la presencia de la gente nativa, también después del año en el extranjero también echo de menos hablar con nativos porque es diferente.

<I appreciate the presence of native people, also after the year abroad I also miss speaking with natives because it's different.>

(Alice's interview, LC1)

As discussed in previous chapters, learners perceived different affordances in interacting with natives and with non-natives, as they occupied different subject positions (Kramsch, 2009). Nevertheless, as Borghetti (2016) puts it,

ci sono apprendenti che, per soddisfare le proprie necessità comunicative e/o raggiungere le proprie identità ideali, hanno bisogno di aderire il più possibile alle norme linguistico-comunicative della comunità che parla la LO [lingua obiettivo] come lingua nativa.

<there are learners who, in order to satisfy their own communicative needs and/or achieve their ideal identities, feel the need to adhere as much as possible to the linguistic-communicative norms of the community of native speakers of the target language.>

(Borghetti, 2016, p. 163, my translation)

Although the concept of "native speaker" can (and should) be challenged because of its pernicious and toxic effects, and there have been multiple scholarly attempts to get rid of it (Dewaele et al., 2022), learners in the LC did not do so, indicating that native-speakerness seems to prevail in the language learning discourse.

Nevertheless, the data contain episodes which indicate that not all natives were well received in these language encounters. Some native speakers were even considered a nuisance or potentially disruptive. Rebecca, for instance, dismissed her experience of talking with a Spanish native speaker because of his restraining attitude, which impeded her to perform her social self in Spanish:

Nuria: ¿Los language cafés te ayudan a darte cuenta de las palabras que son más frecuentes, más comunes?

<Do the language cafés help you to notice words which are more frequent, more common?>

Rebecca: Mm... not really, porque no hay nativos.

<Mm... not really, because there are no native speakers.>

Nuria: ¿Has tenido oportunidad de hablar con nativos?

<Have you had any opportunity to speak with natives?>

Rebecca: Una vez, pero había un hombre que era español, y hablaba solo de nuestros errores de pronunciación y no quería hablar porque era muy estricto con todas las palabras y hablaba mucho en inglés para hablar de la pronunciación española. (...) Era muy crítico.

<Once, there was a man who was Spanish, and only spoke about our pronunciation errors and I didn't want to speak because he was very strict with all the words and spoke a lot in English to talk about Spanish pronunciation. (...) He was very judgmental.>

Nuria: Did you try to negotiate that?

Rebecca: Em... hablé más con otras personas en la mesa [laughter].

<Em... I spoke more with other people at the table.>

(Rebecca's interview, LC1)

In this case, the Spanish person, as much as he might have been well-intentioned, disrupted the dynamics of the LC by acting too "teacherly" and focusing on error correction over socialisation, by speaking English when Spanish was the group's chosen lingua franca, and by exercising an authoritative power that made Rebecca ill-at-ease and unwilling to speak ("I didn't want to speak because he was very strict"). As Stickler and Lewis (2008, p. 253) point out in the context of email

tandem exchange, “too much correction can ruin a partnership”. The sociocultural dynamics of LC groups are co-constructed, and authoritative voices tend to be resisted. Data discussed in previous chapters showed that native speakers normally assumed the role of “an interlocutor sensitive to the needs of his/her non-native speaker partner” (Woodin, 2018, p. 20). This person’s judgmental attitude overshadowed the learning affordances that are normally associated with interacting with proficient speakers (e.g., in this case, noticing word frequency). The tension was not resolved dialogically by addressing the issue of discomfort, attempting to reach mutual understanding (Holmes, 2014), and negotiating a different type of interaction; instead, Rebecca resisted by choosing to ignore this participant and turned around to talk to other people. As Norton (2000, 2013) points out, motivated learners who look for opportunities to practise may choose not to participate in certain communicative situations when these inhibit their human agency—e.g., when their identity positions are reframed unfavourably to them, or they struggle to claim their voice. In this case, the native speaker misinterpreted the LC context as a primarily educational setting, rather than recreational, and positioned language learners like Rebecca *only* as learners, preventing them from performing their “multilingual social selves” with him.

In LC2, there was another example of a native speaker who was left out of the group. In this case, he was deliberately not invited into the group because, according to the participant who knew him, he would not fit in:

Mike : Oui, mais aussi je connais un autre, par exemple, qui pensait que... je n’avais envie de l’inviter... il peut être assez agressif et... il était un organisateur de comment s’appelle... ‘Hospitalité’, c’est-à-dire qu’il organise pour les gens qui ont de l’argent qui veulent voir un match de football, European Champions League à Madrid, parce qu’ils sont de [name of city], et il organise le voyage et tout ça, mais je crois qu’il a... [...] il est complètement différent, non ? Il est classiquement de classe ouvrier, son père était dans la mail français, sa mère était morte, et son père est venue en Angleterre parce qu’il a connu une anglaise qui habite à Whitley Bay. Et son père conduit des taxis pour les... je sais pas, Uber, mais il est mécanicien, il travaille pour... avec les voitures.

<Yes, but also I knew another one, for example, who thought that... I didn’t feel like inviting him...he can be quite aggressive and...he was an organiser of what’s the name... ‘Hospitality’, so he organises for people who have money who want to watch a football match, European Champions League in Madrid, because they are from [name of City], and he organises the trip and everything, but I think that he has...[...he is completely different, isn’t he? He

is clearly working class, his dad worked for the French mail, his mum died, and his dad came to England because he met an English woman who lives in Whitley Bay. And his dad is a taxi driver for...don't know, Uber, but he is a mechanic, he works for...with cars.>

Nadia : Mais ses idées étaient un petit fortes, non ?

<But his ideas were a bit strong, right?>

Mike : Oui, fortes ! [laughter]

<Yes, strong!>

Joanne : De extrême droit

<Far right>

(LC2 focus group)

The man Mike was talking about, despite being a native speaker of French, was deemed unfit for the culture of the group because of his different ideology (“his ideas were a bit strong”, “far right”) and manners (“he can be quite aggressive”). He was judged as ill-equipped to be able to contribute adequately to the discussions of the group. As illustrated in Chapter 5 (5.3.7), the group had already experienced the withdrawal of some participants in the past possibly because of the presence of a “troublemaker” (“*un élément perturbateur*”) in the group.

Mike hinted at his social class as having an influence on his being “completely different” from the rest of the group. This is an example of how cultural capital was more important than linguistic competence in order to be considered a legitimate participant in LCs. I will return to this point later on in my discussion of cosmopolitanism in section 7.3.

In the two episodes discussed above, the native speakers’ behaviours were considered disruptive to the cohesive small culture of the group (Holliday, 1999). And in both cases, in order to preserve group harmony, these speakers were neglected. Despite being linguistically proficient, they were considered discursively incompetent and unfit for the LCs; they did not have the right sort of linguistic proficiency (Bourdieu, 1991; Kramsch, 2009):

The competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be *listened to*, likely to be recognized as *acceptable* in all the situations in which there is occasion to speak. [...] social acceptability is not reducible to mere grammaticality. Speakers lacking the legitimate competence are *de facto* excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 55)

Looking at how the man with what was described as strong, far-right ideas was rejected from the group, the LC participants' intercultural attitudes of curiosity and openness towards cultural diversity need to be put into question, or at least counterbalanced with the fact that they also demonstrated narrow tendencies insofar as they were only willing to engage in a certain type of interdiscourse communication (Scollon & Scollon, 2001)—that is, communication involving people from different countries, but not too dissimilar political ideologies or educational and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Drawing on his study on the social judgment of taste, Bourdieu (1984) would argue that mingling with people with similar compositions of capital constitutes a natural tendency, rooted in people's habitus. However, the world is more diverse than what the LCs present, and the aim of intercultural development is not conflict-free communication (Dervin, 2016; Phipps, 2014; Piller, 2011). Instead, the polarised world we are living in needs intercultural and multilingual speakers with tools and willingness to address uncomfortable situations in order to develop better mutual understanding among people with seemingly irreconcilable positions (Byram, 1997; Holmes, 2014; Phipps, 2014, 2019). When Nadia referred to the regular participants of LC2 as "*le noyau résistant*" ("the resistant core", see 5.3.7), she pointed to the fact that these participants might have been the ones who were equipped with the right tools and attitudes to adapt to a wider intersectional range of intercultural encounters, unlike the ones who decided to leave the group.

I will return to these ideas in section 7.3 in connection with (elite) cosmopolitanism. For now, the point here is that language proficiency, or being a native speaker, was not a sufficient condition to be "legitimated" as a LC participant.

Next, I explore different participants' conversational experiences in the LCs which involved engaging in multiperspectivity.

7.2.3 Examples of LC conversations involving multiperspectivity

In this section I discuss different data excerpts which illustrate the kinds of topics and conversations that were conducive to some form of learning about different worldviews. The examples show that, having no specific agenda, cultural topics emerged in the situated affordances of each encounter based on the participating interlocutors and their subjectivities.

The first four examples are drawn from LC1, and the other three, from LC2. I draw on a combination of data from interviews, focus groups, participants' written reflections, the researcher's reflective journal, and audio-recorded naturally-occurring conversations.

(1) Student life, parent-child relationships, hair-drying, and the police (LC1)

During the focus group with the three Italian Erasmus students, after the participants mentioned the term "culture" several times, I asked them what kind of cultural topics they talked about in the LCs. They started to recall collaboratively the conversational topics which, for them, involved intercultural learning in the LC.

Carla: We explain our university system, so they know the differences between our culture, their culture, and we speak about food, or history, and they are very interested, so it's good. Also we have a different point of view, for example we were talking about arts, and they don't really study art as we do in Italy, so they were really interested in our point of view...

Maria: and our approach to art, because they don't study the history about... for us it's compulsory, we have to know this... [...] So things we take for granted, well they are not for them. We take art for granted in a way.

(Focus group 1, LC1)

The conversations that these participants had in the LC involved sharing different points of view with British students from a cross-cultural approach (talking about "the differences between *our* culture, *their* culture"). Drawing on Holliday's (2011) grammar of culture, their statements about culture reflect a large culture discourse where culture is understood as contained within national boundaries. Some of these exchanges made these participants reflect upon how certain political and social structures (e.g., the Italian education system) shaped their upbringing and their beliefs about, for instance, what constitutes a core subject at school and common knowledge in society. They realised that their taken-for-granted cultural

resources were influenced by educational structures, thus seeing the importance of secondary socialisation—understood as “the internalization of institutional or institution-based ‘sub worlds’” (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 158)—in shaping the distribution of knowledge in different societies. For them, history of art was considered staple knowledge (“we take art for granted”) because in Italy it is a compulsory subject at school, while it is not in the UK. Hence they learned they should not expect students from other parts of the world to know about art, or to give this subject the same importance as they do in Italy. Byram (1997, p. 52) argues that “[a]wareness that one is a product of one’s own socialisation is a pre-condition for understanding one’s reactions to otherness”.

I then asked them what other topics they discussed which challenged their assumptions:

Valentina: Just simple things [...] I mean the fact that they... after high school here it’s quite common just to move as far as possible, they say “I want to go as far as possible from my hometown”, while we tend to remain in the nearby, so this is what we know it’s just cultural difference. Or speaking with the girls from the 4th year, even their relationship with their parents, because they say “oh yeah, I call my parents twice a month” and we were like...

Carla: We call them every day!

Valentina: If I didn’t my mother would get so worried, if I don’t call her every day! Whereas for them it’s like “that’s fine!” It’s just these small little things about the culture, about the food, even just drying their hair

[We all laugh]

Maria: Yeah, they don’t dry their hair!

Carla: It’s so strange!

Maria: It’s cold here! Why don’t they dry their hair?

Valentina: It’s small facts, because you don’t discuss this in class, of course, we discuss them during general conversations. [...] And it’s much more interesting than just learning about... Okay, it’s important to learn about history, about traditions, but I mean this is how we really get to know about the culture. They think like “ok, Italians are friendly”, but...

(Focus group 1, LC1)

Their use of the personal pronouns “they” and “we” again reflects a large culture approach—or an “Us versus Them” discourse (Holliday, 2011)—based on national conceptualisations of culture and focused on difference (“it’s just cultural difference”). None of the participants initiated any threads by shifting the narrative to personal trajectories and the use of “I” (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017), which could have allowed the emergence of universal cultural processes and small culture formation on the go (Holliday, 2011). Nevertheless, Valentina thought that to “really get to know about the culture” it was important to focus on the “small little things” that people do, over the study of encyclopaedic knowledge such as history and traditions. In other words, she saw the LC as an opportunity to learn about cultural products as the “outcome of cultural activity” (Holliday, 2019, p. 5)—focusing, for instance, on “artefacts” such as the ways in which people carry out certain everyday practices—rather than learning about grand narratives of nation and history. However, the participants took the newly learned information as “facts” about each other’s culture (such as *we*, Italians, call our parents more often than *them*, British; or *we* dry our hair and *they* don’t). They seemed to enjoy learning about their different habits instead of focusing on the threads connecting each other. They struggled to find explanations for these differences, and simply judged the others’ habits as “strange”.

Finally, they also reported on a conversation they had about the meaning of calling the police:

Valentina: Yesterday we were meeting with the girls from the 4th year, and we were speaking about police, and she said... In Italy we only call the police

Maria: only if something bad happened

Valentina: Yeah, we tend not to call the police, while here they often do, and we tried to figure out why, we tried to explain...

Carla: Why we feel unsafe, because we were telling this girl that we don’t really feel safe walking alone in the night time, in Catania, and here it’s very different. And she asked why [laughter] we don’t really know! Yeah, you become a bit more aware of your culture, you have to think about it

Valentina: It’s just comparing to other culture, because (...) we don’t feel natural to call the police for a problem, here if there’s a small problem they feel it’s right to call the police and we also tried to figure out why there are

these differences. I find it really interesting, and for example you would not do this in a normal class or even in a general conversation these details don't come up easily, but in this group, where you are a smaller group and you are talking about...

Maria: ...anything!

(Focus group 1, LC1)

In this excerpt, the participants report on an episode of meaning negotiation as it emerged in interaction: the meaning of calling the police, or what constituted for each of them a good reason for calling the police. This led to further discussions about their perceptions of safety in different contexts. They learned from each other by explicitation, which Byram (1997) describes as the practice of clarifying one's meaning or position, of making your perspective or position more explicit. Valentina notices that the ecology of the LC afforded the emergence of such topics in a way that was organic and not common neither in the classroom nor in general interactions outside the LC. This might be explained by the in-betweenness that characterises the nature of the LC, conceived as a space for socialisation as well as for collaborative learning, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Valentina also mentions twice that they “tried to figure out why” they had these different views about simple matters. Likewise, Carla suggests that these conversations made them reflect upon their own cultures and worldviews (“you become a bit more aware of your culture, you have to think about it”). This indicates that, by engaging in these conversations, the participants started to decentre from their own worldviews and shift perspectives, an important aspect of developing intercultural attitudes (Byram, 1997). They attributed their different understandings to the particular social and political structures in which they were brought up (Holliday, 2011). For instance, had they not been brought up in Italy, they would not have conceived of art history as a staple in young people's common general knowledge.

To sum up, these participants' intercultural narratives remained somewhat superficial, based on comparisons between countries, and drawing on “Us versus Them” discourses. It is not possible to observe from the data whether these conversations helped participants to challenge stereotypes or, on the contrary, made them believe that these were objective generalizable facts about each other's

cultures. However, by interacting with others in the LC they were “at least beginning to acquire the means by which to access, analyse, compare and evaluate artefacts, practices, values, beliefs and meanings in other cultures and in their own taken-for-granted realities” (Belz, 2007, p. 155). Rather than accessing encyclopaedic knowledge or a disembodied list of cultural facts that one should know about Britain or Italy, these Erasmus students and the Italian learners with whom they interacted co-created a space for meaning negotiation and collaborative learning about each other’s worldviews. Thus, Carla, Maria and Valentina were not mere “language experts” helping others learn Italian in the LC, but they were also transformed by these encounters as they engaged in intercultural learning about self and other.

(2) Comparing education systems in different countries (LC1)

Another example of the comparative, large culture approach to intercultural learning comes from Amy. During the interview, she mentioned that she sometimes just sat on the side while others talked about their year abroad. She felt she could not contribute much to those conversations because of her lower proficiency level and because she had not had a year abroad. Then, I asked her:

Nuria: In terms of cultural topics, do people who have been on their year abroad talk about cultural things?

Amy: Em... I don’t think so, not particularly. I know what we would talk about a lot is like... because I’m from America people would ask me about that, and cultural differences from there versus here, and like the way the universities are structured differently and stuff like that, which is really fun to talk about, because I kind of know a lot about it. And I did meet a girl who was going to uni in Australia and we were talking about how it’s similar to the American university system and how that’s different from the British university system, that was really fun, because I did a lot of research in choosing where to go to university and what school to go and all of that, so it’s nice to share that.

(Amy’s interview, LC1)

Amy, who was studying Spanish at B1 level (according to the CEFR), felt more confident and able to contribute to conversations when they revolved around topics she knew much about, for instance, the university systems in different countries. She mentioned twice during the interview that being positioned by others as American informed many of her conversations in the LC, which would be

framed within a large culture approach (e.g., discussing “cultural differences from *there* [the United States] versus *here* [the United Kingdom]”). It is important to note that multilinguals with intercultural sensitivity should be able to “grasp the sense of cultural belonging” (Borghetti, 2016) of one another as they interact, taking into account that “some individuals tend to perceive their national/religious identities as salient in any context while others prefer not to be automatically associated to the large cultures they participate in” (Borghetti, 2019, p. 30). Amy did not explicitly describe the salience of her nationality in the LC as a problem; however, she highlighted how she particularly enjoyed a conversation she had with another student who shared with her the personal experience of studying her degree abroad (Amy was American and studying in the UK, while the other student [Laura, Alice’s sister] was British and studying in Australia). With her, she engaged in small culture formation on the go (Holliday, 2016), as she was able to share her transnational personal trajectories and connect through knowledge exchange which was of interest to both of them.

(3) The climate, Christmas traditions, food, and accents (LC1)

Like Amy, Elisabeth also talked with Laura, the girl who lived in Australia, together with Katya, a Hungarian girl. In the pre-interview activity, Elisabeth wrote about the conversations she had with them in the LC:

Laura nos dijo que acaba de volver de Australia, después de estudiando en Sídney por dos años. Empezó a describirlo como un país muy bonito, con mucha naturaleza y que siempre hace calor. Mientras que estaba hablando, me acordé las fotos que mi tío me ha mandar (vive en Queensland). En las fotos, se puede ver mucha gente celebrando la Navidad a la playa y llevando los gorros de Papa Noel. [...] Les dije a las chicas que soy rusa, y la gente suelen celebrar la Navidad y la Noche Viene (después de medianoche) como saliendo al aire libre. [...] Laura y Katya me han preguntado cuáles ciudades visito en Rusia, y les he dicho que normalmente voy a Moscú y Ryazan, ya que tengo muchos familiares allí. Luego, Katya empezó a describir Budapest: la arquitectura, las costumbres y demás. La conversación, la me maravilló. Me encanta hablar de las culturas diferentes y aprender más del mundo, particularmente me gusta que esto se puede reducir los estereotipos. Por ejemplo, Katya nos dijo que ella y su familia no les gusta la comida tradicional, ya que es muy grasienta y hay demasiada sal.

Esto ha cambiado el tema de la conversación, y empezaron a hablar de comida. Me preguntaba que comida es popular en Australia, y Laura nos sorprendió. Nos dijo que no hay un plato tradicional australiano como la paella en España por ejemplo, pero la comida italiana y china es muy

popular. También, como el clima, mucha gente gusta tener barbacoas. Katya le ha preguntado en broma si suelen cocinar los canguros en Australia, ¡y Laura les ha dicho: “sí”! Estaba estupefacto, hasta he olvidado usar los verbos correctos mientras que estaba expresando mi sorpresa. Creo que los canguros son animales muy mansos y no me puedo imaginarlos como comida.

Luego, decidíamos hablar de los acentos de la gente. Por lo visto, en Australia todos han pensado que Laura era muy elegante, sola porque tiene un acento inglés, pero ella no está de acuerdo con ellos. Dije las chicas que es como algunas personas en Estados Unidos. Fui con mi clase a Nuevo York hace dos años, y allí, como de nuestros acentos ingleses, una oficial de aduana en el aeropuerto ‘JFK’ nos ha preguntado si conocemos la reina, o el príncipe William y Kate Middleton.

<Laura told us that she had just returned from Australia after studying in Sydney for two years. She started to describe it as a very beautiful country, with a lot of nature, and where it's always warm. While she was speaking, I remembered the pictures my uncle sent me (he lives in Queensland). In the pictures, you can see many people celebrating Christmas at the beach and wearing Santa Claus hats. [...] I told the girls that I'm Russian, and people normally celebrate Christmas and Christmas Eve (after midnight) going outside. [...] Laura and Katya asked me which cities I visit in Russia, and I told them that normally I go to Moscow and Ryazan, since I have many relatives there. Then, Katya started to describe Budapest: the architecture, the traditions and more. The conversation delighted me. I love talking about different cultures and learning more about the world, I particularly like that this can reduce stereotypes. For instance, Katya told us that she and her family don't like [Hungarian] traditional food, since it's very greasy and salty.

This changed the topic of conversation, and they started to talk about food. I wondered what food is popular in Australia, and Laura surprised us. She said that there isn't a traditional Australian dish like paella in Spain, for example, but Italian and Chinese food are very popular. Also, because of the climate, many people like to have barbecues. Katya asked her jokingly if they cook kangaroos in Australia, and Laura said “yes”! I was astonished, I even forgot to use the correct verbs while I was expressing my surprise. I think kangaroos are very tame animals and I cannot imagine them as food.

Then, we decided to talk about people's accents. Apparently, in Australia everyone thought that Laura was very elegant, only because she has an English accent, but she doesn't agree with them. I told the girls that it's like some people in the United States. I went with my class to New York two years ago, and there, because of our English accents, a customs officer at JFK airport asked us if we know the Queen, or prince William and Kate Middleton.>

(Elisabeth's reflective piece, LC1)

Elisabeth, Laura, and Katya had in common that they had lived in different countries for extended periods of time (at least Russia and England, England and Australia, and Hungary and England respectively). Their conversations revolved around their knowledge of these countries and their cultural “artefacts” (Holliday, 2011), for example, the climate, architecture, food, Christmas traditions, and various other practices and statements about culture considered as facts. Although Laura was British, in the LC conversations she was positioned as the “expert” on Australia. Thus, both national identities and transnational personal trajectories were made salient, and individuals exchanged information about the places they knew best.

Elisabeth’s reflections offer yet another example of multiperspectivity and intercultural discourse dominated by a large culture perspective and a focus on (national) cultural “artefacts” (Holliday, 2011). However, a thread mode emerged when Laura and Elisabeth shared their experiences of being stereotyped because of their British accent in Australia and the United States, or when Laura said that Chinese and Italian food are at the core of Australian cuisine, thus highlighting the dialogic nature of cultural realities, which are both influenced by and influencing other cultural realities in an ongoing process of fluid development (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016).

(4) Life in Mexico and Mexican Spanish (LC1)

During the focus group with José, Carlos and Alberto, the three postgraduate students from Mexico, mentioned that many of the learners of Spanish they interacted with were more familiar with the Spanish from Spain than from Latin America. Therefore, these learners of Spanish saw interacting with José, Carlos and Alberto as an opportunity to learn more about Mexico:

José: Y también de repente me preguntaban “¿cómo se habla allá? ¿qué se hace allá?”, este... también yo creo que fue más como cultural, de ver qué es lo que pensamos y hacemos nosotros.

<And they also asked me “how do people speak there? What do people do there?”, em... also I think it was more like cultural, seeing what we think and what we do.>

Nuria: ¿Y eso os gustó?

<And did you like that?>

José: Sí, a mí me encantó, me encantó.

<Yes, I loved it, I loved it.>

Alberto: Sí, en lo general preguntaban más cosas de cultura, cosas de gastronomía, de política incluso, este... pero sí hubo unas dos o tres pequeñas ocasiones en las que preguntaron cuestiones de gramática, sobre todo al darse cuenta de que el español de España y el de México son muy diferentes.

<Yes, in general they asked more things about culture, about gastronomy, even politics, em... but yes, there were around two or three little occasions where they asked questions about grammar, especially after realising that the Spanish from Spain and from Mexico are very different.>

(Focus group 2, LC1)

In Holliday's grammar of culture, "statements about culture" are linked to "how we present ourselves and what we choose to call 'our culture'—how we position ourselves and how we choose to play the 'culture card'" (Holliday, 2019, p. 5). With the use of "we" in "what we think and what we do" ("*lo que pensamos y hacemos nosotros*"), José positions himself and the other two participants as representatives of the same "Mexican culture". However, these Mexican students came from different regions in Mexico, and they mentioned during the focus group that it was important for them to enlighten these Spanish learners about the linguistic and cultural diversity within their country. Thus, they also moved beyond the large culture approach which sees culture and language as contained within national boundaries (Holliday, 1999). They insisted, for example, on their interest in showing the Spanish learners the different accents from Mexico and some regional expressions from their hometowns.

(5) Schools in different countries and different decades (LC2)

In LC2, participants also compared particular social and political structures from the different countries they knew:

We are having an interesting conversation about the different types of schools in our countries (Mexico, Spain, France and England) and the issue of segregation. The age range in the group covers four decades, and we also talk about our experiences with school meals when we were young. Ruth and Joanne mention that something common at their time was tapioca, which they were not very fond of. I ask them what tapioca is and how it was served, because I think tapioca is a very different thing in the north of Brazil. About schools, Pedro, the Mexican guy, says that something he

learned recently and struck him as very odd is that some English non-Catholic families baptise their children just so that they can get a place in a Catholic school, known for having a good reputation. Joanne says that it might not always be a requirement, but she agrees that it is funny. I didn't know that! (Researcher's reflective journal, second time in LC2, 08/12/2016)

In Holliday's grammar of culture, there are particular social and political structures which "form us and make us different from each other" (Holliday, 2019, p. 3). In this case, these structures were related to one's upbringing and socialisation within a particular nation and educational system. The intergenerational characteristics of the group added to the conversations a historical dimension, often highlighting how different cultural and social realities have changed in the places where we grew up. These perspectives were often shared from the point of view of personal trajectories (Holliday, 2011); for instance, I told the group how I experienced during the 90s the arrival of the first students from Morocco and Dominican Republic in my primary school class in Madrid, while this same school nowadays is highly multicultural and multilingual.

The topic about schools gave Pedro the opportunity to share an interesting fact that struck him as odd about schooling practices in England: the fact that being baptised, which is normally viewed as a religious tradition only practiced within Catholic families, has been repurposed by some parents as a means to increase their child's chances to get into a good school. For these parents, enabling a good education for their children outweighs the potential incoherence of having them to adhere to certain religious values which are not part of the family tradition. This example illustrates how religious identities and practices cannot be defined in fixed or static terms. Like all cultural practices, they can have multiple meanings and should be interpreted as situated in particular sociocultural and historical contexts (Holliday, 2011).

(6) The separatist movement in Catalonia and other parts of the world (LC2)

In October 2017, there was a highly controversial Catalan independence referendum which occupied much of the Spanish and international media because of the political turmoil that developed around it. Being a Spanish migrant in the UK, I was asked by many people I encountered around the time about the situation there and my perspective on it. There was an LC2 get-together soon after the

referendum and, at the end of it, I told the participants that I was surprised that this topic did not come up during our conversations. Thus, Hugo brought it up in our following encounter, which took place three weeks later and was audio-recorded:

Hugo: Il y a trois semaines, pour suivre la dernière fois, tu nous as rappelés, Nuria, qu'est-ce qu'il s'est passé, des trucs en Espagne en ce moment... Qu'est-ce qu'il se passe en Espagne

<Three weeks ago, to follow up on last time, you reminded us, Nuria, what happened, things in Spain right now... What's happening in Spain>

[...]

Nuria: La dernière fois je vous ai dit que c'était drôle que vous ne... m'avez... pas demandée sur la Catalogne

<The last time I told you that it was funny that you didn't ask me about Catalonia>

Ruth: Oui, oui

<Yes, yes>

Nuria: Parce que tout le monde maintenant me demande

<Because everyone now is asking me>

Hugo: Oui, en fait c'est probablement la raison pour laquelle j'ai rien demandé. Je me suis dit que tu dois en avoir jusqu'à là de la Catalogne

<Yes, in fact that's probably the reason why I didn't ask anything. I thought that you must be fed up with Catalonia>

Ruth: Oui oui oui, moi aussi, moi aussi

<Yes, yes, yes, me too, me too>

(LC2 naturally-occurring conversation, 09/11/2017)

Hugo and Ruth showed awareness and sensitivity to the fact that, being Spanish, I had probably been talking about the recent events in my country too much already, and admitted that this was the reason why they preferred not to bring it up. I then asked them if they had been following the events, and both said yes. Ruth even had the latest issue of *The Economist* with her, and showed us the feature article she

had read about it. “*T’as fait ta recherche*” (“you’ve done your research”), said Hugo. We started sharing our views on the development of the events and the discussion lasted for more than 27 minutes (until another participant arrived). We discussed the complexities of the issue, questioned whether 50% of votes would be enough to decide on such important matters (like Brexit), compared the Catalan movement to other separatist movements in Europe (e.g., in Scotland, Corsica, the north of Italy, and Flanders), and discussed the meaning of independence in each of these contexts in terms of their global position, politics, and certain cultural resources (Holliday, 2011): the economic ambitions behind each movement, their left-wing and right-wing ideologies, linguistic identities, and the romanticism that in some cases surrounds the idea of becoming independent.

This discussion went beyond the comparative approach and addressed global socio-political issues rather than culture-specific practices. The three of us were Europeans interconnected by the shared socio-political histories of our countries and were able to contribute with our own analysis:

Hugo: Mais oui, pour moi aussi, le gouvernement espagnol a manqué de flexibilité. C’est vrai qu’ils ont toujours dit que c’est pas possible d’organiser un référendum à cause de la constitution, mais oui, un peuple, s’il veut, s’il devient indépendant, ça devrait être possible, mais après il faut mettre les conditions, il faut... il faut regarder ça, mais les lois peuvent être changées [...]

<But yes, for me also the Spanish government missed some flexibility. It’s true that they always said it’s not possible to organise a referendum because of the constitution, but yes, if the people want, if they become independent, that should be possible, but then it’s necessary to put some conditions... it’s necessary to look at that, but the laws can be changed>

Ruth: Oui, oui, je crois que le gouvernement avait tort d’envoyer la police se battre contre le peuple, ça c’est une erreur

<Yes, yes, I think that the government was wrong to send the police to fight against the people, that’s a mistake>

Hugo: C’est une grosse erreur de communication

<That’s a big mistake of communication>

Ruth: Exactement

<Exactly>

Nuria: Aha

Hugo: C'est facile pour les partis indépendantistes de revendiquer qu'en effet les espagnols ont utilisé la violence et après... Ce qui est horrible aussi c'est comment les mots sont utilisés à l'excès, comme les partis indépendantistes comparent le gouvernement espagnol actuel au franquisme. Moi je connais pas le franquisme, bien sûr, mais j'imagine que c'était bien pire. Je pense pas que les gens auraient pu manifester dans la rue leurs idées aussi ouvertement sous le franquisme. Ils seraient allés en prison ou...

<It's easy for the separatists to claim that the Spanish government used violence and then... What is also horrible is how words are used to excess, how the separatist parties compare the current Spanish government with Francoism. I didn't live under the Franco regime, of course, but I imagine that it was much worse. I don't think people would have been able to manifest their ideas so openly in the street under the Franco regime. They would have gone to prison or...>

(LC2 naturally-occurring conversation, 09/11/2017)

This excerpt illustrates that, during the conversation, I was not positioned as the “expert” on Spanish politics just by virtue of being Spanish. As opposed to the LC1 excerpts discussed before in this section, where each participant seemed to enlighten others about the places they knew best, in this case, the three of us were informed about the events in Catalonia and contributed equally to the conversation by sharing our different knowledge and analysis. Also, the discussion revolved around the complexities of the issue without the need to take sides or agree on a conclusion. Thus, the nature of the conversational encounter was reminiscent of the “tertulias” mentioned in Chapter 2 (2.2), where people gathered for the pleasure of engaging in intellectually stimulating discussions with others.

(7) The expected behaviour of a married woman (LC2)

The following account from my reflective journal describes the only time when I felt some tension among LC2 participants. It captures an episode where Sonia expressed her views on how being a married woman, in her opinion, is not compatible with going out with male friends:

Sonia is shocked by the fact that Ruth, who is a married woman, went with Hugo, who is also in a relationship, to the cinema and for lunch together. Ruth tells her that she has other male friends she meets up with occasionally. Sonia responds loudly “*Ah bon?!*” She is shocked by the fact that Ruth goes out with male friends without her husband. “What if he

kisses you? What would you do?” At the beginning I think she’s joking, but I’m starting to realise that she means it. She keeps saying that Ruth’s openness is too modern for her (“*trop modern ça*”). Hugo and I laugh, as Ruth deals with her inquisitive comments very patiently. I’m thinking about how I can back her up. I ask her how long she has been with Mike. “35 years”. Then I say that I guess their relationship is strong enough if they have been together for so long and that, in my opinion, the fact that they do so many things independently is really nice, as this makes the relationship “healthier” (I say this word in English, because I don’t know how to say it in French, but, nonetheless, nobody understands what I mean by “healthier” in this context, so I just go back to “strong”). Funnily enough, at a later point during our conversations, Sonia says: “you know? I completely see myself in Ruth! Once we realised that if we were to make a playlist with, let’s say, 20 songs, we would choose the same songs!” Ruth says that it’s true: they have so many things in common in terms of music and literature. (Researcher’s reflective journal, 23/03/2017)

While the conversation focused on beliefs about what a married woman can or cannot do, none of the participants used a block narrative approach to associate their own personal beliefs and behaviours with any particular culture or nation (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017). Using Holliday’s grammar of culture (2011), the participants did not draw upon their cultural resources (e.g., their upbringing and socialisation within a particular nation, religion or ideology) as factors that determined their views on the topic. Instead, Ruth and Sonia spoke as individuals who, despite their clashing beliefs on this matter, could still be friends and connect in many other ways (e.g., in music and literature preferences).

This episode helped me to understand some of the participants’ remarks during the focus group. As I showed in Chapter 5 (5.3.2), when I asked Joanne why she started to attend LC2 during the focus group, she said that first it was her interest in speaking French, but gradually the role of French shifted to the background as the group started to bond as friends and discuss intellectually stimulating topics for her. After she said that, the others recalled some memorable conversations they had:

Nadia: Il y a des discussions très politiques et très vives ici, hein ? On a eu le Brexit, on a eu la position des femmes... [everyone laughs out loud]

<There are very political and lively discussions here, huh? We had Brexit, the position of women...>

Hugo: Oui, je me rappelle de ça, avec Sonia, oui, très forte !

<Yes, I remember that, with Sonia, yes, very good!>

Mike: Le grand débat, Joanne et Sonia, fantastique !

<The big debate, Joanne and Sonia, fantastic!>

Hugo: sur le rôle des femmes

<about the role of women>

Mike: Oui, ça c'était super !

<Yes, it was great!>

(LC2 focus group)

Unfortunately, I was not part of the group when the “grand débat” about the role of women took place, but the fact that participants still remembered and recalled it after more than three years means that it must have been a truly interesting debate where Joanne and Sonia dialogically confronted their views on this thorny topic.

As Belz (2007) asserts, being interculturally competent does not mean agreeing with others' points of view or convincing others of the validity of one's opinions, although Holmes (2014) argues that intercultural speakers are expected to seek mutual understanding with others with seemingly irreconcilable positions. There is no evidence in the data of whether participants improved their mutual understanding as a result of these conversations. What is salient, however, is that participants seemed to associate a sense of pleasure and enjoyment with these LC debates or “tertulias”, which offered an opportunity to engage in multiperspectivity—or discussing different worldviews with others. Thus, participants created and negotiated a LC small culture (Holliday, 1999), where relationships were forged through speaking French about intellectually stimulating topics. Whether there was an elitist dimension to this co-constructed small culture is something that I explore in the next section.

Summary

In this section I showed that international (and multilingual) diversity was seen by participants as an asset to experience multiperspectivity in LCs. The excerpts illustrated that “cultural differences” were not the cause of any problem in

communication, but a casual topic of conversation. Without an agenda, conversations about culture and different worldviews emerged in the situated affordances of each LC. Participants experienced “interculturality without culture” (Dervin, 2012, p. 187): the languages they spoke in the LC were not “filled” with specific “target cultures” (Risager, 2006), but with their personal interests and languacultures. In other words, the (intercultural) reality of LCs was a situated reality co-constructed by individuals with their subjectivities as they interacted with one another. Similar to the tandem partnerships studied by Woodin (2018), the relational aspects of interculturality were central to the LCs.

Participants manifested cosmopolitan and decentring dispositions by seeking out opportunities to speak with cultural others—in multiple languages—and learn from them. The experience of meeting and interacting with people from different horizons helped participants to recognise differences in points of view and identify new perspectives, meanings, beliefs and behaviours which before they might have taken for granted. For that reason alone, the LC was a rewarding and fulfilling intercultural experience for some participants. However, in some cases, the focus was too much on particular cultural products underpinned by a large culture approach, which sees culture as contained within national boundaries (Holliday, 1999). In other cases, personal trajectories complemented these grand narratives about culture. In that respect, the closer and more stable relationship that LC2 participants were able to forge allowed for much richer discussions around global socio-political issues, moving beyond superficial block narratives (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017) and comparisons between “national cultures”. This suggests that the nature of the relationship between speakers plays an important role in the emergence of more or less superficial conversations about culture.

Also, the data suggest that participants were interested in cultural others as long as the LC was preserved as a safe and comfortable environment for the exchange of ideas (McKinley et al., 2019). While the myth of the native speaker is still ever-present in language learning discourses, and some learners even rated their LC experience based on the number of native speakers they could interact with in these events, a closer and more critical examination of the social environment reveals that it was not *any* native speaker that was welcome in, or was able to adapt to, the small culture of LCs. Certain types of interdiscursive communication were not well

received and were rejected in order to preserve group harmony. Thus, there was an implicit distinction between accepted and non-accepted otherness based on ideologies, political beliefs, and social behaviours. Following from that, in the next section I explore whether an underlying invisible fence might exist in these otherwise open and cosmopolitan spaces.

7.3 The LC as a cosmopolitan activity

In this final section I delve into the cosmopolitan dimension of the LCs.

Cosmopolitanism involves a disposition to experience transnational ways of life (Ros i Solé, 2013), and willingness to socialise in multiple languages as part of one's leisure activities is an example of that cosmopolitan, decentring disposition (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004). Some scholars have also noted that cosmopolitan learners are also those who have the socio-economic means to travel across the globe to support their multilingual journeys (Najar, 2015; Rizvi, 2007).

As discussed in Chapter 6, the multilingual subjectivities of LC participants were often linked to fond memories of experiences abroad, which they shared with each other in conversation. In LC1, where most participants were university students, one of the most common topics of conversation was the year abroad, or any other extensive experiences of travelling abroad. Ben and Alice, both British, shared in Spanish their adventures of backpacking in Perú (see the chapter's opening vignette). At their 20-21 years of age, they had already been travelling for leisure in different faraway countries, and could share their experiences with one another. Alice's sister (Laura) was studying in Australia and, when she visited LC1, she met Amy, an international student from the United States, with whom she discussed their personal experiences of study abroad in Australia and the UK respectively. Rebecca, of around the same age, talked about her experiences teaching English in Nepal and Togo; Molly, about her volunteering work in Lesbos and work placement in France; Rachel, about her experiences as an *au pair* in Madrid and the Italian Isola d'Elba.

Actually, one thing, I don't know whether it's something in my head or not, but I think... I don't like to talk about going abroad too much [in other social circles], because I think people would be like "ah, that again!", but at the language café everyone talks about it. (Rebecca's interview, LC1)

Rebecca's remark is consistent with the idea that "[m]obile students in higher education are often considered as privileged movers with shared discourses, aims and images" (Tarp, 2020, p. 272). LC1 was a space to exchange anecdotes and intercultural experiences which involved encounters with otherness that happened elsewhere. Thus, the multilingual bubble mentioned in 7.1.2—or "otro mundo", to re-use Nathan's phrase—could be as well described in terms of a cosmopolitan bubble insofar as it is co-constructed through shared discourses of transnational attachments and ways of life (Delanty, 2005).

The cosmopolitan bubble of the LC enhanced some participants' imagined identities with a focus on intercultural becomings and a redesign of their imagined "cultural cartographies" (Ros i Solé, 2013). For Rebecca, the LC was not an intercultural experience per se, or a place to grow as an intercultural speaker, but the conversations she had there had an impact on her imagined identities and willingness to invest in experiencing interculturality:

Nuria: ¿Piensas que aprendes a ser más intercultural [en el language café]?

<Do you think you learn how to be more intercultural [in the language café]?>

Rebecca: I probably wouldn't go that far. Like it's only a couple of hours and you stay in the [Student Union bar]... [laughter]. But it like makes you want to have intercultural experiences.

(Rebecca's interview, LC1)

By listening to other people's experiences abroad and the personal attachments they created with the languages they spoke, Rebecca felt a desire to engage in similar experiences. She herself inspired others, too. Lydia, for instance, wrote in her pre-interview reflective task that she had a memorable conversation with Rebecca, as she was impressed by her experiences of working in Nepal for two months.

Similarly, although Amy was an international student from the United States herself, she felt motivated to go abroad to study Spanish after listening to the experiences of her peers:

Cuanto más que yo oigo sobre las experiencias de estudiantes en sus años extranjeros, cuanto más quiero ir en uno o, al menos, hacer un curso en el verano.

<The more I hear about the students' experiences of their year abroad, the more I want to go in one or, at least, do a summer course.>

(Amy's reflective writing, LC1)

Another example—discussed in detail in Chapter 6 (6.3.2) in relation to self-projection in successful others—concerns Molly's account of an inspiring conversation she had in her hometown LC with a woman who made her imagine her future career with rewarding experiences of working in a multilingual environment, and “nomadic” dwelling (Ros i Solé, 2016).

(...) she was just saying how much she enjoyed being able to speak both her languages in the office, and it kind of just introduced the idea of being able to... maybe I could work in the UK and in France. (Molly's interview, LC1)

Block (2015) argues that looking at the construct of social class can help us better understand different learners' behaviours towards their language learning project. Castillo Zaragoza (2014) argues that the learner's socioeconomic situation shapes the ways in which they envision their “possible L2 selves” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), which, in turn, has an impact on the perceived learning affordances and how they act upon them. The participants in the above excerpts were cosmopolitan learners who “had the economic and social capacity to travel and to afford language journeys across the world” (Najar, 2015, p. 151), something that is not accessible to all. Thus, they could be described as *elite* cosmopolitans.

However, cosmopolitanism should be a “humanistic project—not an economic one” (Petriglieri, 2016). Canagarajah (2013, p. 193) contends that cosmopolitanism can be experienced in one's local neighbourhood, without the need to travel, “in forms of super-diversity constructed by people of different language and cultural backgrounds”. Paradoxically, while one of the aims of my research was precisely to challenge the assumption of having to go abroad as the only way to have meaningful multilingual, intercultural socialisation experiences, it seems that having extensive leisured travel experiences or transnational attachments of some kind—or the socioeconomic means to afford them—may constitute a very important source of cultural capital to be able to flow in these LC environments.

Despite being free, open events, the LCs in this study seemed to attract people from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds with similar cultural and educational capital. This might constitute another type of invisible fence besides the one concerning affective boundaries discussed in Murray et al. (2017) (see 5.2.7). In the context of LC1, this invisible fence could be explained by its links with a university and the fact that it was mainly attended by university students. However, LC2 had no institutional links, and yet it also attracted highly educated professionals with an interest in languages and cultures as a form of personal development, or leisure and consumption (Kubota, 2011), and not a form of investment to escalate the socioeconomic ladder (Norton, 2000). Bourdieu (1984) found that an emphasis on aesthetics over utility is associated with the higher socioeconomic classes. Most participants in both LC1 and LC2 had in common that they enjoyed socialising in languages as a leisure activity and had the time to engage in such an intellectual hobby for fun.

Summary

Many LC participants could be described as globetrotters even from a young age, and as cosmopolitans who, through language learning and travel, wanted to “discover and immerse [themselves] in new exciting cultural worlds through aesthetic, intellectual and moral experiences” (Ros i Solé, 2013, p. 332). They actively pursued transnational ways of life, and the LCs enabled them to engage with different languages in their ordinary everyday activities and leisure. Moreover, sharing transnational attachments and ways of life with others helped participants to maintain and develop their cosmopolitan dispositions, and mobilised their imagined cosmopolitan identities.

Nevertheless, the data suggests that the LCs in this study, despite being free and open to the public, did not democratise the language immersion experience, as the events were mainly attended by “elite” cosmopolitans who can afford to discover the world for leisure. This finding needs to be interpreted within the context of language learning in the UK (see 1.1 and 5.1.4), but it highlights the importance of considering social class as an aspect that can shape the experience of interculturality and cosmopolitanism.

Summary of Chapter 7

This chapter has investigated how participants experienced interculturality in the LCs, to answer the study's third and final research question. The chapter was divided into three main sections: participants' understandings of the LC as an intercultural space (7.1), multiperspectivity, or learning about each other's worldviews (7.2), and the LC as a cosmopolitan activity (7.3).

The first section (7.1) showed that the notion of "intercultural" was associated with diversity in terms of national and linguistic backgrounds. Participants considered the LC more or less intercultural based on the number of people from other countries with whom they had the chance to interact. This created a tension between my investment as a researcher in non-essentialist discourses about culture and the large culture approach (Holliday, 1999) that participants manifested in their accounts. Nevertheless, some scholars in intercultural communication concede that essentialism is a "universal sin" (Dervin, 2016, p. 81), and that the "thread mode" (Holliday, 2019) is not the default way of talking about culture.

The international diversity and multilingual dynamics involved in the environment contributed to a sense of translocation in some participants, who described the LC as a different world. Thus, consistent with previous studies (Igarashi, 2016), the LC could be conceptualised as a *heterotopia*, or a place that "is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). The data showed that languaging in LCs afforded the co-construction of an alternative social space where subject positions (Kramsch, 2009) based on conventional dichotomies such as local/foreigner, host/guest, and self/other became blurred. These co-constructed spaces are abstract, but, at the same time, they are grounded in, and emerge from, the real materialities of face-to-face interaction and the relationship between learners and their surrounding physical environment (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004; Ros i Solé, 2016).

In the second section (7.2), I explored how participants engaged in multiperspectivity and decentring dispositions in the LC. Many participants reported attitudes of curiosity towards culturally diverse others, and these

participants actively capitalised on the international diversity of the LC to learn about other worldviews, and reflect upon their own. These participants' accounts clearly focused on enjoyment and pleasure when talking about intercultural encounters (Ros i Solé, 2016). Nevertheless, the data suggest that the LC experience involves an exploration of otherness and diversity, as much as gathering with like-minded, cosmopolitan, multilingual speakers interested in learning from cultural others. While the presence of native speakers of the target language would be normally highly valued, I showed two examples of native speakers who were not considered an asset to the group, but rather a nuisance or disruption to the enjoyable social and discursive dynamics of the LC. These two examples suggest that, albeit internationally and linguistically diverse, the LCs were largely preserved as "safe" spaces with rather homogeneous discursive practices, and where conflict was avoided.

An analysis of different participants' accounts indicated that the experience of meeting and interacting with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds helped participants recognise differences in points of view and identify new perspectives, meanings, beliefs and behaviours which before they might have taken for granted. Others, like the three Mexican postgraduate students, enjoyed showing aspects of their own cultures and language varieties to attentive language learners. However, many of these interactions remained at a surface of mere comparison of cultural differences between countries (Woodin, 2001) underpinned by large culture ideologies (Holliday, 1999), and without any evidence of critical engagement with, or interpretation of, the new knowledge. In the case of LC2, thanks in part to the continuity of the group and the deeper relationships they were able to develop, participants often engaged in deeper discussions about global socio-political issues. Nevertheless, intercultural development cannot be an assumed outcome of attending these LCs. It was not clear from the data whether participants developed "critical cultural awareness" (Byram, 1997) or better intercultural understandings of self and other.

From this discussion I also concluded that the LCs in this study were not associated with any given "target culture" specifically, but intercultural experiences were co-constructed based on participants' identities and subjectivities (e.g., their complex multilingual repertoires, their emotions and memories connected with different

places and peoples in the world, the transnational relationships they maintain in their everyday life, the cultural products they use and value, etc.). It could be argued that the heterotopic place of LCs affords the experience of “interculturality without culture” (Dervin, 2012, p. 187). The *linguae francae* that participants chose to speak were “filled” with participants’ languacultures (Risager, 2006) rather than “target language cultures”.

This point led to the third and final section of the chapter (7.3), where I explored the LC as a cosmopolitan activity. The LC experience fed learners’ curiosity, enhanced their imagined identities as multilingual, cosmopolitan speakers, giving them a personal purpose to invest in languages and the cultural worlds around them. From a critical perspective, the cosmopolitan dispositions of LC participants seemed to be underpinned by their privileged socioeconomic status. While there is nothing wrong with that, this created another point of tension for me as a researcher. When I set out, I was hoping that I would be able to defend LCs as spaces that democratise the language immersion experience by offering people from all backgrounds a space to socialise in languages without the need to travel far. However, I gradually became aware that having a certain type of cultural capital was important in order to be able to flourish in the LC environment.

Thus, to answer the question of how participants experienced interculturality in the LCs, my findings conclude that the LCs afforded them an exploration of certain types of otherness and diversity, as much as they offered a safe space to connect with like-minded, cosmopolitan, multilingual speakers with shared goals and interests.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions of the study. It begins by presenting an overview of the study together with the key findings and contributions in response to the research questions guiding it (8.1). Following from this, the main theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications arising from the research findings are discussed (8.2). I then highlight some of the limitations of the study (8.3) and directions for future research (8.4), before concluding the chapter with some final remarks to underline the study's major contributions and significance (8.5).

8.1 Overview of the study: findings and contributions

This study investigated the affordances of two LCs in northern England to co-create experiences of multilingual socialisation, collaborative learning, multilingual identities, and interculturality. The overarching aim of this study was to draw attention to LCs as meaningful sites for language learning and socialisation, thus contributing to knowledge about a type of non-instructional setting that is under-investigated. Previous research on LCs to date has been dominated by EFL contexts with a narrow focus on the instrumental value of LCs to improve language proficiency, ignoring the perspectives of already proficient speakers with complex multilingual subjectivities (Kramsch, 2009) who might have other motivations for participating in these events. An underlying assumption that has permeated all facets of this research is that language is more than a skill or a code (Kramsch, 2021), and that languages are lived, and not just learned or acquired (Phipps, 2007; Ros i Solé, 2016). This understanding of language is embedded in the theoretical concepts of “*linguaging*” (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004) and “*translanguaging*” (Canagarajah, 2013; Li, 2018), which have been used as conceptual lenses in the discussion of findings. The study also aimed to fill a gap in the literature regarding the development of intercultural competence in these environments, often treated as an assumed outcome in previous studies. To that end, I drew on Holliday's (2011) “*grammar of culture*” and Amadasi and Holliday's (2017) description of “*block*” and “*thread*” narratives to explore how participants experienced interculturality in the LCs.

The study adopted a qualitative and interpretivist approach, underpinned by social constructionism, ethnographic methods of data collection, and an ecological perspective to researching language learning. A complex set of data was collected from two different LCs through participant-observation, audio-recording of naturally-occurring conversations in the LCs, audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with 24 participants, short written reflections from eight participants, and my own researcher journal. I analysed these data following Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis. Also, reflexivity with a researching multilingually perspective (Holmes et al., 2013) was an important aspect that shaped the study's methodological approach. My complex positioning as a language learner, teacher, and researcher in the study, and the transparency offered regarding how my multilingual subjectivities interacted with those of the research participants', were a key component of an approach to research that does justice to naturally fluid multilingual environments. In doing so, translanguaging as methodology (see 4.4.5) represents a major methodological contribution of the study (Polo-Pérez & Holmes, forthcoming).

The research questions allowed for a holistic approach whereby LCs were treated as "spaces of possibility" (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p. 38) linked to the notion of "affordance" in ecological research (van Lier, 2004). In what follows, I summarise the contributions of the study by showing how the findings chapters addressed each of the research questions. These were informed by the three main interrelated themes emerging from the literature review: co-constructing language learning and multilingual socialisation, the experience of multilingual identities, and the experience of interculturality in the LCs.

RQ1: How do participants co-construct language learning and multilingual socialisation in the ecologies of LCs?

Subquestion: What affordances and challenges do participants perceive in this environment?

The answers to these questions were discussed in Chapter 5. Following an ecological approach, the LCs were described as interconnected with other places, and situated within a particular sociohistorical context, which has an impact on what goes on in the here-and-now of social interaction during the LC events. For

instance, the data showed that LC1 participants, who were young university students, saw these events as an informal activity to complement their instructed learning, and tended to frame their experiences in the LC in comparison with the classroom. Also, participants from both LC1 and LC2 often drew on multilingual socialisation experiences from elsewhere (e.g., other LCs or sojourns abroad) to make sense of their LC experiences, thus suggesting that these events were only one activity in their “interconnected web of learning opportunities” (Reinders & Benson, 2017, p. 14). Furthermore, the situatedness of LC1 and LC2 in the UK at this particular sociohistorical time provided a context to explore participants’ approaches to language learning. As the data demonstrated, their approaches were rarely informed by a need or desire to climb up the socioeconomic ladder, as is nowadays the case for many learners of English around the world (Duff, 2017; Gao, 2012, 2016). The aims and motivations for speaking languages and participating in the LCs shaped the co-construction of the social environment of the LCs, whose ecologies were analysed separately, as I discuss below.

LC1 participants were university students with different multilingual socialisation experiences and transnational attachments. Four main motivations for participating in LC1 were identified: to socialise in languages for personal enjoyment with instrumental value; to socialise in one’s linguistic comfort zone and help others; to expand one’s social networks; and to complete coursework set by a teacher. LC2 participants were professionals of a wide range of ages, also with complex multilingual repertoires and transnational attachments. They reported three main motivations for participating in this LC: to socialise and find new ways to engage with the local community; to keep their languages alive (mainly French, in this case); and to socialise in languages for personal enjoyment and intellectual pleasure. Participants from both LCs often had overlapping motivations which also evolved in time as they developed a deeper relationship with the environment. A focus on pleasure and the value of LCs as an intellectual and social hobby complemented, and often outweighed, the instrumental value of these events for the development of language skills. In other words, LCs need to be conceptualised as much more than places to “practise” or “learn” languages, which represents a main contribution of this study. This resonates with the literature that views languages as *lived*, and not just learned or acquired (e.g., Kramsch, 2009; Phipps, 2007; Ros i Solé, 2016).

The social environment of each LC was found to be interconnected with the physical environment, as different elements shaped participants' perceptions, emotions, and ways of behaving in these events. For instance, the background music, the large open space with different activities going on at the same time, and the messy and flexible arrangement of people around language tables in LC1 contributed to the participants' perception of the informality of the event. Also, I discussed the symbolic meaning of the stickers that helped sorting out people into language groups in LC1 (see 5.2.4), but also influenced participants' perceptions of each other's multilingual identities. The flexible arrangement around language tables and the complex multilingual repertoires that participants brought with them contributed to the co-construction of translanguaging spaces (Li, 2018), where language practices were negotiated intersubjectively. In LC2, the variations in the choice of venue—from meeting in a pub to hosting dinners at participants' houses—reflected the evolution of this group from being a public event towards becoming a private gathering of multilingual friends. Drinks were a mediating artefact with symbolic meaning in LC2: they were highlighted in the Facebook description of the group, indexing a relaxed social atmosphere ("A glass of wine, a pint of beer, a bit of conversation to prepare the weekend"). Drinks were also part of the shared repertoire, cultural practices, and in-group intersubjectivity (Kramsch, 2009) that participants had co-constructed over time, which characterises the emergence of groups with cohesive behaviour or "small cultures" (Holliday, 1999). For instance, it was customary in this group to buy each other drinks, and accepting or not to order more drinks was pragmatically understood in communication as acceptance or rejection to stay chatting for a bit longer.

Considering the interrelations between the social and physical aspects of the environment, the findings showed that LC1 participants co-constructed their learning and socialisation experiences based on three aspects: (1) sense of freedom, agency and authenticity; (2) joint enterprise and reciprocity; and (3) emotion work. In relation to the first theme, participants in LC1 felt liberated from the constraints of the classroom—e.g., time limitations, the pressure of high-stakes assessment, the need to follow a syllabus with pre-set topics, or the lack of agency to choose different modes of participation, registers, and language varieties. Without these constraints, participants in LC1 could focus on performing their social selves and being who they wanted to be in the language(s) of their choice—

that is, they could focus on *linguaging* (Phipps & González, 2004) and *translinguaging* (Canagarajah, 2014; Li, 2018). Regarding the joint enterprise and sense of reciprocity, the realisation that everyone in LC1 was “in the same boat” made participants perceive this environment as less threatening and more power-balanced than other spaces for language socialisation. Echoing Balçıkanlı’s (2017) findings, participants conceptualised LC1 as a “safe” place: a place where mistakes do not matter and everyone helps one another. Finally, emotion work played an important role in LC1. Participants’ feelings and emotions evolved during the course of the event from anxiety-related, to relief and joy, and finishing with a sense of achievement. This contributes to knowledge about the place of affect in language learning. Rather than regarding affect as lodged in the mind of the individual and acting as “filter” than can inhibit language learning (Krashen, 1981), the data illustrated how emotions are interwoven with the social experience of linguaging (Phipps, 2007), and are therefore intersubjective and emergent in social interaction (Ros i Solé, 2016).

The challenges and limitations that participants perceived in LC1 were that conversations were often repetitive and superficial, that the LC was not a place to improve language accuracy, that the events were not frequent enough, and that only widely-taught languages in the UK were represented.

Due to the more stable nature of the group in LC2, where participants had known each other for a long time, emotion work did not emerge as a salient theme. Instead, LC2 participants co-constructed and maintained their own space for multilingual socialisation based on two aspects: the importance of bonding and friendship, and the pleasure of engaging in multiperspective and cosmopolitan debates drawing on each other’s multilingual and transnational biographies. Regarding the first theme, all LC2 participants found ways to embed their multilingual repertoires in their everyday social activities and relationships. Bonding in this group was important in order to sustain those durable multilingual relationships. Also, since the group was rather small, its survival relied on participants’ interdependence and commitment to attend regularly. The intimacy that participants achieved over time resulted in deep learning about each other and their worldviews; however, intimacy also had its challenges, as the group had lost some members in the past due to hostilities between some participants. This is

why one participant referred to the remaining regular attendees as “*le noyau résistant*” (“the resistant core”). This resistant core valued the multilingual and transnational nature of the group as an affordance for the emergence of intellectually stimulating topics based on each other’s diverse idiosyncrasies, knowledge, and life experiences.

The two LCs had the potential to habituate language and translanguaging in the lives of multilingual speakers regardless of geographical location. Participants co-constructed the LCs to seek out alternative and decentred ways of dwelling in their languages by making them part of their everyday lives or leisure activities, irrespective of the “target language” country proximity.

RQ2: How do participants experience their multilingual identities in the LCs?

Chapter 6 built upon the thick description and contextualisation from the previous chapter to explore how participants’ multilingual identities emerged in these environments which they co-constructed for themselves. Participants experienced their multilingual identities in multiple and diverse ways, based to a great extent on the previous multilingual socialisation baggage they brought with them. Thus, the findings revealed three different ways in which participants experienced their multilingual identities in the LCs.

First, participants mobilised their multilingual identities by engaging in metalanguaging, defined as language learning experiences, emotions, beliefs, and memories associated with one’s multilingual repertoires. The high frequency of metalanguaging episodes in the data reflects the fact that LC participants were connected by a shared interest in languages. Through metalanguaging, participants encountered other people’s understandings and experiences of multilingualism and were able to relate these to their own subjectivities—e.g., their language ideologies, affective relationship with languages, trajectories, and aspirations as multilingual subjects (Kramsch, 2009). Underlying these subjectivities was often a view of speaking different languages as a pleasure, and an approach to languages as much more than employable skills.

Second, some participants also found in the LCs a space to reconnect with their multilingual social selves in three different ways: (1) by focusing on the joy of language rather than displaying classroom knowledge, (2) by invoking their

memories from joyful immersion experiences abroad, and (3) by breaking with the monotony of socialising in the dominant language of their context—which, in this case, for most participants was English. Thus, the LC afforded the development of personal attachments and relationships with and in languages that go beyond the academic or instrumental value, and such personal attachments are essential in the development of multilingual identities (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Developing multilingual identities is important because it enhances the willingness of speakers to invest in the languages they are learning (Fisher et al., 2020) and find new and more cohesive ways of interacting with the multilingual world that surrounds them and of which they are part (Phipps, 2019).

Finally, in relation to the above, the study also surfaced the construction of participants' sense of themselves as multilingual speakers (Kramsch, 2000; Ohta, 2001; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000), which concerned mainly participants who had scarce socialisation experiences in the language(s) they were practising in the LC—myself as a learner of French included. Some of these participants developed their self-perception as speakers of a particular language motivated by particular instances of successful communicative resourcefulness, by the positive comments others made on their linguistic abilities during the LC, and by an overall sense of achievement after the event. Another way in which participants reconstructed their self-perception was by projecting their idea of multilingual selves into others with successful language learning trajectories. Such encounters enabled learners to imagine new and encouraging possibilities for their future multilingual selves (Norton, 2013). Thus, interacting with more experienced multilinguals, afforded by the LC context, can have a positive impact on learners' imagined identities (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007), hence shaping their perception of the ideal multilingual self (Henry, 2017) away from the unattainable model of the native speaker (Byram, 1997; Cook, 1999; Dewaele, 2018; Holliday, 2006; Piller, 2002; Risager, 2006).

RQ3: How do participants experience interculturality in the LCs?

Chapter 7 addressed the study's third and last research question. The chapter was divided into three themes: first, how (or whether) participants understood the LC as an intercultural space; second, participants' experience of multiperspectivity, or

learning about different worldviews with others in the LCs; and third, the cosmopolitan dimension of these events.

Regarding the first theme, the findings revealed that international diversity was often associated with interculturality; thus, participants rated their LC experience as more or less intercultural based on the number of people from other countries they had the opportunity to interact with. This view is at odds with non-essentialist discourses of culture (Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 1999) and shows that the identification of “culture” with national groups still dominates everyday language, as others have noted (e.g., Amadasi & Holliday, 2017; Borghetti, 2019; McKinley et al, 2019; Piller, 2012). Consistent with Igarashi’s (2016) findings, participants also described the LC as “another world” that made them feel as if they were somewhere else (see 7.1.2). The LC can be then described as a heterotopia (Foucault, 1986), that is, a space that takes participants temporarily to an alternative world away from their everyday habitat or cultural environment. Albeit an abstract feeling, it emerged from the here-and-now interactions among participants as they intentionally introduced other languages into their ecosystem (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) to engage in new ways with their physical surroundings (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004; Ros i Solé, 2016).

With regard to the second theme of multiperspectivity, participants saw the international and multilingual diversity of the LCs as an enjoyable opportunity to learn about other people’s worldviews, thus showing decentring and cosmopolitan dispositions (Ros i Solé, 2013). Participants described learning about new perspectives, meanings, beliefs and behaviours in interaction with others as a pleasurable experience. Consistent with the findings in the previous two chapters, underlying these cosmopolitan dispositions was a focus on pleasure, which contrasts with the attention that much of the research in intercultural communication has paid to cultural obstacles that hinder communication in intercultural encounters (Ros i Solé, 2016). LC conversations often revolved around discussing cultural differences between people from different places, based on a large culture approach (Holliday, 1999), although there were instances of how personal trajectories complemented these grand narratives about culture (see 7.2.3). In that respect, the nature of the relationship between speakers played an important role in the emergence of more or less superficial conversations about

culture, reinforcing calls for a greater emphasis on the importance of the relational dimension in intercultural development (Dervin, 2016). Also, in contrast with previous studies, intercultural development cannot be assumed to be an outcome of attending these two LCs, since it was not evident from the data whether participants developed “critical cultural awareness” (Byram, 1997) or better intercultural understandings of self and other through critical engagement with the new knowledge. However, engaging in multiperspectivity through multilingual socialisation helps individuals realise that other ways of living are possible (Phipps & Levine, 2012) and enhances their intercultural curiosity (Byram, 1997) (see 7.2.1). A further conclusion was that LC conversations around multiperspectivity did not focus on any given “target cultures” specifically, but drew on participants languacultures (Risager, 2006) based on their subjectivities as multilinguals with transnational attachments. These findings represent important contributions to knowledge with relevant implications for language pedagogy, as I discuss later.

The focus on pleasure—as highlighted at different points across the findings chapters (e.g., in 5.2.2, 5.3.2, 6.1.1, 6.2.1, and 7.2.1)—meant that certain types of otherness were not well received or were even rejected in order to preserve group harmony. For instance, I discussed two examples of “native speakers”, one from each LC, whose presence was deemed detrimental to the group dynamics, even when the opportunity to interact with native speakers is normally highly valued in LCs (Gao, 2012; Jin & Cortazzi, 2002; Su & Wu, 2009) (see 7.2.2). Thus, the experience of interculturality in these two LCs needs to be interpreted as situated within the ecologies of these events, which tended to be preserved as safe or conflict-free spaces for language socialisation, as highlighted in Chapter 5 (5.2.6 and 5.2.7).

In relation to the last point, the third section of Chapter 7 explored the cosmopolitan dimension that permeated the experience of interculturality in these events. Having a certain type of cultural capital seemed desirable in order to be able to fit into the LC environments, thus revealing the interrelationship that exists in these events between leisure activities, cosmopolitanism, and social class. This interrelationship has been explained drawing on Bourdieu’s (1984) understanding of “taste” for certain leisure activities as a marker of social class (see 7.2.2 and 7.3). Bourdieu attempted to rationalise why certain people do not feel they belong to

certain environments, even when there are no apparent reasons why they would not be able to access them. Again, this finding needs to be interpreted within the context of language learning and socialisation in England, where English is the dominant language and learning additional languages is not perceived as a must for socioeconomic mobility (Duff, 2017). The little research that exists on LCs has not addressed the social class dimension of these language-centred leisure activities, which may represent an “invisible fence” (Murray et al., 2017) that restricts accessibility. Thus, this study contributes to knowledge about the role of social class in applied linguistics (Block, 2015; Castillo Zaragoza, 2014), and has important implications for pedagogy as well as directions for future research, as I explore below.

In conclusion, to answer the question of how participants experienced interculturality in the LCs, the study showed that the LCs afforded an exploration of certain types of otherness and diversity, as much as they offered a safe space to connect with like-minded, cosmopolitan, multilingual speakers with shared goals and interests.

8.2 Implications of the study

Having discussed the way in which the research questions have been answered, I turn to the theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications that can be drawn from the study.

8.2.1 Theoretical implications

Underpinned by an ecological approach to research in additional language development (van Lier, 2004), this study adds to decentred views of language education (Lytra et al., 2022; Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004; Ros i Solé, 2016) by foregrounding LCs as contact-zones with blurring boundaries between learning and leisure, and the importance of understanding the lived and embodied experience of languages beyond taxonomic competence models and individual levels of achievement. Based on this study’s findings, competence needs to be re-conceptualised as situated in social participation and enmeshed with the endeavour of establishing meaningful human connections.

Along similar lines, multilingual identities are conceptualised as relational and contingent to human sociality (Norton, 2000; van Lier, 2004) rather than as static individual features. The concept of *multilingual social self* represents one of this study's distinctive theoretical contributions. It refers to a self-concept that is co-constructed through multilingual social interaction and involves an image of self as able to socialise and flow in multilingual environments through the mobilisation of complex repertoires and multilingual subjectivities (e.g. the memories, emotions, and personal attachments linked to different languages). It is a multilingual self that disentangles itself from the institutional roles that teachers and students often have to play in the classroom setting. Nevertheless, both language educators and language learners should think of ways to make space for the multilingual social self in the classroom, as I will discuss below in the subsection on pedagogical implications.

Researchers need to be wary when describing a nationally and linguistically diverse space as intercultural, or as one that promotes intercultural learning or development. Holliday's (2011) "grammar of culture" and Amadasi and Holliday's (2017) concepts of "threads" and "blocks" (see 3.4.2) have been useful in analysing how culture is discursively drawn upon in conversation. Considering the intersectional aspects of interculturality (Dervin, 2016), the findings from the two LCs investigated in this study showed that, while participants engaged in multiperspectivity, they also preserved these spaces as conflict-free, as much as possible, consistent with the idea that LCs aim to be "safe" spaces for language socialisation. However, intercultural communication and development may involve conflict, dealing with uncomfortable, sustained dialogue, and also time for individuals to process, think, interpret, digest, and incorporate new ways of understanding (Phipps & González, 2004; Phipps, 2019).

8.2.2 Methodological implications

The main methodological implications of the study arise from the processes of conducting research in more than one language and the engagement of the researcher's multilingual repertoire in those processes. The linguistic repertoires available in the research intertwined with the researcher's positioning and reflexivity, and these aspects were reflected in the research outputs. Thus, the study proposes a methodology where the ethnographic self is used as a resource

(Coffey, 1999) throughout the research process and sheds light on the opportunities and challenges of engaging the authentic multilingual self in ethnographic research. Doing so implies humanising fieldwork by engaging in relational work and languaging in personally-invested ways. Recognising the importance of the naturally-occurring multilingual dynamics at play in the field, I kept a translingual mindset to participate accordingly (Andrews et al., 2018). The authentic multilingual self is therefore translingual: it draws on its full multilingual repertoire in fluid and dynamic ways in communication with others, thus enacting complex identities which are situated and emergent in social interaction (Polo-Pérez, forthcoming).

Researchers should be reflexive about their decision-making, and find ways of making visible and explicit in their research report the multilingual processes that shaped the generation of their research data and outcomes. A reflexive stance can help researchers working in multilingual settings become aware of the language spaces they occupy in the research, and make purposeful decisions accordingly (Holmes et al., 2016), for instance, to balance power dynamics; to co-construct knowledge and experiences respecting the inner motives of self and other; to craft reflexivity-informed methods in an emerging design; or to find ways to write the self in the research (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014). Ultimately, it is the role of the intentional, reflexive researcher to account for the authentic multilingual self at all stages of the research (Polo-Pérez, forthcoming). Doing so in this study enriched the research process and facilitated my ongoing development as a researcher, as I became more aware of my multilingual praxis, which most likely “entail[ed] an enrichment of the research itself” (Attia & Edge, 2017). In this investigation, where multiple languages were at play, reflexivity helped to produce research which does justice to the complexities of naturally chaotic and fluid multilingual environments of LCs.

This thesis contributes to researching multilingually praxis by demonstrating the affordances of “translanguaging as methodology” (Polo-Pérez & Holmes, forthcoming), as discussed in Chapter 4 (4.4.5). First, the study challenges monolingual ideologies that risk denying the linguistic, affective, and performative aspects of communication. Second, it allows for more complex representations of those involved in communication as multilingual selves. Third, it encourages an

ethical stance whereby researchers humanise fieldwork by moving away from a centred view of research participants merely as suppliers of data (Ladegaard & Phipps, 2020; Phipps, 2019; Zhu, 2020). Fourth, it encourages researchers to prioritise the relational and affective aspects of research, showing awareness and sensitivity to the multilingual subjectivities of the research participants. Zhu (2020, p. 207) contends that “[s]eeing research as social action implies that our research embeds, not leads to, impact; and equally importantly, that it is a process of connections and conversations”. In multilingual research, these “connections and conversations” happen multilingually, which has implications for how complex multilingual data are represented. In that respect, fifthly, translanguaging as methodology invites researchers to make fully explicit the basis of their transcription choices, which will depend on the research questions motivating their study. In conclusion, it urges researchers to include a researching multilingually perspective (Holmes et al., 2016) and researcher reflexivity (e.g. Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014) to add transparency to the shaping role of multilingual practices in their research, which, in turn, contributes to the trustworthiness of research outcomes.

In relation to the last point, I drew on a number of methodological processes which enhanced the trustworthiness of the study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), four different criteria can be used to judge trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. First, the *credibility* of the findings was enhanced by the use of a complex set of data collection methods (see 4.4.2); the prolonged engagement of the researcher in the field (I attended the LC events for over three years); the discussion of findings with a key participant (Nathan) and sharing research outputs with LC2 participants; and peer debriefing in the form of discussing my findings with fellow doctoral students and presenting them at different conferences and other academic settings. Regarding the *transferability* of the findings, in each LC setting there are innumerable aspects that interact in constantly changing ways, which impacts on the ways in which the environment and its social and learning affordances are co-constructed and acted upon. Nevertheless, this thesis provides a thorough and detailed thick description of the research context, which will allow readers to make their own judgement on the applicability of the findings to other contexts (Kuper et al., 2008). Furthermore, the study provides a thorough explanation of the complex theoretical and

methodological framework which, though context-dependent, may be transferable in whole or in part to future research on LCs or other informal social learning environments outside the classroom. *Dependability* is concerned with the consistency of the findings and to what extent the study could be repeated obtaining the same outcomes. The interpretivist approach of the study, underpinned by social constructionism, assumes that knowledge was co-constructed between participants and the researcher. A detailed explanation of the research methods that led to the co-construction of knowledge about the two LCs is provided in Chapter 4 (4.4). Finally, the criterion of *confirmability* regards the presence of researcher bias in the findings. As discussed above, the study provides transparency regarding my complex positionality in the research, the language spaces that I occupied, and how engaging my authentic multilingual self shaped the research. This reflexive stance is apparent throughout the thesis (not only in the methodology chapter), and constitutes a key element to support the trustworthiness of the study.

8.2.3 Pedagogical implications

While focused on informal language learning, a number of implications for language pedagogy emerge from this study's findings. In fact, in studying LCs, I did not intend to defend these environments over the classroom, but rather suggest how LCs may complement the valuable systematic and scaffolded learning of the language classroom. Many avid LC participants are also enrolled in language courses and strongly value their teachers, grammar books, and classroom learning. However, language educators have not yet worked out how teaching methodologies and curricula may fill the gap between what happens inside and outside the language classroom (Benson, 2011). This study can inspire language educators to "consider the affordances available in the learner's environment" and integrate these in innovative ways "in order to foster autonomy in class" (Assis Sade, 2014, p. 171). Nevertheless, my research does not only speak to language teachers and researchers, but may also enhance learners' consciousness about their languaging experiences and social language ecologies. For example, the theorisation of LC experiences presented in this thesis may equip learners with analytical and reflective tools to deconstruct the meaning of speaking or practising a language, and can help them be more critically aware of the affordances and challenges they come across in different language and intercultural encounters.

Davis and Sumara (2008, p. 37) argue that education is “a domain construed in terms of effecting change”. However, much of the research in language education has considered change mainly in terms of improvement in learners’ linguistic proficiency or level of communicative competence. Instead, this study invites language educators to consider other changes and transformations that multilinguals may go through in their language learning journeys: changing their self-perception as multilinguals; discovering and performing new language identities; intentionally changing their linguistic ecologies by dwelling multilingually in their physical surroundings; and learning about self and others through engaging in new intercultural encounters. These changes highlight the transformative power of adding a new language into an individual’s life (e.g., Kramsch, 2009; Ros i Solé, 2016), and go hand in hand with transcending the conceptualisation of language as a code (subdivided into competence levels) and recognising the value of languages as lived experiences for making and maintaining human connections.

Another implication emerging from the findings is that, without pedagogical intervention, the intercultural learning that takes place in LC encounters may remain at a superficial level. While participants found pleasure in engaging in multiperspectivity (see 7.2), the data showed no evidence of critical engagement with, or interpretation of, the new knowledge gained during the LCs. As shown in section 7.2.3, many LC conversations focused on cultural difference drawing on a large culture approach (Holliday, 1999) and superficial block narratives (Amadasí & Holliday, 2017). In a study focused on intercultural learning, Woodin (2001) looked at students reflective diary entries over a period of 12 weeks and concluded that “learners remain in the ‘safe’ spaces of reporting on cultural differences, but did not provide evidence of developing critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997), nor of reflection on one’s own culture” (Woodin, 2018, p. 22). Experiential learning requires reflection if it is not to remain at surface level (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012) and, without appropriate pedagogical intervention, the reflective engagement that is needed to complete the circle of experiential learning (Harvey et al., 2016; Kolb, 1984; Moon, 2004) and develop critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997) cannot be taken for granted. This is not to suggest that pedagogical intervention should be needed in LCs, since the different ecologies of formal and informal spaces are to be respected (Knight et al., 2020). Rather, the findings reinforce the idea that explicit

intercultural learning and teaching occupy an important place in the classroom (Byram, 2021).

Finally, multilingual and cosmopolitan speakers often engage in “interculturality without culture” (Dervin, 2012, p. 187). In other words, intercultural experiences are not shaped by specific “target cultures” associated with the languages spoken (Risager, 2006). Instead, multilingual speakers shape their linguistic resources with their own subjectivities and “languacultures” (Risager, 2006), which reflect the individual’s affiliations, biography, and idiolectal resources built throughout a lifetime. For instance, section 7.2.3 showed that LC participants learned about each other’s worldviews based on the places and topics they knew best, and used a language of their choice as a lingua franca to engage in such conversations. These findings shed doubt on the suitability of traditional ways of presenting culture in the language classroom as focused on cultural facts about “target language countries” in order to prepare learners to interact with native speakers of the language they are learning, who are unrealistically depicted as monolingual and monocultural. Instead, a transnational approach to language and culture (Risager, 2006, 2007) recognises that “languages spread across cultures, and cultures spread across languages” (Risager, 2006, p. 2). Such a transnational approach can provide learners with more effective tools to understand and engage with others in the global world we live in.

Having presented the study’s contributions to knowledge and their associated implications, it is important to acknowledge its limitations.

8.3 Limitations of the study

In this section I outline the main limitations of the study. Some of these limitations relate to the specificities of the research context. Firstly, an inevitable consequence of conducting qualitative and ethnographically-inspired research which attends to the specificities of the research context is the issue with the transferability of findings. While transferability was not an aim in the research design, the study provides sufficient “thick description” of the context and, with the high level of detail offered, readers can determine the extent to which this thesis’ findings may be transferable to similar contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For instance, the study focused on two sites where foreign language socialisation was foregrounded and

both researcher and participants were multilingual speakers learning new languages. Therefore, using translanguaging as methodology (see 4.4.5) may be framed differently in research contexts where engaging in multilingual practices is seen as integral to communication, but not the purpose of it. Also, in LCs located in highly cosmopolitan cities like London, for instance, where multilingualism is enmeshed in everyday public interactions, the feelings of heterotopic dwelling experienced by the participants in this and other studies (e.g. Igarashi, 2016) may not be as prominent.

Another limitation of the study comes from a limitation of the LCs themselves: the fact that only “elite” languages were represented in these events—as discussed in Chapter 5 (5.2.8). Looking at the LCs available in different parts of the UK, this seems to be a general trend. As Ros i Solé puts it:

Whereas for learners of “elite”, highly valued, standardised languages such as French, German or Spanish (Kramsch, 2014) language can empower and prompt the discovery of new aspects of the self and new worlds, students of less prestigious languages are faced with an altogether different experience, the humiliation of having to live a secret linguistic life. (Ros i Solé, 2022, p. 155)

Thus, speakers of “less prestigious languages” might not identify with some of this study’s findings. While these speakers often create their own language-focused social networks and socialisation circles—like Nathan did with speakers of his languages (see 5.2.2)—it is rare to find advertised, public LC events for languages other than the widely taught ones, where speakers of these other languages could have similar experiences as the ones reported by the participants in this study.

Also, I did not have the means to identify or contact participants who attended the LCs only once, and who perhaps may have had a negative experience and, as a consequence, never attended again. The fact that LC1 was mainly attended by young university students in a bar which was seen as student territory might have deterred potential participants from the wider community; however, this is only a speculative observation which could not be evidenced by including the voices of those who may have felt excluded in these environments. This also means that the experiences reported in this study come from participants who repeatedly attended these events voluntarily, and therefore had an overall positive opinion about them. Besides, as discussed in 4.4.5, even if I managed to negotiate my

learner positionality in LC1, my Spanish teacher identity was also perceived as salient by some LC1 participants, who mistakenly thought that I was part of the organising committee, and might have therefore felt compelled to depict the LC in a positive light.

Further methodological limitations derive from the non-interventionist stance of the research, which aimed to minimise the interference of the researcher in the level of formality in the research setting. I opted not to follow strict research procedures or employ more invasive methods of data collection, such as video-recording, as these may have jeopardised the informality of the LCs and compromise the level of agency that participants were granted to move around, stay as long as they wanted, and engage more or less superficially with the environment (see section 5.2.5 on the sense of freedom, agency and authenticity in LC1). Holliday (2015, p. 56-57) argues that “[i]nvolving [participants] in extended procedures for getting permission, collaborating or checking interpretations may in itself be an unfair imposition”; also, “it may be unfair to develop relationships within a research setting which cannot be sustained in their own terms”. Thus, I respected that not all participants completed a reflective piece of writing about the LCs, and the audio-recording of naturally-occurring conversations in the LCs was only conducted twice in each LC, and always including me as a participant (see 4.4.4 on the ethical reasons behind this decision). Video-recording presented further ethical issues due to both venues being crowded public spaces. Therefore, non-verbal communication is only minimally commented on in the study, drawing on observational notes from the researcher’s reflective journal.

To conclude, I suggest some directions for future research and include some final remarks about the main contributions of the study.

8.4 Directions for future research

I can envisage a number of future research avenues that would complement the study’s findings. First, a critical sociolinguistic approach could shed light on the languages and voices that are typically represented in LCs, and further inquire into the relationships between LCs, social class, and cosmopolitanism. Ros i Solé and Fenoulhet (2011, p. 11) argue that “languages have [...] become a luxury product, a non-necessity, shaped by a desire to acquire cultural capital for a new aspirational

lifestyle which will allow individuals to be part of different social and cultural groups". In the context of the UK, future research could investigate what can be done to change the face of leisured additional language learning and socialisation as something that belongs to everyone and not just the elites, considering the importance of multilingualism in a society shaped by globalisation, but also economic and forced migration. Important moves towards this direction have been made, for instance, by the "Researching Multilingually at Borders" project (<http://researching-multilingually-at-borders.com/>) and the ongoing "Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies" project (<https://meits.org/>), both funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under the Open World Research Initiative. More research based on pedagogical intervention is needed to democratise foreign language socialisation.

Secondly, future research could also investigate what teaching methodologies may facilitate languaging and the development of learners' sense of multilingual social selves in the classroom, in an attempt to find more effective ways to connect or reduce the gap between what happens inside and outside the classroom (Little, 1991; van Lier, 2012). Instructed and non-instructed contexts for language learning fulfil different purposes, both playing an important role in the learning process, and should, therefore, remain different (Knight et al., 2020), albeit not exclusive. However, language learners should be offered "multiple identity positions from which to engage in the language practices of the classroom, the school and the community" (Norton and Toohey, 2011, p. 432). As Kramsch (2009) pointed out, many learners who have experienced personal transformations through living and socialising in the languages they are learning might struggle to engage with the systematic learning focused on the pursuit of language accuracy which is often prioritised in the classroom. Such a focus on accuracy tends to neglect the subjective dimension of language, or what Kramsch (2009) calls "myth", which "encompasses the imagined, emotional resonances that people associate with the language they speak and hear" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 12). Myth represents the power of language to go beyond its referential meaning and evoke aesthetic and affective responses. This study has shown how the LC experience can evoke memories of past socialisation experiences, thus helping speakers to reconnect with their multilingual social self. These findings can inspire researchers to investigate whether the same can be achieved in the context of the classroom.

To that end, and inspired by how the subjectivities of the researcher-as-language-learner have permeated every stage of this study, the possibilities and challenges of bringing the teacher's learner self into the classroom could also be further explored.

Finally, since LCs continue to be an under-researched context for language learning and socialisation, more studies are needed to reflect the diversity within this social phenomenon. There are currently interesting projects, which are starting to publish the first research outputs (Jansson, 2021; Johnson, 2018; Krueger, 2018; Kunitz & Jansson, 2021), investigating LCs focused on enhancing social interaction between local communities and refugees in Nordic countries. More research to broaden the knowledge about the affordances of LCs is necessary. Researchers could focus on LCs as a context in which to promote intercultural understanding through multilingual intercultural encounters, and how LCs can have a real impact on improving people's interaction within multilingual societies.

8.5 Final remarks

This thesis has drawn attention to the under-researched environment of LCs, with a focus on languages other than English. The findings show that participants co-constructed the LCs to seek out alternative and decentred ways of dwelling in their languages by making them part of their everyday lives and leisure activities, regardless of proximity to "target language" countries. The pleasure of languaging and the value of LCs as an intellectual and social hobby often outweighed the instrumental value of these events for the development of language skills. Further, the LCs mobilised participants' multilingual identities and their sense of multilingual social selves which prompted them to draw on their previous language socialisation experiences. Finally, the LCs offered a safe space to engage in multiperspectivity and learn about each other's worldviews, as well as to connect with like-minded, cosmopolitan, multilingual speakers.

Furthermore, the study shows the possibilities of conducting research in naturally complex and fluid multilingual environments through engaging and being reflexive about the researcher's authentic multilingual self at all stages of the research process.

This doctoral thesis contributes to the field of language learning beyond the classroom by focusing on how languages are lived intersubjectively, rather than merely learned or acquired. This is consistent with a poststructuralist view of language and intercultural learning as experiencing new ways of being in the world, and much more than the development of skills.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: Ethical approval letter (07/11/2016)



Shaped by the past, creating the future

7 November 2016

Nuria Polo-Perez
nuria.polo-perez@durham.ac.uk

Dear Nuria

Foreign Language Communities of Practice: The Ecologies of a 'Language Café'

I am pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been reviewed and that the above research project has been registered as non-empirical.

May we take this opportunity to wish you good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nadin Beckmann". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Dr Nadin Beckmann
School of Education Ethics Committee Chair

Leazes Road
Durham, DH1 1TA
Telephone +44 (0)191 334 2000 Fax +44 (0)191 334 8311
www.durham.ac.uk/education

APPENDIX B: Ethical approval letter (08/09/2017)



Shaped by the past, creating the future

08/09/2017

Nuria Polo-Perez
nuria.polo-perez@durham.ac.uk

Dear Nuria

A qualitative study on language cafés

I am pleased to inform you that your ethics application for the above research project has been approved by the School of Education Ethics Committee.

May we take this opportunity to wish you good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nadin Beckmann".

Dr Nadin Beckmann
School of Education Ethics Committee Chair

APPENDIX C: Participant information sheet



Shaped by the past, creating the future

Date:

Participant Information Sheet

Title: A qualitative study on 'language cafés'

You are invited to take part in a research study on 'language cafés'. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The study is conducted by **Nuria Polo-Pérez** as part of her doctoral research at Durham University.

The purpose of this study is to explore the opportunities that language cafés offer to foreign language speakers in places where the target language is not commonly spoken, and also to analyse how people make these language cafés happen.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to allow the researcher to audio-record your conversations with other participants in the language café events. Also, you will be invited for an interview with the researcher about your own experience as a participant in language cafés. The interview will be scheduled at your own convenience and it will take around 45-60 minutes. As an optional and complementary activity, prior to the interview you are invited to prepare a piece of writing about the language café(s) that you attend (see the *Guidelines for the optional pre-interview writing activity*).

You are free to decide whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences for you.

All responses you give or other data collected will be kept confidential. The records of this study will be kept secure and private. All files containing any information you give are password protected. In any research report that may be published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify you individually. There will be no way to connect your name to your responses at any time during or after the study.

If you have any questions, requests or concerns regarding this research, please contact me via email at nuria.polo-perez@durham.ac.uk or by telephone at 0*****.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the School of Education Ethics Sub-Committee at Durham University (date of approval: 08/09/2017)

Nuria Polo-Pérez

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nuria Polo-Pérez'.

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Durham University is the trading name of the University of Durham

APPENDIX D: Guidelines for the optional pre-interview writing activity

Dear participant,

Thank you for accepting to contribute to my research project!

This activity is optional: you can attend the interview with me without the need to complete it. However, your reflective piece of writing could help us narrow down the topics that we will discuss during the interview.

You can write it in English, Spanish, French, Italian, or Portuguese (feel free to use more than one language), and, if you want, you can have feedback on any aspects that interest you.

The task is very flexible in terms of the length of your text, and also the information that you choose to focus on. Here are the instructions:

I would like you to write a reflective account about your experience as a participant in language cafés. These are some ideas which you can focus on (but please feel free to come up with your own):

- *One or more very nice experiences, feelings or anecdotes that you recall from a language café (it can be very short or a full account)*
- *An interesting conversation that you had in a language café: why was it interesting, how did the conversation flow, why do you think you remember it...*
- *What makes language cafés different from other spaces in your opinion*
- *Your feelings before, during and after the language café*
- *A detailed reflective account about a language café that you have just attended (therefore, you should write this as soon as possible after the event)*

You can write about one or more of those ideas, and you can of course write more than one text if you are keen to do so!

If you have any questions, requests or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me via email at nuria.polo-perez@durham.ac.uk or by telephone/WhatsApp at 07*****.

Thank you very much!

Best wishes,

Nuria Polo-Pérez



PhD researcher at Durham University

APPENDIX E: Declaration of informed consent



Shaped by the past, creating the future

Declaration of Informed Consent

- I agree to participate in this study, the purpose of which is to explore the opportunities that language cafés offer to foreign language speakers in places where the target language is not commonly spoken.
- I have read the participant information sheet and understand the information provided.
- I have been informed that I may decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study without penalty of any kind.
- I have been informed that data collection will involve the use of audio recording devices.
- I have been informed that all of my responses will be kept confidential and secure, and that I will not be identified in any report or other publication resulting from this research.
- I have been informed that the investigator will answer any questions regarding the study and its procedures. Nuria Polo-Pérez, School of Education, Durham University can be contacted via email: nuria.polo-perez@durham.ac.uk or telephone: 07*****.
- I will be provided with a copy of this form for my records.

Any concerns about this study should be addressed to the School of Education Ethics Sub-Committee, Durham University via email to ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk.

Date	Participant Name (please print)	Participant Signature

I certify that I have presented the above information to the participant and secured his or her consent.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Nuria', written over a horizontal line.

Date	Signature of Investigator

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Durham University is the trading name of the University of Durham

APPENDIX F: Poster



Be a participant in a research project on language cafés!

Would you like to take part in a research study on 'language cafés'? The aim is to explore the opportunities that these events offer to foreign language speakers in places where the target language is not commonly spoken. The study is conducted by **Nuria Polo-Pérez** as part of her doctoral research at Durham University.

Nuria would be extremely grateful if you could allow her to audio-record some of your conversations in the language cafés at the [REDACTED]. This is for volunteers only! She will be there participating herself as a learner of French, and she is very much interested in keeping the informality of the place as it is.

All data collected will be anonymised and kept strictly confidential.

nuria.polo-perez@durham.ac.uk

APPENDIX G: Interview protocol

(This protocol was used for both one-to-one and focus group interviews.)

Before the interview:

I will thank the participant for collaborating with me and will ask them if they prefer to speak English, Spanish, French or Italian with me, or a combination of them. I will remind them about the aims of my study: to explore the opportunities that language cafés offer to foreign language speakers in places where the target language is not commonly spoken, and to analyse how people make language cafés happen. I will also remind them that I am not part of the organisation of the language café in any form, but a learner-participant and researcher who is interested in studying these events and what happens in them.

They will receive a copy of the participant information sheet. I will ask them to read it and invite them to ask any questions that they may have about anything related to the project. Then, I will mention the following aspects:

- The estimated duration of the interview is 45-60 minutes.
- The interview is going to be audio-recorded and I might need to take some notes as well.
- I will ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the data by anonymising all names of individuals and places.
- They can choose not to respond any questions which might make them feel uncomfortable and they can withdraw from the study without the need to give a reason at any time.

Finally, I will ask them to read and sign two copies of the consent form: one for me and one for them to keep. After this, I will start recording.

I will ask them some warm-up questions to start the conversation. These questions will vary depending on the relationship that I have with the participants.

I have prepared different sets of questions for the semi-structured interview: one for the language café participants who attend to practise the languages they are learning; one for participants who mainly used their first language during the language café; and one for the language café organisers. They will be translated into Spanish, Italian and French as necessary. Also, among the language café participants, there might be variations of the questions depending on the following factors:

- whether they are regular attendees or they have attended the event only once or few times;
- whether they are currently receiving or not formal instruction in the target language.

If the participant has completed the optional pre-interview activity and has sent me beforehand their piece of writing (see the *Guidelines for the optional pre-interview writing activity*), the questions will be adapted to the information already obtained through their narratives.

After the interview:

I will invite participants to contact me by phone or by email if they have any comments or questions, or if they would like to stay in touch regarding the development of my study.

Questions for people who attended to practise the languages they are learning:

Background of the person:

- Tell me a bit about your multilingual repertoire. What languages have you learned and how have you learned them?

(I want to find out about their relationship with the languages they speak to see if they have more intrinsic or extrinsic motivations to improve their skills, to see if they already value language cafés differently than other type of activities, to know how long they have been attending the language café – or if they attend more than one -, to find out about how they understand language learning, to find out if they see themselves as multilingual and intercultural people who like to be in contact from people from different cultures, etc.)

What is the language café for them (with a focus on affordances and limitations):

- What do you like about language cafés?

- What do you enjoy the most about your conversations in the language café? Can you recall any particular conversation that you remember fondly?

(I want to find out about what affordances they perceive in language cafés. I want to know what is the language café for them. I will also ask about what they don't like about it. I will maybe ask specifically about their views on error correction in this place, or whether they think they can improve their linguistic accuracy. Whatever their answers are in general in this part, I will try to delve into the themes they bring up.)

- What do you get from participating in the language café?

(After delving into different themes, I would like them to summarise what benefits they see, to get a more developed answer and confirm their priorities.)

- What do you get from speaking with native speakers and with non-native speakers?

- What is different about these spaces as compared to a classroom or the real world outside? And compared to learning in tandem or other informal spaces for language learning?

- How would you describe the language café to someone who has never attended or doesn't know what it is?

Their participation + feelings and emotions:

- Tell me about the first time you attended a language café. How did you find it? Was it as you expected?

- How would you describe your participation in the language café? What kind of participant are you?

- How do you normally behave in the language café?

(I will ask them if they prepare anything in advance, if they like to help others, if they feel they are always being helped, if they are shy, or they are outgoing or very talkative)

- How do you feel in the language café?

- Would you say this place is for certain kinds of people more than others?

Interculturality:

- Would you describe the language café as an intercultural space? Would you say that it creates intercultural situations?

- Could you think of examples of conversations where you discussed cultural topics in the language café?

Questions for participants who mainly used their first language during the language cafés:

Background of the person:

- What languages do you speak?

- In what situations do you speak X?

What is the language café for them (with a focus on affordances and limitations):

- What brought you to attend the language café?

- What do you like about it?

- What do you get from it?

- What is different about these spaces as compared to a classroom or the real world outside? And compared to learning in tandem or other informal learning contexts?

Their participation + feelings and emotions:

- How would you describe your participation in the language café?

- How do you normally behave in the language café?

- Do you remember the first time you attended?

- Would you say this place is for certain kinds of people more than others?

Interculturality:

- Would you describe the language café as an intercultural space? Would you say that it creates intercultural situations?
- Could you think of examples of conversations where you discussed cultural topics in the language café?

Questions for organisers:

Background of the person:

- What languages do you speak?
- In what situations do you speak X?

What is the language café for them (with a focus on affordances and limitations):

- What brought you to organise the language café?
- What do you like about it?
- What do you get from it?
- What is different about these spaces as compared to a classroom or the real world outside? And compared to learning in tandem?

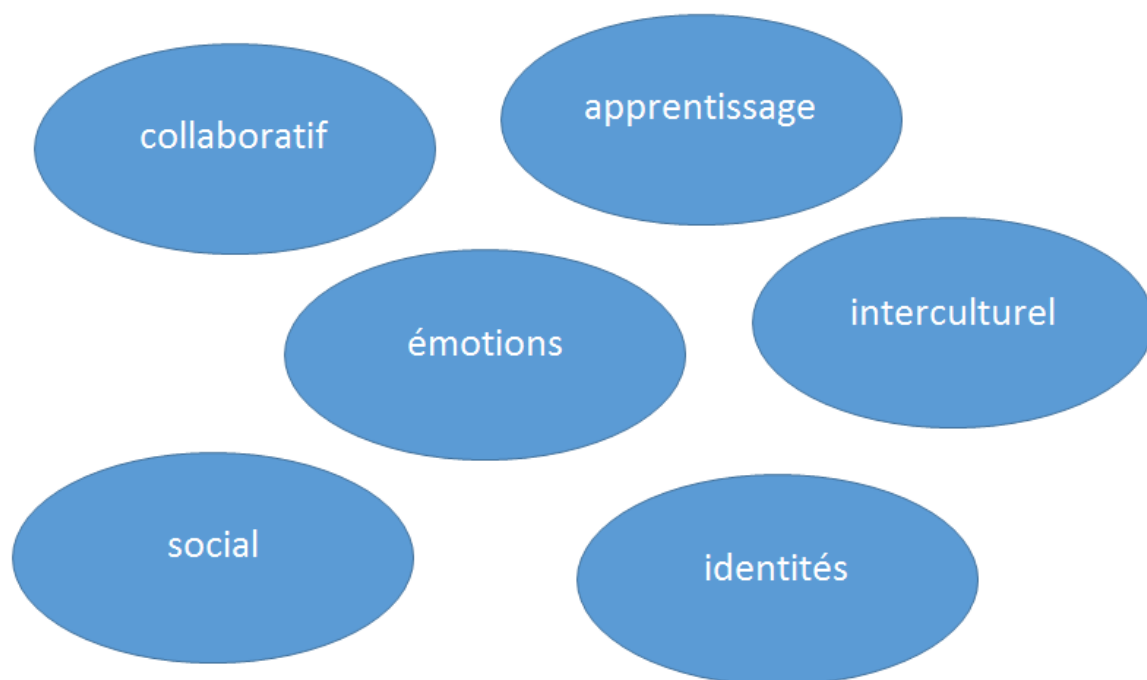
Their participation + feelings and emotions:

- How would you define your role in the language café?
- How do you normally behave in the language café?
- Would you say this place is for certain kinds of people more than others?

Interculturality:

- Would you say this place creates intercultural situations? Could you illustrate your answer with concrete examples?

APPENDIX H: Focus group visual prompt



The same visual prompt was also available in Spanish and in English.

APPENDIX I: Types of notes from the researcher reflective journal

Type of notes	Examples
Descriptive observational notes	“When I arrive at the language café, at around 6.20pm, I don’t see the improvised ‘reception desk’ that they usually have at the entrance. Instead, people are already distributed and engaged in conversations, sitting down in different tables around the room. There might be around 50 people in total.” “The girl says that she finds it odd the fact that films are often dubbed in two versions: in Spanish from Spain and in ‘International Spanish’ or Spanish from Mexico. I then say that translating humour, for example, is really difficult, and what works for an audience in Spain might not work for a different audience in other countries. She says that she finds Spanish humour in general very silly, and she doesn’t find it funny. I say that there are many different styles, and I give them examples of very famous comedies in Spain (they seem to take mental notes of those movies, and ask me if they are in Netflix). She mentions the humour in <i>Volver</i>, a movie by Almodóvar, and I tell her that Almodóvar has a very particular sense of humour of his own, which is part of his style as a director.” “I notice that, when we introduce ourselves, everyone explains somehow what their connection with French is. Sometimes is just ‘I study French at uni’, but in the case of Robert, he explains how he connects French with his degree in Physics. He tells the group about his experience working in Lille over the summer.” “When I arrived, the bar was full of people and there were no signs of who could be part of the French speaking group, so I decided to ask a waiter: “Do you know if there is a French gathering happening here tonight?”. He pointed at two women that he thought were regulars in this event. I approached them and asked them (in English): “Are you the organisers of the French language café?” They were not the organisers, but regular attendants who immediately switched to French, maybe because it coincided with the moment when the actual organiser arrived. He is French. They exchanged two kisses with him, which symbolised to me that even rituals, such as greetings, are done “a la francesa” in this French environment they have created for themselves.” “There is a moment when I think Hugo is checking WhatsApp or something like that, but he is actually googling the movies that Ruth is talking about and the names of the

	actors that she doesn't remember. I also take out my phone and note down the names of their favourite movies." "In terms of error correction, it is interesting what happened today a couple of times. When I arrive, I say "Il faut froid", and Ruth says "Oui, oui, il FAIT froid aujourd'hui ! » I noticed her correction and I repeated the corrected version. Then it happens again when I say « ça verrá », and she says « oui, oui, ça viendra ». I think I had an interference from Italian."
Reflective notes as a learner of French and LC participant	"Ben eventually leaves and Isabelle starts a conversation with me by asking me if I have ever taught at a secondary school. I give her a brief summary of how I got here and how my 6 years in the UK have unfolded. Somehow I feel that she's acting like a nice teacher who wants the learner to speak, and suddenly I get a bit more self-conscious, I don't know why!" "It's been great. I've talked with different people, I've felt a bit more confident speaking French, and I've been told for the first time that my French is good! I agree with Sandor and the other guys: I wish this language café happened more often." "While we talk, I realise that there are some students of mine practising Italian near us. This is something I cannot avoid: in the language café, I always tend to keep looking around to see who is there, what other languages people are speaking and what they are doing while I speak with somebody. I hope they don't notice that, as it might seem rude. For instance, I hear a small group of people talking in Arabic next to us and I can see how one of the guys is making a big effort to form his sentences. He asks "How do you say in Arabic 'how do you say...?'" And one of them replies "<i>Mada taqul...?</i>" And I almost felt like telling him myself." "There was a moment, after having been speaking with the Brazilian woman, when we joined the parallel conversation, but I could not understand very well what they were talking about. Hours later, I'm still not sure if they were talking about the Chilean accent or Chinese accent... I'm pretty sure that I misunderstood them and that my answer was quite rubbish... How embarrassing! Maybe I tell them next time. It is, obviously, not that important, but I guess it has to do with being able to fit in, to be considered a 'legitimate participant' with an acceptable level. I want to create a good impression and I want to show them that I can do better."

	"There are so many things that I would say if I had the vocab (like when I wanted to say that my parents are going to be one of the first passengers on that new Ryanair route), but I stay quiet instead and say only simple things. And use a lot of gestures and body language in general!" "I feel quite comfortable now in the group. I think they are starting to see more of me and they are getting more confident with me too. It's a nice feeling, like we are friends and they like talking with me. I used to feel all the time as if I was not contributing anything to them, but now I feel part of the 'noyau', as Nadia calls it".
Reflective notes on research methodology / research processes	"As more people join, they ask what the recording is all about. Some people explain it themselves, and other times it is me who tells them about my research. There is a great moment when a girl, who is very outgoing and quite fluent in French, asks me if I would like her to get one of the devices to record her conversation with other two guys. In that part of the recording I can hear that she is acting quite teacherly with them, and one of them at some point asks why this is being recorded (he doesn't seem to like having a voice recorder there while he's trying to speak French). I think she might have stopped the recording on purpose at that moment, although she tells me that she pressed something by mistake. This episode with the voice recorder raises some ethical issues I should consider. Perhaps I should not record as many conversations as I would like to." "It is funny how much Spanish I have spoken today, when I didn't even go closer to the 'Spanish table'. As soon as I say that I'm Spanish, some people start talking to me in Spanish very keenly. I think they would love to participate in the study and do the interview in Spanish. This is such a big contrast with other Spanish speakers who get suddenly so shy to speak when they realise I'm a native speaker, like the Italian girl the other day." "I am on time (7.30) and I am the first one to arrive. The pub is very crowded and noisy, which makes me think immediately about the problems of recording here. I take a picture to maybe show my supervisors the kind of environment that I want to collect data from." "Mike asks me if I got anything interesting from the interview we did at my place. I guess this is something they all wonder about. I tell him that it was very interesting, that I have transcribed the conversation and have noticed interesting things, but that I still don't have any findings as such to share with them. It's a shame because I would like to

	share with them more of what I am doing, but because I make such slow progress during term time, there isn't much to say so far..."
Theoretical notes	"I guess it has to do with being able to fit in, to be considered a 'legitimate participant' with an acceptable level. I want to create a good impression and I want to show them that I can do better. This could be linked to Norton's notion of <i>investment</i>. Chatting with these nice people in the LC has an extrinsic effect on my motivation and is making me want to invest more in learning the language in order to be able to invest in these new social relationships." "Many of the interactions are about cultural <i>difference</i>, but they can be quite superficial and limited to the knowledge component in Byram's model of ICC. Attitudes of relativizing self (<i>savoir être</i>), for instance, are not observable".

APPENDIX J: Sample of initial coding of data

Initial coding of Elisabeth's reflective writing piece:

Data	Codes and comments
Fecha: 07/11/17 El martes 7 de noviembre, fui al Café de Lenguas, que mucha gente se reunieron para practicar idiomas diferentes. Cuando entré, era un poco extraño – había muchas personas sentadas en grupos, y tuve ganas del intruso. Empecé buscando la gente con las pegatinas con la letra “S” y después de diez segundos le encontré y empecé charlando. El hombre primo que conocí, olvidé su nombre inmediatamente – no es bueno, pero estaba un poco nerviosa. Recuerdo que era majo, y tenía cincuenta años aproximadamente. No habló más español, y por eso pude relajar – yo pensé que había muchos hablantes nativos de español, y me alegró que era de la misma habilidad que los otros. Empecé hablando con tres chicas – se llamaban Alice, [name] y [name]. Alice habló de viviendo en Valencia, y [name] – en Granada; ambos les encantó vivir en España, y por eso sus español era muy avanzado. Hablé un poco de vida en Londres – dije que es ocupada pero muy interesante en ciudades más grandes. Por otro lado, [name] nunca había experimentado este – dijo que lleva viviendo en [this city] toda la vida, dónde es tranquilo y todos son relajados. Para mí, era extraño; desde que llegué aquí, ¡he estado tan ocupada! Estoy acostumbrado a vida en Londres o Moscú, lugares enormes con vida en marcha, pero en [this city] estoy aún más cansado porque siempre hay algo que hacer. Empezaron a discutir qué ciudad en España es mejor, cuando otra chica – no olvido su nombre – se unió a nosotros. Resultó que estudia Económica como yo, pero nunca lo he visto. En ese momento realicé que [this city] es universidad grandísimo, y todavía tengo que conocer mucha gente. Volvimos a discutir qué ciudad es mejor – dije que pensé Madrid es increíble y tiene mucha vida y atmósfera feliz. Pero, estuve de acuerdo con Alice que Barcelona es increíble también, particularmente la Basílica de la Sagrada Familia. De hecho, me gustó nuestra conversación tanto, que me dejó llevar con mi entusiasmo – me olvidé para usar la gramática correcta. Alice me ayudó; me sentí un poco molesto conmigo, porque he practicado antes, pero es más duro cuando hablando rápidamente. También, estaba celoso que ella es mejor que yo. Pero entonces recordé que ella tenía más experiencia que yo, y sólo tengo que practicar español más – el Café de Lenguas me ayudó con esto. Después, más gente llegó y empecé charlando con [name] –	Feelings: “tuve ganas de intruso” = felt like an intruder? Stickers as mediational tools Feelings and emotions Comparing with others – feeling relief with peers with similar level Alice (pseudonym) – another research participant Experiences abroad What city is best – a bit superficial? Languaging – participating and going with the flow more important than accuracy Feeling jealousy - Comparing with others. Non-native speaker as role model: if I practice more, I can be like her.

estudia la informática, pero español es su módulo opcional como yo. ¡Me le gustaba mucho! Era muy divertido y hablamos de las películas, especialmente si nos gusta Marvel y DC o no. Peter prefirió DC – dijo que Batman y Superman son superhéroes mejores de todos los tiempos. Para mí, me chifla Iron Man y Thor de Marvel – creo que estas películas son más graciosas y me gusta cuando puedo reír en el cine. Sin embargo, estuve de acuerdo que Suicide Squad – una película de DC – era bastante bueno, particularmente Margot Robbie, que es una de mis actrices favoritas. Mi discusión con [name] era parte la más agradable de la noche – cuando estaba hablando de tópico que me apasiona, volví más seguro con mi lengua. En general, me disfrutéme; pude practicar hablando español fuera del clase, y aunque era torpe a veces porque nadie sabía conocía, aprendí que todos tenemos algo en común. Todos somos multicultural y chiflan idiomas. Estuvo bien que al final de la noche, dejo de traducir en mi mente frases del inglés al español - al principio era duro para hablar con fluidez, pero al final mi habla era natural. Por lo tanto, lo pasé bien y pude relajar.	Discussing shared interests/hobbies Feelings Shared interest: languages Feelings and emotions
Fecha: 30/01/18 Hace tres días fui al café de idiomas en “Student Union”. He ido allí antes y por eso sabía que esperar, pero estaba nerviosa todavía. También, estaba un poco estresada ya que más tarde esa noche tenía que ir a los ensayos de teatro, y no quería llegar tarde. Cuando llegué y me puse mi pegatina, vi un grupo que está hablando español. En este grupo había algunas chicas de mi clase español. Me ha alegrado mucho verlas y podía relajarme. Acompañé [name] y una otra chica, que se llamaba [name – Alice’s sister]. Ella me dijo que estudia Matemáticas y está en su tercero curso de universidad. La he preguntado si su título es duro y ha contestado a mí: “Claro que sí, pero creo que es una ciencia muy interesante y me maravilla”. Para mí, me gustan las mates, pero en mi opinión estudiarlas todos los días por tres o cuatro años, ¡se debe de estar agotado! [name] nos dijo que acaba de volver de Australia, después de estudiando en Sídney por dos años. Empezó a describirlo como un país muy bonito, con mucha naturaleza y que siempre hace calor. Mientras que estaba hablando, me acordé las fotos que mi tío me ha mandar (vive en Queensland). En las fotos, se puede ver mucha gente celebrando la Navidad a la playa y llevando los gorros de Papa Noel. El clima en Australia es mejor como en [this city]; aquí suele llover o nevar, y siempre hay el viento fuerte. De hecho, los estados del tiempo en [this city] son similares del clima en Leicester, la ciudad de donde [name] es de. Como eso, está acostumbrado a frío. Yo tampoco – dije a las chicas que soy rusa, y la gente suelen celebrar la Navidad y la Noche	Feelings and emotions (before going) Stickers as mediational tools to sort people into groups Common introductions: what do you study? Experiences abroad Comparing countries Comparing traditions

Viene (después de medianoche) como saliendo al aire libre. Les gusta hacer un muñeco de nieve y ver los fuegos artificiales. [name] y [name] me han preguntado cuáles ciudades visito en Rusia, y les he dicho que normalmente voy a Moscú y Ryzan, ya que tengo muchos familiares allí. Luego, [name] empezó a describir Budapest: la arquitectura, las costumbres y demás. La conversación, la me maravilló. Me encanta hablar de las culturas diferentes y aprender más del mundo, particularmente me gusta que esto se puede reducir los estereotipos. Por ejemplo, [name] nos dijo que ella y su familia no les gusta la comida tradicional, ya que es muy grasienta y hay demasiada sal. Esto ha cambiado el tema de la conversación, y empezaron a hablar de comida. Me preguntaba que comida es popular en Australia, y [name] nos sorprendió. Nos dijo que no hay un plato tradicional australiano como la paella en España por ejemplo, pero la comida italiana y china es muy popular. También, como el clima, mucha gente gusta tener barbacoas, y por eso la salsa es un plato muy querido. [name] le ha preguntado en broma si suelen cocinar los canguros en Australia, ¡y [name] les ha dicho: “sí”! Estaba estupefacto, hasta he olvidado usar los verbos correctos mientras que estaba expresando mi sorpresa. Creo que los canguros son animales muy mansos y no me puedo imaginarlos como comida. Luego, decidíamos hablar de los acentos de la gente. Por lo visto, en Australia todos han pensado que [name] era muy elegante, sola porque tiene un acento inglés, pero ella no está de acuerdo con ellos. Dije las chicas que es como algunas personas en Estados Unidos. Fui con mi clase a Nuevo York hace dos años, y allí, como de nuestros acentos ingleses, una oficial de aduana en el aeropuerto ‘JFK’ nos ha preguntado si conocemos la reina, o el príncipe William y Kate Middleton. Ese momento, la hermana de [name] llegó y nos acompañó. La he reconocido de café de idiomas primero. Era Alice, la chica que estudia Lenguas en universidad, y habla inglés, italiano, español y catalán. Me ha alegrado mucho verla, y charlamos un poco, pero me di cuenta de que tuve que ir a mis ensayos. Empecé a despedírselas, pero las chicas me han preguntado de que la obra de teatro y cuando será. Les dije que está ambientada después de la época de la reina Victoria, y cuenta la historia de una mujer Nora, que lucha contra el régimen sexista. Quiere libertad y el derecho al voto. He dicho a las chicas que esta obra es una drama y se llama “Una Casa de Muñeca” ([name] me ayudó ese momento, ya que no me acordaba la palabra de “doll”). Acabó decidiendo que esperé que vayan a verlo. Estaba una noche muy agradable, pero pienso que hablaba mejor la última vez. Como mis ensayos, probablemente estaba estresado. El mes próximo, me gustaría para quedarse al café más tiempo y estar relajada, así que me puedo practicar más y mejorar mi español.	Cultural learning from a comparative approach Comparing food in different countries (still large culture approach) She mentions again forgetting about accuracy – focus on languaging Comparing accents – accentism Stereotypes Collaborative peer learning Feelings and emotions (after the LC) Common introductions: what

Fecha: 27/02/18 Llegué al café de idiomas y empecé a hablar con [name] y un chico que se llama [name]. Él es en su año finalmente de universidad y estudia español y ruso. Ahora, está escribiendo su disertación. Creo que su tema es la comparación entre las diferencias de estas lenguas, pero no estoy seguro si esto verdad, ya que [name] hablaba rapidísimo y lo encontraba difícil para entenderlo al principio. Pero, después cinco o diez minutos me acostumbré de esto. Es probable que practique más como yo, porque lleva siete años estudiando y hablando español, y también su curso es los idiomas, pero español es un módulo solamente de mi parte. Otra chica llegó y se disculpó por llegar tarde porque la nieve la quedó atorada. Como esto medio tiempo, sus lecturas han cancelado y estaba muy molesta. Estaba de acuerdo con ella porque lo mismo me ha pasado. Empezaron a decir de los huelgos que están pasando en este momento. Lo encontraba un tema muy interesante porque no he hablado mucho de esto alguna vez. No suelo hablar de esto cuando conozco alguno nuevo, y por eso era difícil ya que no sabía algunas palabras en español. [name] me ayudaba un poco – por ejemplo me enseñó que ‘to refund’ es ‘devolver’ o ‘reembolsar’. También, aprendía que ‘estar en huelgo’ es una frase coloquial, y era muy útil porque lo usaba mucho cuando hablando. La chica que llegó tarde estaba furiosa con los huelgos (y la nieve además) porque sus lecturas han cancelado. Estaba estresada de sus exámenes, y dijo que echa de menos sus clases, particularmente español. Dije que echo de menos mis clases también, especialmente la práctica del español, ya que para aprender un idioma se puede hablar mucho y no es posible aprenderlo con un libro solamente. Sin embargo, mientras que no quiero que los huelgos alteren mi educación, apoyo a la causa de los profesores. Yo estaba contenta que podía decir esto en español sin errores, porque recordaba las palabras como ‘apoyar’ (en vez de ‘soportar’) o ‘los pensiones’. Pero, me olvidé como se dice ‘signature’ o ‘to sign’ en español cuando estaba describiendo la situación en la universidad de Liverpool. (Como los huelgos, más que siete mil estudiantes querían reembolsos y firmaron una petición, pero la universidad se les negó.) Ninguno de nosotros podíamos recordar como se dice ‘firmar’, y por eso dije: “siete mil estudiantes escribieron sus nombres a la petición”. No era una traducción perfecta, pero se podía entenderlo. Entonces [name] – un hombre que está estudiando una maestría en física – nos acompañó. Como fue al otra café de idiomas cerca de [name of neighbourhood], llegó tarde. [name] habla español mejor que [name], y cuando empezó a hablar, yo estaba confuso por veinte o treinta segundos. Pero, como antes, me acostumbré de esto. [name]	do you study? Comparing with others Context: the weather outside affects what happens inside the LC Context: the ongoing strike shapes what goes on in the LC (e.g., conversation topics and the vocab participants use and learn collaboratively) Beliefs about language learning (“I support the cause” - She knows that I’m striking. Issues with positionality? Does she feel compelled to say that because I’m going to read it?) Compensation strategies. Language. Finding alternative ways to convey the message. Comparing levels Sharing Spanish learning trajectories and experiences abroad (I wonder if the guy spoke Russian with her? I can ask her in the interview)

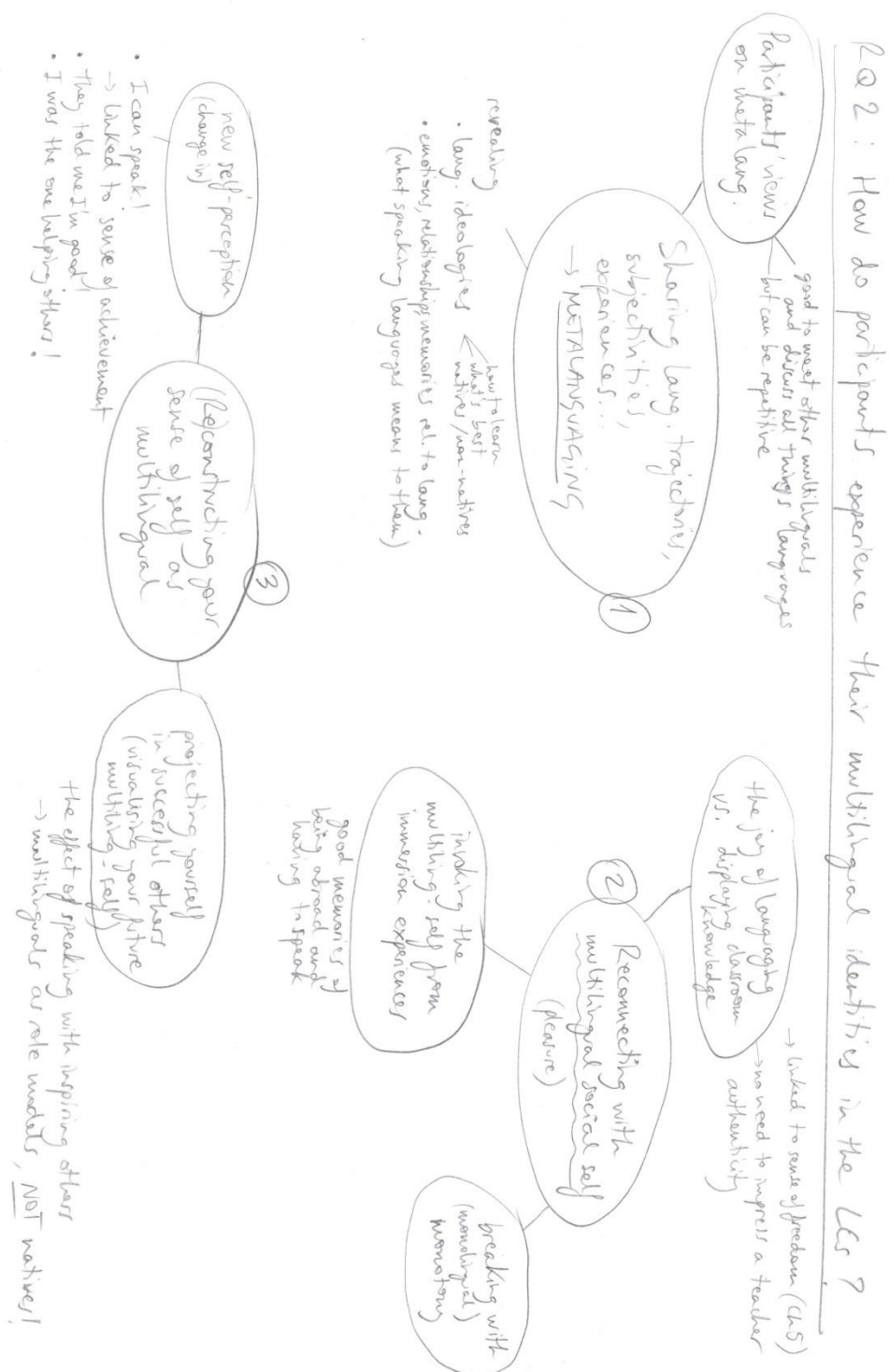
nos preguntaba sobre nuestras experiencias con español y [name] describió su año extranjero. Pasó tiempo en Andalucía, en la universidad de Granada, y en Tomsk (una ciudad rusa) de modo que se podía mejorar sus idiomas. Cuando lo preguntaba por qué razón eligió Tomsk en vez de Moscú o San Petersburgo, me dijo que quería una experiencia autentica. Creo que era autentica, pero más difícil – Tomsk es una ciudad pequeña y no hay mucha gente que habla inglés. Para mí, me gustaría mucho ir al año extranjero, pero no sé dónde, no estoy seguro si España es un lugar que hay universidades con una buena reputación para estudiar económicas. A lo mejor en Francia o en algún lugar en Asia. No quiero ir a los Estados Unidos, en mi opinión es muy estereotípico. Pero no sé, podría cambiar en opinión. [name] dijo que no le gustaban los Estados Unidos porque cuando fue allí, se parecía que la gente está muy arrogante y hay demasiada cultura de consumismo. No estaba de acuerdo con él, creo que todas experiencias son diferentes. Por ejemplo, cuando visité el Nuevo York el año pasado, lo me encantaba. [name] me preguntaba de mi opinión de Sudamérica y la economía allí. Tenía pocas problemas otra vez contestar a él, ya que no suelo hablar de esta tema, pero me gustaba la práctica. Dije que hay mucha potencial para desarrollo, pero los países tienen que reducir la corrupción y crear más instituciones sociales para mejorar las vidas de los ciudadanos. Con estas reformas, el continente se puede mejorar. Quería decir “to grow” también, pero nadie sabía la frase correcta. [name] dijo “aumentar”, y [name] proponía “la mejora en crecimiento económico”. Más tarde, cuando usé el diccionario, aprendí que [name] estaba correcto. Fue buena suerte, como usé la frase de [name] a hablar. En general estaba feliz. Era una buena experiencia, aprendí vocabulario nuevo y practiqué mucho español. Es verdad que era duro para entender todos cuando [name] o [name] estaban hablando, pero me acostumbré a la forma de hablar rápida. También, mi forma de hablar no era fragmentado, nadie lentamente. Sin embargo, mientras que no hablo mal, necesito más práctica para mejorar mi fluidez.	Year abroad Stereotypes Experiences abroad Discussing global issues: economy in South America Collaborative learning of vocab Zone of proximal development Self-evaluation

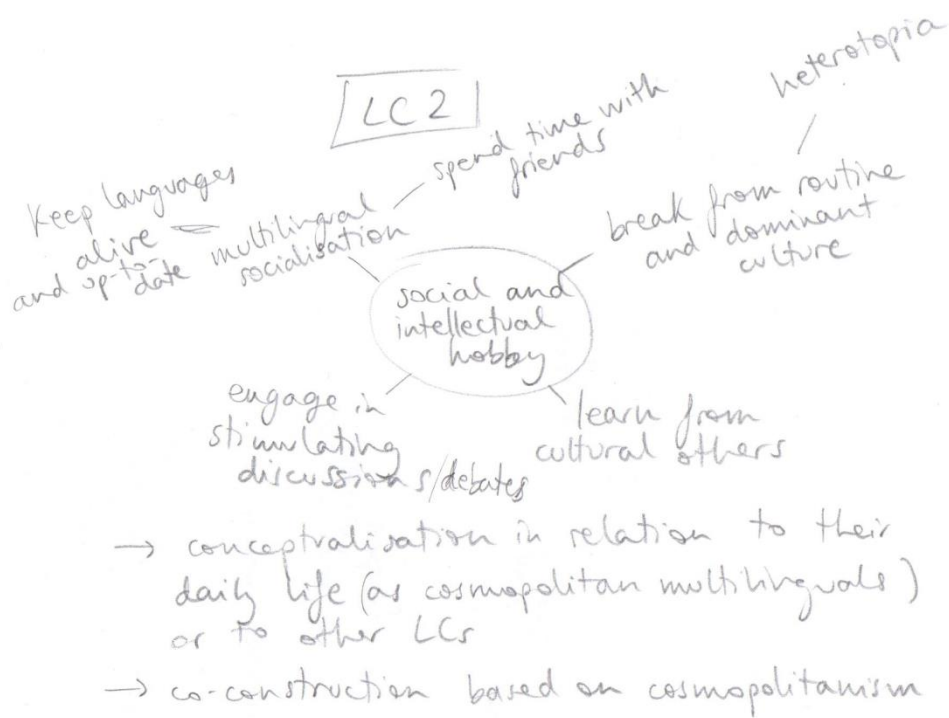
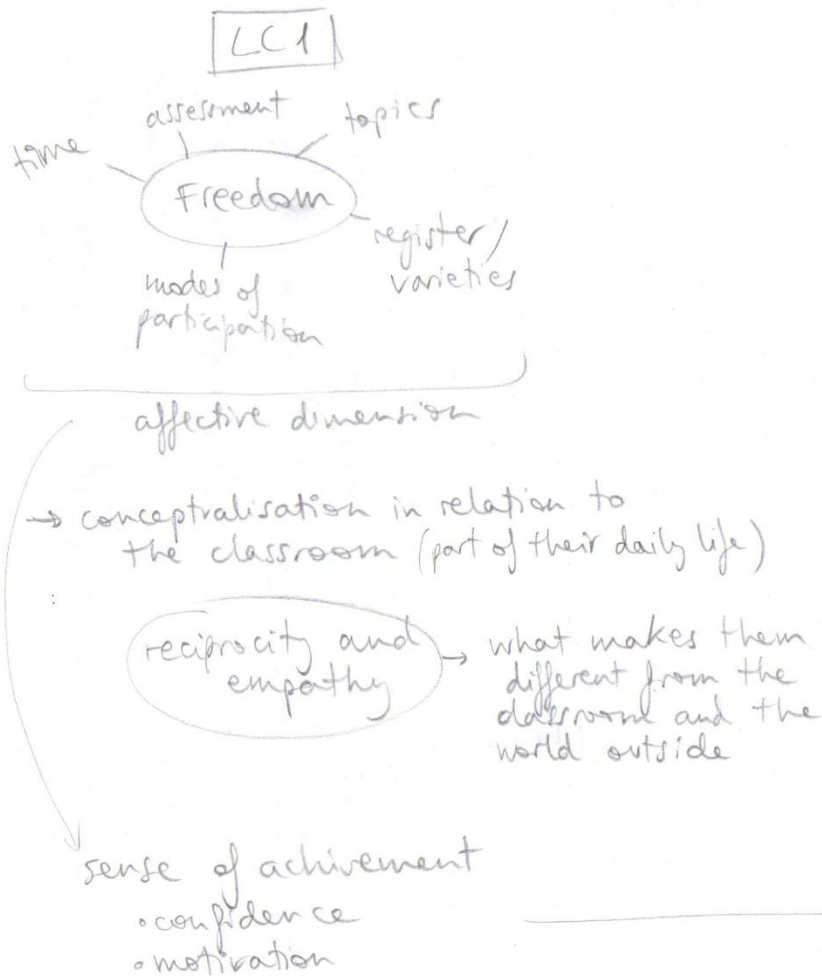
APPENDIX K: List of nodes from NVivo

Nodes				
	Name	Sources	References	
+	(de)humanising the learning experience		6	11
+	Beliefs about language and language learning		11	30
+	classroom vs LC		12	25
+	creating opportunities		11	41
	exchanging tips		4	7
	feedback		7	12
+	feelings and emotions		14	58
	group dynamics in the LC		11	35
	interaction with the environment		7	16
+	intercultural		14	53
	L2 identities		10	29
	L2 socialization		13	43
	LC outside uni		7	10
	legitimacy		2	4
	natives and non-natives		11	22
	negotiating modes of participation		10	19
	organising a LC		3	3
	ownership		8	17
+	peer learning		13	33
	real world vs classroom		6	6
+	real world vs LC		10	23
	reciprocity		2	2
	repetition in the LC		10	12
	role of the organisers		7	8
+	self-assessment		6	11
	tandem vs LC		2	2
	time to speak		6	9
	Topics in the LC		13	35
	use of laugh		8	27
+	why people (don't) attend a LC		13	41
+	Why they like the LC		13	26

+	Why they like the LC		13	26
	learning new things		2	2
	meeting people		5	9
+	opportunity to speak		4	4
	relatable topics		4	4
	speaking with no pressure		3	4
	time to speak		3	3
	realising your potential		1	1
	reciprocity, everyone benefits		2	5
+	speaking with natives		3	3
	help from natives		1	1
	knowing your teachers better		1	1
+	the atmosphere		2	2
	collaborative		2	2
	different levels		1	1
	fun, relaxed atmosphere		7	11
+	loads of people		2	2
	unpredictable		1	1
	multilingual		1	1
	same age		1	2

APPENDIX L: Examples of handwritten conceptual maps to organise themes and subthemes





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