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## IDENTITY, INVESTMENT, AND POWER RELATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF NONPROFIT ADULT ESL LEARNERS

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**IDENTITY, INVESTMENT, AND POWER  
RELATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF NONPROFIT  
ADULT ESL LEARNERS**

A Thesis Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Abby Elaine Hassler  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis reports the results of a qualitative case study of adult ESL learners at Centro Hispano, an immigrant advocacy nonprofit organization, in Knoxville, Tennessee. The study seeks to understand how these learners perceive their own identity in and outside of the ESL classroom, how they invest in learning English, what factors hurt or help their investment, and how they perceive and respond to power relations in the nonprofit and in the greater Knoxville community. Primary collection methods are semi-structured interviews with four adult ESL learners, three volunteer classroom instructors, and the program director. Additional data collection includes surveys, diary entries, and classroom observations. Drawing from student participants' experiences learning and using English, the study provides pedagogical suggestions for Centro Hispano and other nonprofits about how to best meet their students' needs. The study also presents recommendations for future research on issues of identity, investment, and power relations for this understudied and valuable population of learners.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One Introduction .....	1
Overview of chapters .....	9
Chapter Two Literature Review.....	12
Overview of the field of SLA and my research .....	13
Identity: A theoretical framework.....	16
Operational definition of identity.....	19
Investment.....	20
A brief history of motivation research .....	22
L2 motivational self system and person-in-context .....	24
Broadening Norton’s view of investment .....	26
Imagined communities and imagined L2 selves.....	29
Power relations.....	31
Standard language ideology, accented English, the communicative burden, and language brokers .....	33
Mock Spanish, Inverted Spanglish, and English Public Spaces .....	36
Chapter Three Methods.....	40
Centro Hispano de East TN: The context of the study .....	42
Programs and services.....	42
Participants.....	44
Student participants.....	44
Instructor participants .....	47
Director participant .....	49
Data collection .....	49
Surveys.....	50
Survey with students .....	50
Survey with instructors .....	50
Interviews.....	51
Interview with students .....	51
Interview with instructors .....	53
Interview with the director.....	53
Diary entries.....	53
Classroom observations .....	54
Data analysis .....	54
Student interview coding .....	56
Investment.....	56
Power relations.....	56
Student diary coding .....	57
Student classroom observation coding.....	57
Reliability of coding .....	57
Chapter Four Identity and Investment .....	61
How students invest in learning English.....	62
Seeking out English learning materials.....	62
Relying on social language support .....	64

What factors help investment? .....	67
A belief that English is necessary .....	67
Being involved in the community of Centro Hispano .....	71
Possessing a highly ambitious learning style .....	73
What factors hurt investment? .....	76
Having a busy schedule .....	76
Short-term negative attitudes toward language and learning .....	79
Poor classroom dynamics .....	81
Conclusion .....	83
Chapter Five Identity and Power .....	86
Outside: Real-world power relations .....	86
Inverted English use to combat mocking speech .....	87
Divided interpretations of accented or developing English .....	89
“Freezing up” to preserve perceived intelligence and status .....	93
Reinforcing previous professional identity to process superiority .....	95
Frustration with relying on “language brokers” and technology to communicate ...	97
Inside: Centro Hispano power relations .....	99
The important role of safe, lived spaces .....	99
Instructors isolate learners when speaking quickly .....	101
Conclusion .....	102
Chapter Six Conclusions, Suggestions, and Recommendations for Future Research ....	104
Identity: A theoretical discussion .....	104
From theory to pedagogy: Identity, investment, and power relations .....	107
Suggestion 1: Offer additional social language support .....	108
Suggestion 2: Introduce effective, authentic writing prompts .....	108
Suggestion 3: Incorporate strategies to help students avoid “freezing” up .....	110
Suggestion 4: Introduce training sessions and/or materials for new instructors .....	111
Suggestions for future research .....	113
References .....	115
Appendices .....	122
Appendix A: Student Consent Form (Spanish) .....	123
Appendix B: Student Consent Form (English) .....	127
Appendix C: Instructor Consent Form .....	131
Appendix D: Administrator Consent Form .....	134
Appendix E: Informal Survey Protocol .....	137
Appendix F: Student Interview Protocols .....	139
Appendix G: Instructor Interview Protocol .....	143
Appendix H: Administrator Interview Protocol .....	145
Appendix I: Diary Entry Prompt .....	147
Appendix J: Classroom Observation Protocol .....	149
Appendix K: Investment Codes .....	151
Appendix L: Power Relation Codes .....	153
Vita .....	155

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

**Mary:** I don't speak English, okay?

**Abby:** But you're speaking English right now!

**Mary:** No, no. I don't speak...correct.

This exchange with Mary prior to the start of my research illustrates one of the main reasons I decided to pursue a qualitative study of a local nonprofit. I taught Mary, a middle-aged, highly energetic Portuguese woman, every Wednesday night for several months in 2018 at the nonprofit Centro Hispano, where her familiar refrains in the classroom were, "I don't speak English" and "I hate English!" When asked why she thought she doesn't speak or why she "hates" the language, her answers centered around the belief that something about her speech was incorrect. Her perception of her English production was not unique. Many other students at the nonprofit echoed this same thought to varying degrees during my time teaching or conducting interviews for this study. Most poignantly, however, was an exchange I heard during a classroom observation between Mary and another instructor in the upper-level conversation course. Mary humorously and exasperatedly exclaimed "I just don't speak English!" to which the instructor assured her, "Don't worry, someday you'll speak right."

What does it mean to speak "right?" How might this ideology about language affect adult language learners? How do these learners view themselves and their language in and outside of the ESL classroom? It was this initial exchange that prompted me to explore issues of identity for adult language learners because I want to understand how student identity is connected to their



language production, views of their own language abilities, why they study the language, and how they navigate power dynamics with native speakers.

The second exchange between Mary and the instructor indicates a need for more research in the field and training for volunteer language instructors. As the case of Mary and other students illustrated, these individuals are faced with enough challenges living in an English-dominant community, it is essential to conduct targeted, qualitative research into adult ESL learner identity to see not only how they perceive themselves but how they navigate the acquisition process in a new country. This study may contribute to the field of adult ESL education by helping nonprofits improve their English teaching practices and provide more comprehensive support for these learners in cities that might not value their “incorrect” English.

Adult L2 education in the U.S. consists of a diverse array of class settings, including both academic and non-academic environments. My study focuses on students enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) nonprofit classes that help adult learners gain English proficiency for “employment and other social interactions” (Larrotta, 2017, p. 62). Within this area of noncredit adult ESL education, there are distinctions between learning settings, which include state-administered and federally funded ESL programs, workplace programs, faith-based programs, and community-based organizations (Eyring, 2014). This study focuses on community-based programs, where learners attend free or low-cost programs at nonprofit organizations. Moving forward, I will now refer to my participant population as nonprofit adult ESL learners.

Nonprofit adult ESL learners face numerous challenges during the English acquisition process, such as problems with restricted “access to economic, educational, and public resources” and “limited interactional opportunities...with speakers of the target language”

(Ciriza-Lope, Shappeck & Arxer, 2016, p. 288). First, unlike elective L2 learners who “learn a language from a majority position of equal power and hence with no evidence or immediate power struggles” (Ortega, 2009, p. 245), most nonprofit adult ESL students are circumstantial L2 learners, where they “must learn the majority language for reasons over which they have little choice” and are usually in the new language environment due to “immigration, economic hardship, postcolonialism, war or occupation” (p. 243). Despite these challenges, adult ESL learners tend to be successful in achieving their specific English-related goals, even if it takes them longer than K-12 or higher education contexts, due to their “cognitive maturity” and personal “motivation to pursue personal goals” (Eyring, 2014, p. 124). For many adult learners, English represents a combination of social, professional, economic, cultural benefits, and access to both real and imagined communities (Kanno & Norton, 2012). Though these learners may sometimes seem slightly ambivalent to the technical and time-consuming inner workings of learning a language, ultimately, they are heavily invested in learning how to speak English, even if various internal and external factors slow down this acquisition process.

Adult ESL learners also face difficulty when they choose to learn English to “advance economically” but their desire may be “inhibited by their life situation” (Finn, 2011, p. 35). These learners are often “locked into low-wage jobs, blocked from acquiring new skills and new jobs, denied equal access to health and other services, and shut off from contact with the larger society” without English (Larrotta, 2017, p. 62). In this view, learners may view English education as an opportunity for improvement but lead “complex lives” that “limits their access to classes” (Orem, 2000, p. 441). These “limits” may include “erratic work schedules, low-paying and low-skill jobs, working multiple jobs, and lack of job stability” (Finn, 2011, p. 35). When

adult ESL learners do discontinue their studies, even for a short time, their reasons for this decision usually hinge on issues like “transportation problems, family health issues, and insufficient income” (Eyring, 2014, p. 124). While poor self-determination and a lack of support at home can also contribute, it is usually issues out of students’ control, such as lack of access or chaotic work and home schedules, that best explain problems of persistence in learning English. My research intends to gently push back against both this limited lens, where students only choose to learn English for economic gain and the stereotype that all immigrants with developing English skills are “impoverished” (Eyring, 2014, p. 139). While financial advancement is always a compelling factor for anyone to invest in a new language, it is not the singular reason most adult ESL learners choose to invest in learning English. In this study, I argue that there are many reasons why learners choose to invest in learning English and many more factors that help or hinder this acquisition process that all shape their identity in and out of the classroom.

Another issue facing these learners is how immigration is viewed in light of the current political administration, where conditions for immigrants “are rapidly changing for the worse” and they are likely to “experience increasing persecution and discrimination” due to the highly charged political environment (Larrotta, 2017, p. 65). Due to conservative, anti-immigrant political tides, opportunities for immigrants, especially undocumented ones, to enroll in state or federally funded adult ESL programs may “become slimmer” as regulations and documentation might be needed for these programs to “receive federal funding” (p. 65). Many immigrants may turn to free or low-cost nonprofit programs to receive social, legal, and English support because these programs do not rely on state or federal funding and are usually removed from political support. However, as my study takes place at a local nonprofit in a mid-size city in the

Southeastern U.S., the current political environment should be taken into account when approaching the various power relations that exist in the greater community for these nonprofit adult ESL learners. Through focusing on this population of learners in this context, my findings may complicate the views of “sympathizers of anti-immigrant movements” who may be less hostile if they understood more about the complexities of learning a second language as an adult (Ortega, 2009, p. 8) and contribute to the rationale for why it is essential to offer adult ESL programs for the growing immigrant population in the country. This research is guided by the ideal that “it is in [the country’s] best interest to help [learners] build on and develop their current education and work skills/experience” at adult education programs, which will “contribute to their personal prosperity” in the country (Larrotta, 2017, p. 68). While I do not support the notion that immigrants and L2 speakers must assimilate to thrive in the U.S., it is universally acknowledged that some level of English proficiency is needed to advance socially, economically, or professionally in areas of the country that are more English dominant. This study also seeks to demonstrate the need for continued funding for these programs and research into best classroom practices, while exploring the role power imbalances between speakers may play in the acquisition process.

Learners also face problems in their own learning environment because of the difficulties nonprofit organizations face when serving their students. Many L2 scholars would agree that “successful adult learning outcomes are connected to the environment in which the learning takes place” (Finn, 2011, p. 37). Unlike academic or state or federally funded adult L2 education programs, community-based, nonprofit ESL programs rely on donations and funding sources from their local community to stay in operation. Nonprofit workers, therefore, must carefully

balance their time between providing services for their students, handling day-to-day workloads, and writing grants to secure more funding for both them and the services they provide to their students. As a result, many nonprofit workers handle overwhelming workloads with lower salaries and heavily rely on the support of community volunteers to offset teaching costs and provide philanthropic opportunities for these volunteers. Many times, these volunteers are “part-time” and “often untrained,” which may lead to “minimal advocacy efforts” for the immigrant populations in which they serve (Eyring, 2014, p. 139). Literal issues of space are also relevant in this discussion of nonprofit adult ESL learners and the environment in which they learn because even physical factors, such as temperature, seating arrangements, room size, lighting, and how technology is or isn’t used all contribute to successful or unsuccessful learning outcomes (Finn, 2011, p. 37). For example, at one point during my study, water pipes broke in the basement of the location, causing classes to be canceled for two days. Space and the learning environment, it would seem, can be key elements in the acquisition process for nonprofit adult ESL learners and worth exploring further.

Lastly, classroom dynamics also serve as a challenge for this population. For instance, many adult ESL instructors find it difficult to teach of students from a range of cultural, educational, and professional backgrounds. In one classroom, instructors may have some students with advanced degrees and others with limited literacy in their first language (Eyring, 2014). Unlike K-12 or formal higher education settings where students are relatively on the same educational level, nonprofit adult ESL learners pose a unique challenge for instructors. Students of varying proficiency levels, “age, religion, cultural...background, occupation, educational attainment, learning ability, participation level, literacy level, and motivations for learning”

(Eyring, 2014, p. 122) may all be present in one classroom. This diverse environment can present certain problems for the learners themselves because higher-level learners may not feel as challenged, while lower-level learners may feel lost or overwhelmed. Due to a nonprofit's lack of financial support and reliance on potentially untrained instructors who may not be trained to handle this classroom diversity effectively, curriculum development usually falls to books and pre-crafted book series offerings. These book series serve as a defacto "curriculum offering" where students purchase the book for their classes and volunteer instructors teach lessons primarily based on lesson plans outlined in the books. This option is affordable, perfect for a rotating schedule of volunteers, and less time consuming than creating a unique curriculum, yet may present certain shortcomings for the precise needs of the learners. For instance, needs assessment may be left up to individual instructors who may or may not understand the importance of teaching what learners need to know, rather than teaching what the book series curriculum thinks students should know. Through this research, I hope to offer pedagogical teaching advice based on my findings of students' identity development and how they invest in learning English and what factors may slow down or impede this progress.

When examining current SLA research into identity, the field has dutifully examined issues of identity for K-12 or university-level students (Dörnyei, 2009; Duff, 2017; Ivanič, 1998; Ushioda, 2009). These researchers have made valuable contributions to the field by allowing for a better understanding of how student develop, negotiate, and construct their identities inside and outside of the classroom. Despite these theoretical findings of young learners, identity research in adult L2 education settings has been less than robust. Scholars who do explore adult L2 identity have shaped the field of second language acquisition in their studies of the "dynamic"

identities of adult L2 learners, focusing on issues of investment, imagined communities, and power relations to examine the complex acquisition process these learners encounter (Darvin & Norton 2015; Norton 1995, 1997, 2013, 2016; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Norton Pierce, 1995; Kanno & Norton, 2012). Others have focused on issues of learner attitude, class, and language socialization (Ciriza-Lope, Shappeck & Arxer, 2016; Block, 2012; Duff & Talmy, 2011). In light of current research in the field, there remains a need to explore issues of adult ESL identity in the Southeastern U.S. at a local nonprofit organization. This specific setting will demonstrate how these learners develop their identity similarly and differently to other contexts, along with the unique factors that affect their identity perception and investment in learning English. With more research in this learning context, nonprofit advocates and educators can improve their teaching practices and learners will benefit from these advancements. When there is not extensive research in the field, nonprofits may struggle to bring awareness to the needs of this unique group of learners and secure continued funding to support them. This study also aims to investigate ways in which space, such as the physical presence of the nonprofit in the community, and students' perception of power relations between themselves and L1 speakers of English influence their identity development and investment in learning English in this context.

Through an identity framework, this qualitative study aims to address these previously mentioned challenges and gaps in research by providing a relevant lens from which to interpret my data for these nonprofit adult ESL learners who are learning English in a high-pressure environment. I want to explore adult ESL education beyond the economic value English represents for these learners and show how vital the ESL classroom can be for creating community, decreasing the impact of negative power relations, and fostering investment in

learning. My study consists of a series of semi-structured interviews, diary entries, classroom observations, and surveys for nonprofit adult ESL learners at Centro Hispano, a Knoxville, Tennessee, nonprofit organization that serves the educational, childcare, and legal needs of Latinx members of the area. The study also involves one-time interviews and classroom observations with volunteer instructors at Centro Hispano and a one-time interview with the adult education program director at the nonprofit. Most simply, the primary goal of my study aims to answer this simple question: How do adult learners perceive their identity in and outside of the nonprofit adult ESL classroom? With a better understanding of identity development for nonprofit adult ESL learners, organizations like Centro Hispano may hopefully better serve the complex and ever-changing needs of their students and equip their volunteer instructors with the knowledge and resources they need to effectively teach their students.

I have chosen to approach second language studies through a socially oriented, identity perspective because scholars cannot study individual learners without understanding that they have “multiple identities, wide-ranging potential, and a vision of future learning outcomes” that involve participating in both real and “imagined future” contexts (Smith & Strong, 2009, p. 3). Expanding this discussion beyond identity, my research also hopes to improve the “visibility, funding, and curricular innovation” of nonprofit adult ESL programs through a better understanding of how these learners invest in learning English and what factors slow down or impede this progress (Eyring, 2014, p. 121).

## **Overview of chapters**

This project consists of six chapters. In Chapter One, I established the exigence for my research and discussed broadening existing approaches in identity theory research to account for



the unique population of nonprofit adult ESL learners. This chapter proposes how a better understanding of identity may inform nonprofit pedagogical practices in light of how their learners invest in learning English and what factors slow down, speed up, or stop this process altogether. Chapter Two discusses the notion of identity, which I use as my theoretical framework to investigate how learners change, position themselves, and learn in and out of the nonprofit adult ESL classroom. I argue that looking at the identity development of nonprofit adult ESL learners is essential for understanding how they choose to invest in learning English and what role power relations in and outside of the nonprofit may play a role in slowing down or stopping this acquisition process. In my discussion, I expand existing definitions of identity, investment, and power relations to better account for the specific environment of my study's context. Chapter Three outlines my research design, including the methods used, participant selection, the context of the study, description of participants, data collection, and data analysis. More specifically, I discuss my rationale for using a qualitative case study approach with semi-structured interviews, diary entries, classroom observations, and surveys, along with how I coded my data and ensured its reliability with an inter-coder reliability check.

Chapters Four and Five serve as my combined results and discussion chapters of my study. They are separated based on in-depth, thematic discussions of my identity framework and two major themes: investment and power relations. In Chapter Four, I discuss the intersection of identity and investment, drawing on interview, classroom observation, and diary entry data from my study participants. Student data is supplemented with excerpts from instructor and program director interviews. For Chapter Five, I analyze the relationship between identity and power relation, using student, instructor, and program administrator data. Finally, Chapter Six contains

my conclusion, pedagogical implications, and suggestions for future research. The chapter reiterates major findings, returns to my original research questions, and provides four pedagogical suggestions for Centro Hispano based on the findings presented in Chapters Four and Five. Suggestions for future research establish how future scholars can build upon my findings and approach.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study intends to highlight the complex relationship between identity, investment, and power relations in and outside of the adult ESL classroom. This chapter explores these concepts, drawing from the work of Bonny Norton (Darvin & Norton 2015; Norton 1995, 1997, 2013, 2016; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Norton Pierce, 1995). Norton worked to bridge the gap in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research between the individual and language learning context. In her seminal work (Norton Pierce, 1995), she suggested SLA theorists have not “questioned how relations of power in the social world affect social interaction between second language learners and target language speakers” (p. 12). This present study expands Norton’s work to account for the context-specific and socially constructed needs of nonprofit adult ESL learners, along with encourage second language instructors to “help language learner claim the right to speak outside of the classroom” (p. 26). For too long, SLA scholarship has placed more emphasis on EFL and academic contexts, nearly ignoring the unique needs, desires, and challenges nonprofit adult ESL learners face on a daily basis in favor of young learners in K-12 or higher education settings, or even other adult learners in academic or for profit environments (Atkinson, 2011; Dörnyei, 2000; Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Otto, 1998; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Duff, 2017; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Ortega, 2009; Matsumoto, 2011; Morita & Kobayashi, 2008; Ushioda, 2009; Waninge, Freerkien, Dörnyei, & De Bot, 2014). As outlined in Chapter One, more immigrants continue to enter the country from all over the world, leading to high demand for free or affordable adult education. However, funding for these programs stays the same or decreases depending on the current political climate or how states classify or value

these learners. Recent anti-immigrant policies from the current presidential administration could result in increasing regulations, documentation requirements, threats of persecution, and instances of discrimination for immigrants in the country. This political situation may make it harder for adult ESL learners to seek out these educational programs and for the programs themselves to secure long-lasting financial support (Larrotta, 2017, p. 65).

Given these circumstances, a closer look at identity, investment, and power relations may have a positive impact on the pedagogical practices of these nonprofits. A thorough understanding of these concepts may shape how nonprofit ESL learning educators, program directors, and advocates approach the language learning process for adults. It may also contribute to an understanding of how these students understand and tailor their own learning processes in the face of power relations and other mitigating factors. A better understanding of investment and power relations of nonprofit adult ESL learners in a southeastern town in the current political environment may encourage policymakers and education leaders to dedicate more resources and time in this specific learner population. In leveraging an identity approach to SLA, I acknowledge the field as a whole and how it has evolved in such a way that makes room for my unique approach to studying language learners. In what follows, I situate my research in the broader field of SLA and explore a more intimate understanding of identity, investment, and power relations.

## **Overview of the field of SLA and my research**

SLA “investigates the human capacity to learn languages other than the first, during late childhood, adolescence, or adulthood, and once the first language or languages have been established” (Ortega, 2009, pp. 1-2). It is viewed as a subfield of applied linguistics, which is a

mega-field that deals with issues that intersect with “language and society, education and cognition” (p. 7). Beginning in the late 1960s, SLA was an interdisciplinary field that drew heavily from similar fields of child language acquisition, language teaching, linguistics, and psychology (p. 2). The field experienced massive growth and reorientation during the 1980s and 1990s when many scholars branched away from traditional social-psychologist research approaches and moved into more cognitive and process-oriented approaches (Atkinson, 2011; Dörnyei, 2005; Ortega, 2009). This study is situated within SLA, but I also draw from sociolinguistic, L2 writing, and social psychology perspectives since SLA widely intersects with these fields.

For the purpose of my study, I use the term L2 acquisition to denote the process of learning and acquiring a second language. The field of SLA has various terms to describe the differences between native and non-native languages, which include mother tongue, first language, and L1. This study does not use the term additional languages or another SLA term to refer to languages learned after the L1 because the focus is on the ESL context. As mentioned in Chapter One, this study’s student participants are nonprofit adult ESL learners. This classification most accurately describes my specific learner population and aligns with how the nonprofit classifies its students. Ortega (2009) acknowledges that there may be some danger in using opposing dichotomous labels like L1 and L2, yet none of my participants are opposed to being labeled as an L2 or ESL learner because they are, quite literally, learning English as their second language.

The learning context is essential in SLA researchers and for the purpose of my study. Scholars make a distinction between naturalistic and instructed learners, but simultaneously

recognize that the vast majority of language learners acquire their L2 through a mixture of both approaches (Ortega, 2009, p. 6). This study focuses on a nonprofit ESL learning environment, which classifies as instructed, but it is not a formal academic environment and much of the classes and learning situations fall under more naturalistic, conversational approaches to language learning. Furthermore, all of the student participants live in an English-speaking, Southeastern city, therefore, a lot of their L2 acquisition occurs outside of the classroom. For this reason, it is vital to not ignore the specific geographical context of their language learning environment. In a similar line of thought, SLA researchers often make distinctions between foreign, second, and heritage learning contexts. My population is made up of learners who are learning English in the United States after spending the majority of their lives outside of the country, only to arrive in Knoxville after immigrating or moving back to the country after being born here. My context is ESL, while a large portion of the field frequently focuses on EFL.

The field of SLA offers the potential for real-life impact in tackling controversial issues of the age of onset, the rate of acquisition, ultimate attainment, effective instruction, motivation, and more (Ortega, 2009, p. 8). As L2 learning is rarely just about language for certain learner populations and these learners' needs are complex and ever-changing, a social, identity-focused approach to SLA can become a platform for "advocating social justice for L2 learners" (p. 251). In my research, I hope to challenge inaccurate assumptions from "sympathizers of anti-immigrant movements" (p. 8) who believe that adult ESL learners settle for rudimentary survival language skills or refuse to learn English for personal reasons. I will achieve this goal with a comprehensive and practical look at the social, identity-focused dimensions of SLA. My goal for this study is first to understand how nonprofit adult ESL learners perceive their identities in and

out of the language classroom. For the rest of this chapter, I outline my theoretical framework, identity, and define two major concepts, investment and power relations.

### **Identity: A theoretical framework**

This study provides its own operational definition of identity, drawing from several prominent theorists in the fields of SLA, L2 writing, and composition. Before providing this definition of identity, however, I first discuss these existing definitions and theories of identity and how they inform my operational definition.

Identity theory is rarely the focus of traditional SLA research, yet some scholars assert that research into identity in L2 learning is growing steadily in the wider field of applied linguistics and other sub-disciplines, such as language socialization (Ortega, 2009). SLA scholars who do consider identity in their research ground their work in poststructuralist feminist theory (Duff & Talmy, 2011, p. 108) where identity is “dynamic and contested” (Ortega, 2009, p. 242). Meanwhile, much of SLA identity research is oriented toward “macro dimensions of context” and theorizes the social as a “site of struggle in need of transformation” (Ortega, 2009, p. 242). The goal of my research is to challenge existing notions of identity for nonprofit adult ESL learners. To do so, I began with Norton’s model of identity (Darvin & Norton 2015; Norton 1995, 1997, 2013, 2016; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Norton Pierce, 1995) and then sought out other identity scholars to inform my operational definition.

In Norton’s (2013) work on language and identity of adult ESL learners, she defines identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 45). An identity approach to SLA should focus on individual language learners in relation to

the social world and address how power relations affect their access to the “target language community” (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 73). Norton’s work on identity asserts that language constructs “our sense of self” and that it is “multiple, changing, and a site of struggle” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 36). Her work expands identity in SLA scholarship, through examining “relations of power” in the language learning process (p. 36). She challenges traditional SLA theorists to consider the conditions that “allow learning to take place,” along with “how learners, inscribed by race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and sexual orientation are accorded or refused the right to speak” both in and out of the classroom (p. 37). In this view, every time individual language learners speak, they are “negotiating and renegotiating a sense of self in relation to the larger social world” (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 73).

Moving beyond Norton, identity has also been studied through the lens of instructor identity. Racelis and Matsuda (2015) paint instructor identity as “a dynamic process shaped by personal educational experiences and ongoing negotiation of various institutional contexts” (p. 203). These scholars note that this identity is “multifaceted” and can include “multiple identities or sub-identities that can sometimes result in tension” (p. 203). In this view, instructors are “active agents” in the own creation and maintenance of their identities in the classroom (p. 203). The essential role of context continues with Lee’s (2012) work in understanding EFL writing teachers develop in terms of identity, where identity is “pluralistic, dynamic, shifting, and unstable” (p. 311). Identity development is an “ongoing process” that is influenced by numerous factors, such as experiences, context, culture, and the activity of learners (p. 331). In this lens, identity is “context-specific” and “context-sensitive” as it weaves itself with the “social, cultural, and political” situations learners find themselves in (p. 331).



Similarly, identity is “multifaceted and dynamic” and created and influenced by “the historical and material reality” of life histories, group affiliations, physical appearances, actions, and social influences (Matsuda, 2016, p. 242). This historical and material reality, in turn, impacts a person’s sense of self or psychological reality (p. 242). More specifically, however, instructor identity is defined as the “evolving sense of professional self” that is significantly influenced by “belief about language teaching” (p. 242). This identity is further altered by their own experiences as language learners and previous teaching situation (p. 242). Some scholars, like Ivanič (1998), echo Matsuda and Norton, arguing that identity signifies “plurality, fluidity and complexity” and how it is constructed “socio-culturally, discursively, and through the mechanisms of social interactions” (pp. 11-12). As identity is a site of struggle, dynamic, contextual, and socially constructed, it is vital to note that it is also open to change over the course of a person’s lifetime. In this way, identity is not singularly present or historically influenced, but evolves across time and space.

Identity is also studied through socialization practices in the classroom, surrounding community, and greater social environment. In this manner, language socialization theories help researchers acknowledge how linguistic and communicative competence can be developed through learners interacting with members of the target language community who are more “knowledgeable or proficient” (Duff & Talmy, 2011, p. 95). After all, social learning and support from friends and family can be crucial to linguistic development (Mernard-Warwick, 2005). This theoretical approach examines both macro and micro contexts where language is used and learned, usually employing longitudinal research designs. In contrast to cognitive SLA approaches, language socialization aims to understand learners in much wider terms, looking at

both linguistic development and “other forms of knowledge” (Duff & Talmy, 2011, p. 95) that are gained through languages like culture, social knowledge, ideologies, epistemologies, identities and subjectivities, and affect. Unlike cognitivist SLA approaches, it focuses on the “social, political, and cultural contexts” where language is used and learned (p. 96). Much like Norton’s SLA identity approach, language socialization sees language learners as having multiple subjectivities and identities that are “inculcated, enacted, and co-constructed” through daily life experiences (p. 97).

Language socialization research acknowledges “agency, contingency, unpredictability, and multidirectionality” in the learning journey as learners socialize with teachers and other experts in their target language community (Duff & Talmy, 2011, p. 97). However, for a “variety of reasons,” some L2 learners do not experience access or acceptance in their target speech community and may even face “oppositions from others,” typically those who are L1 speakers in their community (p. 97). These learners may also not be fully invested in learning all the norms of their target speech community because their future goals may not require this complete adoption of the new culture. For example, learners may want to “retain an identity that is distinct from a particular ... community ... or for practical reasons may be unwilling to straddle both” (p. 98). Essentially, language socialization acknowledges complicated social, cultural, and political contexts in which learners operate and perceive their own identities.

### ***Operational definition of identity***

To summarize, I began with the concept of identity as how a person “understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2013, p. 45). This original definition

was shaped by other scholars who approach identity as a complex, dynamic, contextual, temporal, political, and cultural entity (Duff & Talmy, 2011; Ivanič, 1998; Lee, 2012; Matsuda, 2016; Racelis & Matsuda, 2015).

My operational definition of identity for the purpose of this study is “the dynamic and sometimes contradictory way in which people understand and position themselves in their social, political, historical, institutional, cultural, and imagined or future contexts.” This operationalized definition establishes the foundation for my exploration into issues of investment and power relations in the nonprofit adult ESL classroom.

## **Investment**

To understand nonprofit adult ESL students’ identity, I explore how and why they decide to learn a second language and what factors help and hurt this acquisition process. In her original work on identity theory, Norton Pierce (1995) introduced the concept of investment in an attempt “to capture the relationship of the language learner to the changing social world” (p. 17) and serve as a “sociological complement” to the “psychological construct” of motivation (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 37). Norton (1997) defines the term investment “to signal the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice it” (p. 411). I use investment, rather than motivation or other similar concepts for my study of identity because it more accurately describes the complex acquisition process for adult ESL learners. Unlike elective or low-stakes EFL learning contexts, my study focuses on circumstantial adult ESL learners who have to acquire English or risk being excluded from large portions of an English-dominant society. Despite the necessity of acquisition, many learners do experience short-term lapses in desire to study or practice, but

rarely fall victim to long-term bouts of a lack of motivation or desire to learn. For this reason, investment serves as a unique conceptual lens from which to examine the way adult ESL learners approach, learn, and use their L2.

Norton's theory of investment was informed by Bourdieu's (1977) notion of “cultural capital.” Tying this to her notion of investment, she writes “if learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital” (p. 17). Adult language learners hope that they will receive a “solid return” on their language investment that may result in financial, social, professional, or other intrinsic or external gains. Norton pushed against existing theories of instrumental motivation in SLA that painted learners as “unitary, fixed, and ahistorical” individuals (p. 17). In these traditional theories, learners only desire access to material gains, making their motivation a “fixed personality trait,” rather than part of a complex, ever-changing fabric of desires (p. 17). Essentially, investing in the target language simultaneously serves as an investment in learners’ own identities (Norton & McKinney, 2011).

How does motivation relate to Norton’s concept of investment and my specific adult ESL context? How can it account for my student participants? In Norton Pierce’s (1995) seminal article after her 1993 dissertation, she argued against traditional views of motivation from Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Gardner (1985), such as instrumental and integrative motivation, writing that these concepts cannot fully account for the complex relationships between identity, power, and language learning of female immigrant L2 learners. Instead of focusing on questions of learner motivation or personality in her work, she explored the identity of adult language learners in regards to questions of “What is the learner’s investment in the

target language?” and “How is the learner’s relationship to the target language socially and historically constructed?” (Norton, 1997, p. 411). In her work, she pushed past traditional constructs of learner identity as “good/bad, motivated/ unmotivated, anxious/ confident, introvert/ extrovert” to showcase how issues of power in various learning and situational contexts can require learners to position themselves in multiple ways, which may lead to “varying learning outcomes” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 37). For example, Darvin and Norton (2015) suggest that students may be highly motivated to learn in the classroom, but if the language practices or their instructor are “racist, sexist, or homophobic,” (p. 37) they may not be invested in the learning process. Her early work sought to extend traditional, static views of motivation that didn’t account for her particular study population of adult immigrant women in Canada in the early 1990s. To more fully understand why Norton chose and still chooses to work with the notion of investment instead of motivation, a more in-depth look at motivation in SLA is necessary.

### *A brief history of motivation research*

In SLA, motivation is understood as “the desire to initiate L2 learning and the effort employed to sustain it” (Ortega, 2009, p. 168). For most scholars, this is conceived as the view that some learners are extremely motivated, while others have little or no motivation. Most SLA researchers are interested in studying learner motivation to discover why learners want to learn, what kind of effort they put into learning, how long they keep learning, and how successfully they ultimately are at achieving this learning goal (Ushioda, 2009, p. 218). To be clear, I am not focusing on issues of motivation in my research because the theory does not fully account for the unique situation facing circumstantial L2 learners. However, I distinguish key differences

between motivation research, how the field has evolved, and explain how certain modern findings can better inform a concept of investment.

Motivation research began during the 1950s in Canada with psychologist researchers Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985) who developed the traditional model of L2 learning motivation, which is known as the socio-educational model (Ortega, 2009). They conducted studies with the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), which quantifies motivation through three dimensions: effort, enjoyment, and investment. Put more simply, the AMTB measures much effort people put forth when learning a language, the attitudes they feel towards learning a language (enjoyment), and their desire to learn (investment) (Ortega, 2009, pp. 169-170). The aim of early research was to make generalized predictions about what kind of motivation might lead to certain types of learning outcomes (Ushioda, 2009, p. 218) and reliably measure how individuals will feel about learning their L2 (Ortega, 2009, p. 170). As noted by Norton, large-scale research into motivation theory up until the 1990s largely ignored the social, temporal, or other dynamic elements of the acquisition process. It was in this context in which Norton Pierce (1995) wrote her seminal work on identity, investment, and power relations, arguing that traditional theories of motivation did not account for the complex and seemingly contradictory nature of adult language acquisition.

A more modern view of motivation, however, does account for issues of identity, context, time, and other social elements of language learning (Dörnyei, 2009; Ushioda, 2009). While the work of these scholars has changed the face of modern motivational research, I adopt the concept of investment for my research because motivation is not relevant to my research. Nonprofit adult learners cannot always choose the conditions in which they speak or elect to not learn a language

due to a lack of motivation. Even so, a targeted exploration of the L2 Motivational Self System framework and Person-In-Context view is necessary to demonstrate why I study investment and how it can be more purposefully applied to my research setting through these modern theories of motivational research (Dörnyei, 2009; Ushioda, 2009).

### ***L2 motivational self system and person-in-context***

Dörnyei was one of the first SLA researchers to challenge traditional notions of the motivational antecedents, such as orientations, attitudes, and integrativeness. He argued that within an EFL context, integrativeness isn't as poignant since most beginning learners rarely encounter native speakers or develop strong attitudes towards the language/speakers (Ortega, 2009, p. 178). For example, though there is potential for integration in more ESL-centric environments, Dörnyei argued, for EFL or other foreign language learning contexts, “integrative” has no meaning (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 24). This view is certainly true of EFL learners, yet circumstantial learners don't always have a say over how, where, and to whom they interact with in English. Integrativeness, at least in its most basic sense, is a key facet of the adult ESL learners' existence, yet not in the way previously defined by motivation researchers. Dörnyei (2009) recognized the theoretical shortcomings of integrativeness and integrative motivation, which led to the creation of the L2 Motivational Self System framework to more accurately account for motivational factors in the L2 acquisition process.

Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System redefines integrativeness as learners' drive to close the gap between their actual L2 self and their ideal or ought-to L2 self (Ortega, 2009, p. 186). This framework consists of three primary components: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience. The ideal L2 self, much like the name implies, deals with

learners who wish to attain an imagined version of themselves as native-like speakers. This concept is typically associated with integrative and internalized instrumental motives of motivation. Meanwhile, the ought-to self is more concerned with the attributes that learners believe they should possess to avoid negative outcomes, such as not failing exams, and tends to bear little resemblance to learners' actual desires or wishes. This second component is closely related to extrinsic and less internalized types of instrumental motives. Finally, the L2 learning experience focuses on situated motives like the learning environment and experience that contribute to a learners' acquisition success (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29).

Another dynamic and identity-focused approach to motivation comes from Ushioda (2009) with the person-in-context relational view of language motivation. Motivation in SLA is no longer viewed as a "stable individual difference factor" and researchers are increasingly looking at how the motivational process is "dynamic and changeable" (Waninge, F., Dörnyei, Z., & De Bot, K., 2014, p. 704). However, some scholars argue that even when individual differences are studied, they are done not as differences between individuals, but averages between groups of people who share similar characteristics (Ushioda, 2009, p. 215). Thus, it is important to note that the person-in-context approach views motivation not an "individual difference characteristic" but as something emerging from "relations between human intentionality and social structure" (p. 221). The "context" element of her framework is derived from how context has been frequently approached as an independent variable in motivational research, while Ushioda (2009) argues that scholarship should move to capture the "dynamic, complex, and non-linear" relationship between people and contexts (p. 218).



To summarize, the Person-in-Context relational view of motivation focuses on (1) real learners, rather than theoretical abstractions; (2) the agency /identity/ history/ background/ personality /motives/ goals of individuals; (3) the interaction between self-reflective intentional agency and the complex system of social relations, experiences, contexts, and activities of which learners are a part of (p. 220). Ushioda (2009) suggests her person-in-context relational view of motivation should draw and build upon other existing theoretical perspectives. In her work, she cites Vygotskian sociocultural theory, ecological perspectives, theories of situated learning and communities of practice, socio-cognitive approaches, social theory, and poststructuralist and critical perspectives, which includes Norton's view of investment (pp. 220-221). This unique approach to motivation is not quite divorced from original conceptions of motivation and draws far more from social SLA research than previous motivation scholarship. However, Ushioda does ground her work in Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System to illuminate how these self-states may "facilitate or constrain their engagement with future possible selves" (p. 225). Her view of motivation suggests, a new way of approaching social and identity research, rather than a new view of motivation theory.

### ***Broadening Norton's view of investment***

Norton's traditional view of motivation has remained consistent since her seminal work in the early 1990s (Darvin & Norton 2015; Norton 2013, 2016; Norton & McKinney, 2011). Norton does briefly acknowledge in her latest works that some scholars have broadened the original framework of motivation first proposed by Gardner and Lambert, yet she firmly maintains her view that "motivation in the field of SLA do not capture the complex relationships between power, identity and language learning" (p. 50). Despite this view, she does not currently

suggest that her concept of investment should completely replace motivation theories, nor does she believe that investment is “equivalent to instrumental motivation” (p. 50). Rather, she differentiates investment as a lens from which to view learners as “having a complex social history and multiple desires” (p. 50) and that when they speak and invest in a language, this investment serves as not only an investment in the language itself but an “investment” in their own identity (p. 51). This identity is constantly evolving based on various factors and circumstances across time.

While the majority of motivation research is conducted in EFL settings with young, elective learners, this study focuses on an ESL context with older, circumstantial learners. Current motivation research revolves around the belief that “language learners can choose under what conditions they will interact with members of the target language community” and this issue of access is solely dependent on the “learner’s motivation” (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 74). This assumption of learners was established as the result of early motivational studies, which examined attitudes of Anglophone high school teenagers toward learning French in Canada. Early motivation scholars ignored the role of power relations for their subjects because they did not play as much of a role in this context (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). The primary contributor to this gap in research is due to the overwhelming approach to EFL learning contexts, rather than ESL for most SLA motivation scholars. My adult student participants are in a circumstantial L2 learning environment rather than an elective L2 learning environment due to their immigrant status. Therefore, their desire to learn the language cannot be approached the same as the learners in historical studies of motivation, or more contemporary examples (Dörnyei, 2000; Waninge, Freerkien, Dörnyei, & De Bot, 2014). Even in these comprehensive

overviews of the field, the origins and development of motivation in SLA often fails to account for how motivation is studied in circumstantial L2 contexts for adult ESL learners and what role power relations play in this acquisition process for individuals (Ortega, 2009).

Immigrant, adult ESL learners do not have the luxury of choosing not to learn and being unmotivated as they might in an EFL context, therefore, long-term motivation or even classroom-specific motivation does not play a monumental role in this investment process. New approaches to motivation have overcomplicated a simple concept: Does someone want to learn a language and how hard are they willing to work towards acquiring it? This simplified notion of motivation seems irrelevant to circumstantial L2 learner who wish to integrate more fully into their target language community. They do not always a choice about whether or not to acquire the language and when they choose to interact with their target language community (Darvin & Norton 2015; Norton 1995, 1997, 2013, 2016; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Norton Pierce, 1995). Even for individuals who choose to remain insulated in communities of L1 speakers, they still must at times interact with members of the English- speaking community, making it necessary for them to either learn some of the L2 or rely on others to translate for them. For this reason, I stand by Norton's (1997) concept of investment because it more accurately describes the complex relationship between identity and language for this population of learners in relation to their past, present, and future circumstances. In sum, I interpret investment, not as a replacement for motivation, but rather, a relational process between language learners and their L2 while they work toward their imagined selves, while power relations and other internal and external factors impact this journey.

### *Imagined communities and imagined L2 selves*

Tied to Norton's work on investment and identity is her view of communities of practice and imagined communities. To Norton (2013), imagined communities refer to groups of people who may not be entirely tangible whom learners connect with in their imaginations (p. 8). In this view, these communities exist only in learners' minds, which they have formed based on their past experiences, along with their idealized version of their future selves (Ortega, 2009).

Norton's (2013) concept of imagined communities allows researchers to better understand and explore how learners' ties with certain present and future communities may shape their "learning trajectories" (p. 8). This concept accounts for Norton's (2013) student participant Mai who withdrew from her ESL course because she was not invested in the language practices of the classroom, thus keeping from her imagined community as an "office worker who dressed smartly and was not lost in the anonymity of the factory floor" (p. 9). It also explains the acquisition trajectory for another participant, Katarina, who felt bitter and alienated when positioned as an unskilled and uneducated immigrant based on her language proficiency and struggled to finish her ESL course (Ortega, 2009). However, Norton's view of imagined communities does not always showcase the unique learning situation of some circumstantial L2 learners since not all learners have a specific, imagined community in mind during their learning process.

In my study, I borrow from Dörnyei's (2009) discussion of the ideal and ought-to L2 selves. Though scholars drawing from this framework use it as a way to gauge language learners' motivation, I believe these two concepts would help broaden Norton's view of imagined communities since not all L2 learners wish possess a clear vision of themselves in an imagined community. Rather, circumstantial L2 learners may wish and be working to acquire English

proficiency for a host of other factors, many of which fall under the categories of ideal and ought-to L2 selves. Meanwhile, the L2 learning experience is a separate kind of motivation that should not be viewed as an end-goal like the previous two selves, but rather, motivation-in-process. For example, the ESL program itself (L2 learning experience) may serve as a motivating factor during the investment process for L2 learners, but isn't an imagined self in and of itself. Drawing from this discussion of imagined communities and ideal L2 selves, I propose repurposing these similar theories into one hybrid term: imagined L2 selves.

This imagined L2 selves will combine all the multifaceted ways in which nonprofit adult ESL learners negotiate their sense of self and their identity during their language acquisition process. Identity is neither static or easily defined, which is why an approach to learner investment and imagined communities must not narrowly define the goals learners are envisioning for themselves as just being community based. Furthermore, viewing these future selves only through the lens of motivation also does not completely explain the unique needs and desires of nonprofit adult ESL learners. It is not merely a matter of their ideal or ought-to L2 self that keeps them investing in the learning English. Many members of this population do not always have a choice to not be motivated to learn. Additionally, while both concepts are key in understanding EFL learners, I think this separation is not entirely indicative of adult ESL learners. Learners' ideal and ought-to L2 selves may frequently overlap or inform each other. Due to social, political, economic, professional, and other pressures to acquire English, their true hopes and aspirations may be rooted in responses to their circumstances. While they may always have had a desire to reach their ideal L2 self, they may also be spurred along by ought-to factors, making these two concepts one and the same at times for these learners. Though short-term

motivation may slow down the acquisition process, ultimately, nonprofit adult learners are always striving toward their imagined L2 selves and that this goal has little to nothing to do with their long-term motivation or specific goals for entering an imagined community. Rather, their imagined L2 selves are something they continue working towards through investing in the language, and they are dynamic, opaque, and contextually situated like their past and present identity.

## **Power relations**

Exploring how power relations impact adult ESL learners is crucial in understanding how learners' construct their identity inside and outside of the classroom. As mentioned in Chapter One, adult ESL learners face numerous social, financial, cultural, and physical challenges in their language acquisition journey, making it vital for researchers to examine the relationship between power, investment, and identity. For the purpose of this study, I approach power as the “socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions and communities through which symbolic and material resources in a society are provided, distributed and validated” (Norton, 2013, p. 47). Ivanič (1998) echoes this definition, pointing out the essential relationship between power and identity, stating “identity only establishes itself in relation to difference” and that the “adoption of one identity and rejection of others” involves power struggles (p. 14)

To begin my examination of power relations, I turned to Norton's notion of the relations of power that exist in the language learning process (Darvin & Norton, 2015). She drew from a poststructuralist theoretical perspective that highlighted both macro and micro levels of power that exist in society. This study focuses on these micro “everyday social encounters between people with differential access to symbolic and material resources - encounters that are

inevitably produced within language” (Norton, 2013, p, 47). In this view, every time language learners speak, they are “negotiating and renegotiating a sense of self in relation to the larger social world” (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 73). This notion of the right to speak is essential to understanding the identity development and language investment process of L2 learners. Unfortunately, the right and power to speak is frequently “unequally distributed” when L2 learners interact with native English speakers (Ortega, 2009, p. 242). During the language learning process, power relations may make L2 learners feel like they don’t have a voice in their community, which is why Darwin and Norton (2015) challenge educational advocates to try to understand the various conditions and environments that allow learning to take place, along with how other factors may impede or help this process.

Within this current discussion of power relations, the topics of anxiety and self-confidence may be relevant. While SLA scholars agree that anxiety is not a “permanent predisposition” of learners, self-confidence is viewed as more of an individual characteristic (Norton, 2013, p. 159). In Norton’s (2013) research, she found that the “locus of control” in certain communication settings helps one understand why some L2 speakers lack confidence or have anxiety about their speaking skills (p. 159). If learners are able to control the flow of information in an interaction or feel that there is not an unbalance in the communicative burden, they may be more confident about the language skills (p. 160). While there are always other mitigating factors leading to issues of speaker anxiety and self-confidence, this locus of control might serve as a solid starting point to further analyze issues of unbalanced communication between native and non-native English speakers.

To expand Norton's notion of the right to speak and its relationship to the locus of control in communication acts, I draw from Lippi-Green's (1997) communicative process of everyday social encounters and her discussion of standard language ideology. Lippi-Green's (1997) work clarifies and broadens this view of power relations to account for the intricacies and complexities involved in micro communication acts. Her work expands my discussion of power relations by showcasing not only the social environment in which adult ESL learners speak, but how they may perceive or respond to encounters with native English speakers. Adult ESL learners claiming their right to speak does not exist in a social or cultural vacuum, which is why a more sociolinguistic theoretical approach is necessary to interpret these situations. This expanded discussion begins with the intersection of standard language ideology, accented English, the communicative burden, and language brokers.

***Standard language ideology, accented English, the communicative burden, and language brokers***

Most people, even those who hold adult L2 learners in high esteem, are very comfortable with the concept of a standard language ideology, which is defined as a bias towards “an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions” (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 64). This ideology is usually founded upon the language and speech patterns exhibited by upper middle class speakers. While some people recognize the validity of first and second language accents, whether due to regionality or “native language phonology” present in a L2, many still believe that a “homogenous, standardized, one-size-fits-all language is not only desirable” but possible (Lippi-Green, 1997, pp. 43-44).



Everyday communication between two speakers is relatively simple: someone speaks and another person listens. Once linguistic factors like accented or developing English are involved, however, this interaction can become far more complex. Much of this complexity is due to this long-held belief about standard language ideology of mainstream spoken language. This belief is not only held by native speakers of a language since many immigrant learners see their own accent as a deficit in their own language learning journey. For example, in their study of the term articulate to describe black and non-standardized English speech, Smitherman and Alim (2012) argue that many second language learners saw their accent as “not right” and a detriment in everyday social interactions (p. 45). In their study, they highlight one respondent’s description of her immigrant mother’s language use. This participant discussed how she called her mother at work one day and did not recognize her mother’s accent on the phone. Her mother responded, “I know. Different when I talk right, huh?” The respondent reflected on this exchange, saying, “I had never considered my mother’s way of speaking as ‘not right’” (p. 45). What this story illustrates is the powerful role standardized language ideology plays for L2 speakers. Not only are native speakers enforcing this ideology upon L2 learners, but the L2 learners are projecting this perception of “not correct” English onto themselves. This negative view of their language production might be due to decades and centuries of language instruction that focused heavily on “grammar-centric models” that privilege ideal pronunciation and language use rather than “sociopragmatic curriculum” models that acknowledge the realities of learning a language as an adult (Ciriza-Lope, Shappeck, & Arxer, 2016, p. 298). This view of accented English echoes my earlier discussion of how SLA research seeks to broaden the public’s understanding of the age of onset, rate of acquisition, and ultimate language attainment. All of these areas factor into the

degree of accentedness of speech and how native speakers perceive this language production and sometimes exert their linguistic authority in communicative acts (Ortega, 2009, p. 8).

Drawing from Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs' (1986) cognitive model of the communicative act, Lippi-Green (1997) argues that in every communication, speakers make the choice of accepting or rejecting the communicative burden. When speakers refuse to communicate, this relieves them of any responsibility in the communication process, leaving it up to the speaker to assume more of the burden, essentially, daring the speaker to be understood (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 69). This process is grounded in the principle of mutual responsibility. Mutual responsibility is where people communicate collaboratively to create new information and involves complex processes of "repair, expansion, and replacement" (p. 24). During any conversation, people may "tolerate more or less uncertainty," making the heavier burden fall upon the listener "since she is in the best position to assess her own comprehension" (Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986, p. 34). For interactions between dominant language and developing language speakers; however, when the native speaker encounters an accent or speech pattern that is unfamiliar to them or difficult, they must decide if they intend to accept more responsibility in the communication burden (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 70). Frequently, native speakers reject or negatively respond to this increase in responsibility either due to the degree of accentedness of the speaker or their own language ideology beliefs marking the person as "other" (p. 71-73). Though the social space between two speakers is rarely completely neutral, the space between dominant and developing language speakers is never neutral. In my research, I am interested to see how this communicative process unfolds with my own participant population in response to these imbalances in power.

My research also seeks to examine the many ways adult learners navigate challenging communication situations through finding other ways to communicate, such as nonverbal gestures, technology, or with mediators. For instance, many adult language learners rely on technology and “language brokers” to communicate with native English speakers. Language brokers are individuals who “serve as [a] liaison with influence in exchanges between individuals, to partake in an exchange as an active audience assuming creative or independent agency” (Alvarez, 2017, p. 5). These brokers “influence the content and nature of the message they convey, and ultimately affect the perceptions and decisions of the agents for whom they act” (Tsu, 1995, p. 180). Many times, these language brokers are children of immigrant parents, where “the authority position of the parent may be suppressed as the child or adolescent acts as the spokesperson for the family” (Weisskirch, 2007, p. 546). I do not intend to examine the intricate power dynamics between parents and children in this particular situation, yet I am interested if nonprofit adult ESL learners leverage a similar nonverbal approach when interacting with native speakers.

In summation, I am building upon existing views of power to showcase how learners perceive and respond to power relations between themselves and native speakers of English. To further situate my discussion in the social and cultural context of an English-dominant society, I now turn to theories of Mock Spanish, Inverted Spanglish, and English Public Spaces.

### ***Mock Spanish, Inverted Spanglish, and English Public Spaces***

It is impossible to discuss power relations between L1 and L2 speakers of English without acknowledging the social and cultural context in which they are speaking. My study examines the English-dominant and primarily white public spaces that give rise to Mock

Spanish, along with Inverted Spanglish, as a way for Latinx individuals to reclaim their right to speak English and Spanish. Using Rosa (2016), Hill (1998), and Urciuoli's (1996) work on bilingual speakers, I intend to situate my notion power dynamics between L1 and L2 speakers of English in a specific context where learners must make sense of their own identity and respond to imbalances in power in English public spaces. My research also seeks to discover if tensions even exists between nonprofit adult ESL learners and native English speakers in the "outer sphere of talk" of Knoxville where English is dominant.

Hill (1998) defines Mock Spanish as the discursive practices that involve incorporating certain Spanish language features into English for humorous, racist, or other purposes. The primary practices of Mock Spanish include the semantic pejoration of Spanish loan words for humorous or negative purposes, borrowing obscene Spanish words for euphemisms, incorporating elements of Spanish morphology, and hyper anglicized or parodic pronunciations of Spanish loanwords. The purpose of Mock Spanish, Hill (1998) states, is the "elevation of whiteness" through "covert racist discourse" (p. 683). Ultimately, Hill argues Mock Spanish creates a "white public space" that marks white speech as "invisible and normative" and positions Spanish speakers as other (p. 684). To frame this view, Hill draws from Urciuoli's (1996) work on issues of space, showcasing the differences between the "inner sphere of talk" among Puerto Rican members of a neighborhood and the "outer sphere of talk" with strangers and gatekeepers to the English-dominated society (Hill, 1998, p. 681).

Rosa (2016) broadens Hill's work, demonstrating how Latinx populations transform linguistic boundaries through appropriating the meaningfulness of Mock Spanish through the use of "Inverted Spanglish" (p. 66). With this term, he builds upon existing scholarly work to suggest

Latinx use this mock language practice to meet the demand that they “speak Spanish in English without being heard to possess an accent” (p. 74). While Mock Spanish is used by white populations to further racialize and stigmatize Latinx people, Inverted Spanglish is used by Latinx individuals to claim both Spanish and English as their own and question negative in-group views of language proficiency and use.

How L2 learners perceive and respond to power relations is extremely important to understanding their identity development and investment process in learning English. Some L2 speakers seek to speak “correctly” and vilify their accent, while others, like in the case of Rosa’s (2016) study of Mexican and Puerto Rican youths, resist imposed identities of being either Spanish or English speaking individuals. These speakers choose to employ inverted Spanglish to reclaim both of these seemingly competing identities. Drawing from the previously mentioned scholars, I want to see how nonprofit learners respond to socially and culturally situated linguistic adversity, which may directly reinforce or shape their own identity in and out of the ESL classroom. Some learners may choose to not let standard language ideology, communicative imbalances, or English public spaces affect their overall identity development or investment processes. It is vital to explore both negative and positive reactions to these power relations since reactions may reveal specific identity and language learning practices that may benefit adult ESL educators and improve their teaching practices.

To conclude, this study uses identity as a theoretical framework from which to interpret how and why nonprofit adult ESL learners invest in learning English, what factors help or impede this investment process, and what role power relations may play in their identity or

investment process. It also aims to identify any other factors that may impact their identity, investment in learning English, or power dynamics.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

The purpose of the study is to explore nonprofit adult ESL learner identity inside and outside of the language classroom. The identity framework established in Chapter Two serves as a foundation for better understanding students' language investment and how power relations affect this unique population of learners. The study also hopes to find other internal or external factors that may impact students' identity and their investment in learning English, such as issues of space, context, and time. To address my primary concerns for this study, my research questions are:

1. How do students perceive their identity in and out of the nonprofit adult ESL classroom?
2. How does this identity impact their investment in learning and using English?
3. What other factors impact adult ESL students' identity and investment in learning English?
4. How do adult ESL learners perceive and respond to power relations in and out of the nonprofit ESL classroom?
5. How does a better understanding of identity, investment, and power relations inform nonprofit adult ESL classroom practices?

I conducted an interview-based qualitative study of adult ESL learners at a nonprofit, Centro Hispano, based in Knoxville, Tennessee, from September 17, 2018, until November 15, 2018.

Data primarily came from semi-structured interviews in order better understand the “lived everyday world” from my participants' own perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, p. 27).

Other data collection methods include demographic surveys, classroom observations, and diary

entries. The study was initially slated to take place during the 5-week English class semester from September 17, 2018, to October 31, 2018, but due to student scheduling issues, three final interviews took place after October 31.

This study follows a case study approach, focusing on both individual participants and the context of Centro Hispano. Case studies are “the study of the ‘particularity and complexity of a single case’” which may include people, but can also explore an organization, institution, or community (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 151). This form of research tends “to study a phenomenon in natural settings” and employs “an inductive form of analysis with the aim of building theory...from a detailed study of particular instances” (Polio & Friedman, 2017, p. 55). As is common for case study data collection methods, I used interviews, classroom observations, diary entries, and surveys (Polio & Friedman, 2017). I have chosen this approach because it is an “excellent method for obtaining a thick description of a complex social issue” in a particular context (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 155). As I explored identity and issues of investment and power relations from the perspective of students, instructors, and the program director, the case study method allowed me to fully examine how circumstances “come together and interact in shaping the world” around my participants (p. 155). My participants’ accounts indicated not only how they view the world around them, but also how their view of the world may impact their identity and investment in learning English. I am aware of the potential shortcomings of case study research. Some researchers point of the potential problem of generalizing certain findings from an individual to represent an entire group (p. 153), but I do not intend to present my findings as indicative of all nonprofit adult ESL learners or even all learners at Centro Hispano. Instead, the case study serves as an appropriate lens from which to explore my participants’ identities, how



they invest in learning English, how power relations impact this investment and identity development, and what other factors impact this process. Additionally, the case study approach will allow for a narrative presentation of my data during analysis, as my data will be less structured and more thematic than other mixed method or quantitative approaches to data collection.

### **Centro Hispano de East TN: The context of the study**

Centro Hispano de East TN (Centro Hispano) is a nonprofit organization and welcoming center for Latinx families of Knoxville, Tennessee. According to the nonprofit's website, the organization is dedicated to helping the Latinx community thrive "culturally, educationally, and economically" in the area. The organization's mission statement is to "connect, integrate and empower the Latino community through education and engagement; information and referral services; and community strengthening initiatives." Though the nonprofit first began in 2005, it has grown exponentially over the years and has been located at its current home at 2455 Sutherland Avenue in the John Tarleton Campus since 2010. I chose this nonprofit as the context for my study because it serves as one of the only formal, daily adult ESL programs in the city. Also, I have been volunteering at this location as an adult ESL instructor since June of 2017. During the time the study was conducted, I did not teach or volunteer in any other capacity to not cause any conflict of interest during data collection. I did previously teach two of my four student participants in classes before this study commenced.

#### ***Programs and services***

Centro Hispano is structured around three primary areas of service: Adult Education, Children Education, and Information and Referral. My study specifically focuses on their

evening ESL classes under their Adult Education service branch. These classes take place Monday through Thursday from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. The nonprofit offers classes based on students' level of English proficiency that includes: 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, and the advanced Conversation class (only meets on Mondays). For my study, I only recruited fluent participants from classes 3A through the advanced Conversation class. I focus on the nonprofit's evening ESL program because it is the most heavily populated, serves the most diverse range of learners, operates on shorter semester cycles, and offers the best context for my research scope. Classes in this program run in five to six-week cycles, depending on holiday breaks and other mitigating circumstances, such as workshops, fundraising events, bad weather, and problems with the building itself.

Centro Hispano does offer additional ESL courses for adult learners. Their morning ESL classes take place on Tuesday and Wednesdays from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm, but these courses are year-long, which is outside the scope of my data collection abilities. They also primarily serve mothers who do not work during the day, which would have skewed my data collection toward a specific population of learners. The nonprofit also offers afternoon ESL classes at Lonsdale Elementary school on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., but this is not the primary focus of their organization, serves a niche population of learners, and does not take place at Centro Hispano. The nonprofit also offers language and literacy courses for Spanish speakers working toward literacy in their first language and high school equivalency credential (HiSet, formally GED) prep classes for students who want to further their educational goals. While beneficial, these programs are also outside of the scope of my research focus.

## **Participants**

Participants in my study are divided into three main populations: students, instructors, and the adult ESL program director. While the students are the primary focus of the study, I also interviewed, observed, and surveyed volunteer adult ESL instructors to gain a fuller view of teaching at the nonprofit, and interviewed the program director to learn background and relevant information on the adult ESL program and organization as a whole. After recruitment, four students, three instructors, and the program director agreed to participate in the study. Four additional students and three other instructors took my brief demographic surveys but declined to participate in the rest of my research. Students were given \$15 gift card for participating, while the instructors were given \$5 gift cards and the program administrator was given a \$10 gift card. Below is a discussion on how each of the participants was selected, along with background and demographic data about the participants.

### ***Student participants***

To follow IRB instruction, a few days prior to starting my study, I went to all the classrooms in Centro Hispano to drop off a few consent forms, let students know about my research ahead of time, and answer any potential questions about my study. Then, I officially started my study and recruited student participants on September 17, 2018. I walked around to classrooms 3A, 3B, 4B, and Conversation at Centro Hispano to deliver hard-copy informal student survey and consent forms (See Appendices A-B). I chose to provide students with hard-copy surveys as I did not have access to all student emails for an online survey, did not know if they had reliable Internet access, and wanted to explain my research to them in person. During this process, I handed out four informal surveys in 3A, four in 3B four surveys, two surveys in

4B, and four in the upper-level Conversation course. There was no 4A course offered during this particular semester due to a lack of students.

In the 3A class, the students were not interested in participating and did not want to fill out their informal surveys. For 3B, all four students filled out their informal surveys and two agreed to participate in the study. One of these students later changed her mind and did not participate in any further in the study. Of the two students in the 4B course, one did not seem to fully understand the study and did not fill out the informal survey, while the other student was openly hostile and did not want to fill out the survey. Finally, in the Conversation class, two out of the four students filled out the survey and only one agreed to participate in the study. One student who was not in attendance this night had previously agreed to participate and filled out the survey and signed the consent form the day of her interview. Because attendance numbers were low on the first day of my study, I went back the following Monday, September 24, 2018, to find more participants and was able to find one more willing participants from the upper-level Conversation course. After recruitment was complete, four students chose to participate in the study. I chose pseudonyms for all of my study's participants at their request. These names are random and used to protect the students' identities. Here are the backgrounds of my four student participants:

1. **Mary:** Mary is a 49-year-old woman from Brazil who moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, four years ago when her husband was sponsored for a computer programming job at a local production company. She was a practicing psychologist in Brazil with an undergraduate degree in pedagogy and an advanced degree in psychology. She also went to school for photography for two years. In Knoxville, she does not work and is a

homemaker for her one teenage daughter and husband, yet she does sell Brazilian food on social media to people in the community. She also suffers from Fibromyalgia and Hypothyroidism, which keep her from being able to work long hours. She has been attending Centro Hispano for one year and attends the upper-level Conversation course on Monday nights and 3B on the other three evenings. She does take courses she has already completed before because she wants “more grammar.” I was her instructor on Wednesday nights for levels 3B to 4B previously.

2. **Anna:** Anna is a 43-year-old woman from Mexico who first moved to the United States five years ago. She lived in Florida for one year before moving to Knoxville, Tennessee, where she has lived ever since. She is a housekeeper for a family in the Knoxville area but was a lawyer in Mexico, where she specialized in administration and business law. She is a mother of two children and married her current husband two years ago. She has been attending Centro Hispano off and on for the past two years and is currently in the upper-level Conversation course. Her attendance is sporadic due to her work schedule. She attends some of the lower-level classes with Mary on Wednesdays, as she is unable to come to Centro Hispano on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
3. **Jane:** Jane is a 46-year-old woman from the Dominican Republic. She first moved to the Knoxville, Tennessee, from the Dominican Republic in January 2017 to be with her now-husband, whom she married in April of that same year. She is an International Sales Representative for a local company and has a bachelor’s degree in accounting, a postgraduate degree in marketing, and a specialty certificate in financial management. She is also a mother of three girls and her two youngest daughters live with her, while her

oldest is attending university in the Dominican Republic. She has been involved with or attending classes at Centro Hispano since around two to three weeks since she first moved to the country, which amounted to one year and seven months at the start of this study. She is currently taking the upper-level Conversation course that takes place on Monday evenings. As she has completed the other course levels, she does not attend other days of the week, but she does volunteer around the nonprofit in other capacities. I was her instructor on Wednesday nights for levels 3B to 4B.

4. **Dan:** Dan is a 24-year-old man who was born in Los Angeles, California, but moved and grew up in Mexico since he was three or four years old. He moved back to Los Angeles for about three or four months when he was 21 and then moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, to be closer to some family members. His wife and young baby have been living in Mexico since he moved when he was 21. She finally secured a green card and arrived in Knoxville in December 2018. He has been attending Centro Hispano classes since May 2018 and in level 3B. He currently works as a forklift driver for a local factory where he works extremely long days from Friday to Monday, but still attends classes four days a week. He received special permission to leave work early on Mondays to go to class since he is determined to improve his English proficiency skills.

#### ***Instructor participants***

Instructor participants were recruited via email with an informal survey that asked for their continued participation from an online survey service, QuestionPro. An attached version of the consent form was included in the email (See Appendix C). I obtained 10 instructor email addresses of current and former volunteer ESL instructors who have taught level 3A or higher

from the program administrator. On the morning of September 17, 2018, I emailed all instructors. One of the emails did not go through because the email address was not operational. That evening, I went to each of the classrooms and elicited email addresses from three more volunteer instructors who were not previously listed on the list provided earlier that day. Another email was sent to these three instructors. In total, I was able to recruit three instructors. I have chosen pseudonyms for all the instructors at their request. Here are the backgrounds of the three instructors who agreed to participate in the study:

1. **Joy:** Joy is a 40-year-old woman who volunteers on Monday and Thursday evenings where she teaches the upper-level Conversation course on Mondays and 3B on Thursdays. She has been volunteering at Centro Hispano for around a year and a half and has taught everything from 3A up to the Conversation course. She does not have previous adult ESL teaching experience and is not bilingual in Spanish. She works as a computer programmer in the area.
2. **Rachel:** Rachel is a 22-year-old woman who volunteers on Monday and Wednesday evening where she teaches level 2A. While she was not teaching any of my student participants, she has taught all levels from 1A to 3B during her year and a half volunteer teaching at Centro Hispano. She does not have previous adult ESL teaching experience and is a beginner-to-intermediate level Spanish speaker. She is taking a semester off from pursuing her degree in elementary or high school education.
3. **Brooke:** Brooke is a 21-year-old woman who volunteers on Wednesday evenings where she teaches level 3A. She previously taught 2B and has been volunteering at Centro Hispano for less than a year, where she served as a substitute instructor for a few months

before getting her own classroom. She has no previous adult ESL teaching experience and is an advanced Spanish speaker. She is currently pursuing her nursing degree at the University of Tennessee.

### ***Director participant***

I first approached the adult education program director in the spring of 2018 to get approval from the nonprofit to conduct my research. After my study was approved by the IRB, I sought out his consent to participate in person. He signed a consent form before his interview on October 8, 2018 (See Appendix D). I have chosen a pseudonym at his request. Here is the background of the administrator participant:

1. **Brian:** Brian is a 30-year-old man who serves as the Adult Education Director for Centro Hispano. He majored in Hispanic Studies and Business at the University of Tennessee, which is how he first got involved with Centro Hispano in August 2015 as part of his practicum requirement for his degree. He first taught adult ESL classes twice a week on Monday and Wednesday. He was hired as the Adult Education Director employee in January 2017. During his tenure, he has made significant changes in the program's approach to adult ESL education and is always working to expand the nonprofit's scope to meet the needs of adult learners.

### **Data collection**

This study involves surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and diary entries. Below, I have provided a detailed explanation of my rationale for these data collection methods, along with how I conducted them.



## *Surveys*

I distributed two different surveys to the student and instructor populations to obtain factual information from both populations that would not have been easily obtained otherwise. The goal of these surveys was twofold: to obtain demographic information about my participants and recruit them to participate in the study. Students and instructors were asked to voluntarily take the survey, even if they did not agree to participate in the rest of the study. Both populations were provided with consent forms at the same time as the survey. See survey protocols in Appendix E.

### *Survey with students*

I distributed hard-copy surveys to all students present at Centro Hispano in classes 3A-Conversation on September 17, 2018, and then again on September 24, 2018. The survey asked for basic factual and demographic data, such as age, gender, nationality, the class they are currently taking, and how long they have been at Centro Hispano. The survey also asked if they would be interested in continuing to participate in the study and asked for available times. Students signed the accompanying consent form at this time.

### *Survey with instructors*

I sent out the online survey to 13 instructor email addresses on September 17, 2018. The QuestionPro online survey contained 11 questions that asked basic, factual and demographic questions regarding age, gender, ethnicity, time teaching at Centro Hispano, classes previously taught, and classes currently teaching. The survey also asked if participants had previously adult ESL teaching experience and asked them to explain, if applicable. If instructors were interested in participating, they were asked to respond and provide available times for their interview and

potential classroom observation. The instructor consent form was included in the email as an attachment. All instructors signed their consent forms at the time of their interview.

### *Interviews*

I used semi-structured interviews as a primary means of data collection to understand “the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold meaning from their experiences,” and “to uncover their lived world” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1). This type of interview allows participants to “elaborate on the issues raised in an exploratory manner” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 136). It is important to note that interviews for instructors and the program administrator are used to interpret, triangulate, broaden, and understand student participant interview data. This study is ultimately concerned with how nonprofit adult ESL learners develop and enact their identity in and out of the classroom, along with their investment in learning English and power relations that may impact this process or their identity formation. To fully capture participant voices, I have conveyed all respondents’ “emotional overtones” through punctuation and other means (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 247) like when I indicate when participants get emotional, stop to translate, laugh, or speak in their native languages. See interview protocols in Appendices F-J.

### *Interview with students*

I interviewed each student participant three times during the course of the study. I followed Dörnyei’s (2007) recommendation to hold multiple interview sessions since the first interview typically “develops rapport” with the interviewee, while the second interview is more focused and the third allows the research to ask any follow-up questions or clarify existing points of confusion (pp. 134-135). For my study, Mary and Anna were able to participate in an informal group interview for their first interview. I held first-time interviews individually with Jane and

Dan due to scheduling issues. The following interviews with all four participants were conducted one-on-one.

The first interview (See Appendix F) focused on establishing background information on the participants, seeing how they approached their English learning journey, gauging their views on Centro Hispano and the outside community, and asking them about experiences related to power relations in or out of the classroom. The following two interviews allowed me to have students elaborate on areas I wanted to know more about, discuss their diary entries, talk about the classroom observations, and discuss emerging themes in their responses. All student interviews, which each lasted seven hours and 43 minutes in total, took place at Centro Hispano. Centro Hispano had suffered flooding in their basement and was closed on the day of my first interview with Jane. As a result, we met at a local fast food restaurant.

All student participants are being interviewed in their second language so I took into account the “language proficiency and its potential effect on interviews” (Polio & Friedman, 2017, p. 186). While certain word choices and phrasing might be affected by this L2 barrier, all of my participants were fluent enough to discuss the key themes of the study without significant difficulty. They also chose to participate in my study in order to practice and improve their English. I specifically chose to conduct all student interviews in English with only minor translating help to allow students to practice English and express their thoughts on the L2 learning in their L2. I have taken this L2 consideration into account for transcribing each student interview, as well, because the issue of authentic representation in L2 transcribed speech is a major cause for concern in qualitative research. I agree with Dörnyei’s (2007) about the need for using “standard orthography” to avoid “stigmatization” of non-standardized varieties of English

(p. 248). However, I have edited some of the speech when clarity is clouded or I understood what they were trying to say. I kept many natural speech patterns and errors to convey a level of authenticity and gravity for students' learning situations. The very process of "standardizing" certain features can imply that the students' original language use is "inadequate," and risks "privileging the voice of the researcher over that of the participant" (Polio & Friedman, 2017, p. 189). Major speech alterations could even change my participants' original meaning, leading to inaccurate data (p. 189).

#### *Interview with instructors*

The focus of these interviews was to understand how volunteer instructors teach these nonprofit adult ESL learners (See Appendix G). I interviewed each of the three instructor participants one time for 30 minutes to an hour each because the purpose of these interviews was to explore how different volunteers approached teaching in the nonprofit adult ESL classrooms, how they viewed power relations in the classroom, and what their thoughts were about Centro Hispano's program and curriculum offerings.

#### *Interview with the director*

I interviewed the program director once for an hour to gain needed background information on Centro Hispano and context behind the pedagogical approaches he takes with the adult ESL program (See Appendix H). I did not analyze this interview for emerging themes or issues of administrator identity and only chose to conduct this interview.

#### *Diary entries*

Student participants were also asked to complete diary entries to allow glimpses into their daily life, along with the struggles and triumphs they encounter in learning English. As diaries

allow for an “unobtrusive way of tapping into areas of people’s lives that may otherwise be inaccessible,” their weekly diary entries provided a unique way for students to describe and interpret certain events, behaviors, processes, and power relations that they might not have thought of during their interview. It also allowed students to reflect on topics discussed during a previous interview that they may wish to discuss further in their next interview. The students were asked to write paragraph-length diary entries three to five times a week on issues relating to their daily life and use of English. While the other participants completed their diaries, Dan did not and chose to use his diary as a journal for new verbs he was learning. See a diary entry prompt in Appendix I.

### ***Classroom observations***

To extrapolate on and triangulate data gathered in semi-structured interviews, I conducted “nonparticipant,” “structured” classroom observations to witness how students and instructor participants act and interact in the classroom (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 179). Originally, I intended to conduct several classroom observations, but due to lower instructor participation in this study, I conducted one classroom observation of the upper-level Conversation course and another of level 3A. Unfortunately, no student participants take classes in 3A. During the classroom observations, I only took notes and did not record or videotape these class sessions. I also stayed the duration of the two-hour class period and did not interact with students or instructors during class. See classroom observation protocol in Appendix J.

### **Data analysis**

All of my audio-recorded interviews with students, instructors, and the administrator were transcribed. I transcribed all student interviews myself and used a transcription service,

Rev, to transcribe the three instructors and one administrator interviews. I made this decision to preserve the accuracy of the student interviews because I was unsure if online transcription services would fully be able to capture the students' voices. During the transcription process, I was careful to account for many nonverbal communications in addition to spoken language to retain the "original communication situation" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 246). Only student interviews and diary entries were coded since the focus of my research is on adult ESL learners. I did not explicitly code my instructor or administrator interviews. Instead, I analyzed these transcripts for background information on students, the nonprofit, instructor teaching styles, instructor level of experience, curriculum information, and instances of identity, investment, and power relations for adult ESL learners. All relevant excerpts from these one-time interviews are used to provide background information and illustrate findings from student interviews.

Informal analysis for interviews began during the transcription process. Formal analysis began once all data was collected and coded based on the original research questions for instances of identity, investment, and power relations. My data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) flexible, practical approach to coding, which is not based on any theoretical or philosophical position. In their revised sourcebook, they refer to this as a recursive process, where codes are "developed, evaluated, and revised" during the first and second cycles of coding (Miles et al., 2014). Adopting this approach, I first used codes to summarize and categorize the data broadly and then identified new themes and patterns in the second and following rounds of coding. Additionally, diary entries were coded similarly to the interview data. Classroom observations were not coded and only provided contextual information about classroom power

relations and practices. Neither student nor instructor surveys were coded. These surveys only provided demographic and background data on the participants.

### *Student interview coding*

My interview coding process began inductively since I carefully read over the student interview transcripts and highlighted any relevant passages in three different colors for my broad themes of identity, investment, and power relations. Once complete, I realized there was too much overlap between these three concepts and chose to only code for instances of investment and power relations because these two concepts indicate how students enact and develop their identity in and outside of the classroom. I have included a detailed explanation of my process below, along with the coding schemes.

#### *Investment*

I first began inductively coding for all instances of investment based on Norton's (1997) definition "to signal the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice it" (p. 411). Through this process, I deductively discovered three major categories: how students invest in English, what factors help investment, and what factors hurt investment. The codes are found in Appendix K.

#### *Power relations*

I first began coding for all instances of micro power relations. After further analysis, I discovered how participants were framing their outside and inside worlds in relation to language use and social encounters. Similar to Hill's (1998) discussion of the separation of the "inner sphere of talk" for Spanish-speaking communities and "outer sphere of talk" of the English-dominated society, my study's participants made sharp distinctions between the outside, "real

world” and the inner, “safe space” of Centro Hispano (p. 681). This distinction is also reminiscent of the difference between the outside “white public space” (Hill, 1998) of the greater Knoxville community and the “lived space” of Centro Hispano (Lou, 2016). Then, I began separating my codes into these two distinct categories, narrowing them further into L1 speakers/learners either refusing or taking on the communicative burden. Through applying these major code categories, I deductively discovered numerous sub-codes that emerged during data analysis. These codes are found in Appendix L.

### ***Student diary coding***

Similar to the student interview coding, I first carefully read over the diary entries and marked instances of student identity, investment, and power relations. These entries also provided background information about the students’ everyday life experiences, even when not relating to their use of English. On the second round of coding, I applied my coding scheme developed from my coding of student interviews.

### ***Student classroom observation coding***

I did not code my two classroom observations. Instead, I used my data from these observations to provide contextual information about classroom practices and examples of power relations that may or may not exist in this setting.

### ***Reliability of coding***

To test the reliability of my coding schemes, I asked a second coder, who, at the time of the study, was fellow master’s student in Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistic, to code portions two randomly selected interview transcripts to achieve intercoder reliability, as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). At the coding session, I gave her copies of my coding charts (See Tables 1-2)



I developed and the interview transcripts. I also provided an explanation of my definitions and explanations of investment and power relations. We began by thoroughly reviewing the coding schemes to ensure she had a firm understanding of each coding category. I then elaborated on my provided definitions of investment and power relations and provided examples from other interviews. I answered any questions she had. Then, she coded a portion of one randomly selected interview transcript using my investment coding chart (See Table 1). For this first student interview transcript, we only had about 61 percent intercoder reliability. This discrepancy was primarily due to her interpreting the differences between informal and formal investment differently and highlighting one potential new code I had not previously accounted for, which was another form of formal English instruction.

After this discrepancy, we went over the codes again and I provided her with further clarity. On our next round, we received 89 percent intercoder reliability, which satisfies Miles and Huberman's (1994) requirement of 80 percent. This process allowed me to slightly change the wording of a few of my codes, such as calling my code "with English materials" instead of "with English entertainment" to be more inclusive and "with free English lessons" instead of "free online English lessons" to account for other forms of informal learning. Ultimately, I decided against adding a suggested code, which dealt with Jane's previous formal English instruction in high school, since K-12 academic instruction is not the focus of my study. Next, I provided another randomly selected interview transcript and had her code portions based on my power relations coding chart (See Table 2). For this second coding chart, we obtained 92 percent intercoder reliability. The only reason for the variance in our scores was due to her overlooking one code. I believe we obtained such a high interrater reliability percentage for this second chart

because of the inductive coding method I used and how the codes were easily identifiable in the participants' speech. Both of these percentages are above the recommended 80 percent code-recode reliability, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994).

I learned a few valuable lessons from my coding session with my peer. The first is how difficult it is to quantify issues of investment in the speech of nonprofit adult ESL learners. As I have worked and interacted with these learners for several months at the time of the coding session, I was able to discern what they were speaking about more easily than my peer was able to do. I created all my codes inductively from all four of my student participants' speech, therefore, I had already been immersed in the data and could identify these codes in the text more quickly. This situation mirrors Brice's (2005) similar problem of knowing more than her peer rater did about the background of her participants and being more attuned to their language use (pp. 296-300). Second, I learned how important it is to have another coder examine my coding charts to make sure I am not "putting words" in my participants' mouths. She articulated that my codes seemed highly reflective of the actual experiences the participants were speaking of in their interviews. Third, I was not surprised to find that my peer found my power relations codes easier to identify, which might be due to the more easily define nature of these codes since they are only based on explicit, micro interactions between native and non-native speakers. Unlike my coding chart for power relations, coding for investment is less straightforward.

My peer better understood my investment codes after examining my power relations codes because they answered some of the questions she had about why I was not coding for investment in specific portions. This confusion reaffirmed my belief that identity, investment, and power relations are intricately tied together and cannot be studied separately. Finally, after

completing this coding check, I agree with Brice (2005) that “second language data can pose interpretive challenges ... adding another layer of difficulty to the coding process” (p. 304). I did encounter similar challenges to her due to my role as an “insider” in the Centro Hispano community and seeking help from an “outside” coder. Ultimately, while the intercoder reliability process was valuable in having an outsider coder evaluate the effectiveness of my coding strategy, I am not intending to quantify my data in such a way that makes this process highlight informative for future conclusions I intend to draw.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **IDENTITY AND INVESTMENT**

“I think I lost the fear.... I lost the fear. I think I not scared because I know I need it. {laughs}

It’s necessary. And it’s obligatory for me to speak.” - Jane

This study’s Results and Discussions in Chapters Four and Five are based on two key areas of research: Identity & Investment and Identity & Power Relations. In this chapter, I highlight key themes related to identity and investment that emerged from semi-structured interviews with student participants and their diary entries. Data obtained from instructor interviews, the program director’s interview, and classroom observations provides further elaboration on this theme. Results from the surveys are mentioned when I provide background information on the students and instructors. This chapter seeks to answer the study’s first three research questions.

Due to the narrative nature of the qualitative data, findings are presented thematically and explained based on the theories and literature outlined in Chapter Two. These findings are based on the inductive coding method outlined in Chapter Three, which are excerpts from students’ statements to avoid putting “words” in their mouths. Under the overarching theme of the intersection of identity and investment, I have three main categories for the data in this chapter: How students invest in learning English, what factors help investment, and what factors hurt investment. Each of these categories contain themes that relate to issues of student identity and may contain excerpts from instructor or director interviews to triangulate these findings.

## **How students invest in learning English**

As mentioned in Chapter Two, investment is not motivation, but rather, the “socially and historically constructed relationship” between learners and the language they are learning (Norton, 1997, p. 411). Just as identity is dynamic, investment also conceives learners as having “a complex history and multiple desire” (p. 411). Instead of asking questions about whether or not learners are motivated to learn or how their personality plays into this process, I asked how learners choose to invest in learning English, what factors hurt or help this process, what their level of investment is, and why they have chosen to invest in learning English.

The two main ways students actively engaged in learning English were through formal and informal English instruction. Formal English instruction involves environments where students learn from a trained or semi-trained instructor. For instance, students invested in learning English by attending Centro Hispano, going to community-based classes in the past, and wanting to enroll in future college English classes. Though formal English instruction is vital to the focus of this study, I was also interested in how students invested outside of the Centro Hispano classroom. Two main themes emerged from this category: seeking out English learning materials and reliance on social language support.

### ***Seeking out English learning materials***

All student participants, except Mary, spoke about using outside English materials to supplement what they were learning in the classroom. They practiced with free English lessons (online tutorials, classes, or videos) or English-related materials (workbooks, movies with English subtitles, music, newspapers, etc.). In all her interviews, Jane talked about how she practiced with free, online English classes outside of the classroom and described herself as a

“learning person” who wanted to know more about the world around her. She revealed her primary motive to learn English was to communicate better with her husband who does not speak Spanish. At the time of the study, they had been married for two years. They first met on a dating app and she moved to the Knoxville area from the Dominican Republic to be with him a few months after they began dating. Once she moved to the United States, she stayed at home all day while waiting on her work visa. Jane recalled this situation, remarking, “My husband was working. I reading, watching TV, music, trying to insert... {gestures to head} the English for everywhere.”

After her initial struggle adjusting to life in America, Jane began attending Centro Hispano at the recommendation of a friend. She first began volunteering around the office and then began taking classes soon after. At the time of the study, she completed all formal classes and attended the Conversation course, where she was the most advanced speaker of the four participants. In her first interview, she admitted that she did not study as much outside of the classroom as she used to, but when she does, she said, “I tried to use the class the free class in internet. I try to use it every day. Maybe 20 minutes, 30 minutes.”

Out of all the student participants, Anna had the least access to English in and out of the home since none of her family could or would speak English with her, she was only able to attend classes twice a week because of her busy schedule, and she worked alone. She worked as a housekeeper for a family in the Knoxville area where she listened to and watched English tutorials and classes on YouTube during the day. Despite these challenges, she described enjoying watching and listening to free English classes online. In her second interview, Anna showed me several YouTube videos, where instructors give various grammar lessons. She

reported these videos help her learn and practice when she cannot attend classes due to her busy schedule.

For Dan, he revealed that he was a highly-distracted language learner because he was active at his local gym where he enjoyed weightlifting and other forms of exercise. Despite his distractions, however, he discussed how he practiced English on his days off from work. In his first interview, he stated, “Sometimes on my off day, I’m watching a movie with subtitles in English and the words I don’t understand I can put in the book. I found and translate.”

### ***Relying on social language support***

Students also benefit from language socialization practices in different contexts. Dan and Jane, for example, commented that they practiced English at home, work, and in the greater Knoxville community. Mary and Anna, on the other hand, had little interaction with native English speakers outside of Centro Hispano. Dan’s and Jane’s experiences contributed to existing scholarship on language socialization, where learners gain “communicative competence” through interacting with members of the target language community and other proficient speakers of the language (Duff, 2007, p. 310). For instance, Dan didn’t work in an English-speaking office, but did practice English with his friend “Bob” at work. Discussing this friendship, he explained:

One of my friends in the work. Uh, sentences I don’t understand the word, uh, I’m going to ask him. His name is {Bob} ... Yeah, {Bob}, what is this? He, ‘Oh, this is ect., ect., ect.’ ... I have a doubt, yeah, I’m going to ask for him... ‘What is better: this or this?’ ‘This is better. This is more normal. I recommend this.’

In addition to language support at work, Dan frequently spoke English with his cousin. At the time of the study, Dan lived with his cousin and his cousin's wife and kids. While he did also rely on the cousin for difficult translate help, he reported he enjoyed learning from his cousin to further develop his English proficiency:

I practice my cousin, {indicating cousin talking} 'No say this, uh, say again, okay.' When I have a question, I'm going to my cousin. Uh, 'What is this?' My cousin talk in Spanish and in English ... I go to my cousin, 'Help me.' 'Okay. This is...Okay, you say. Okay, tell me.' Pronunciation, it very help. For me.

In Jane's case, she was married to an English-speaking man, worked in an English-speaking office, and willingly spoke English with people in the community and at Centro Hispano. She expressed how she used English, saying, "in the house, we are all together, we speak English." At work, she was an international sales representative where she communicated with customers and coworkers in English. She did not explicitly learn from her coworkers, yet her case echoes previous studies of workplace language socialization in that learning is informal and can "take different shapes" without any "clear or predictable expert–novice roles" (Zuengler & Cole, 2005, p. 311). In her second interview, she reported how necessary it was for her to speak and learn English at work:

I don't have other options! I need to learn! I need to speak! Uh, and this week ... oh my god, I need to speak. This week is very hard for me! {laughter} It's all problem in the office. We have a new people in the warehouse, they have a lot of mistake. And this is a problem with my customers {bangs down hands} and I don't want problem with the customers {laughter} You know? Because it's a problem for me. Can lost my job.



Here, she discussed how she must communicate in English at work to fix mistakes in the warehouse, not anger customers, and avoid losing her job. This informal, high-stakes socialization at work, along with social language support from her husband have been extremely beneficial in helping her acquire the language more rapidly than the other participants who don't have as much access to English.

For Anna, however, she had the least access to English socialization outside of the classroom because her family did not speak English with her, nor did she use it at work. This situation was best demonstrated when she revealed:

I don't practice with somebody. I don't have somebody to practice English. My husband no speaks English. My son speaks Spanish with me because he learning Spanish. My daughter no speak with me English or Spanish. {laughs} ... I always ... alone. I am.

Anna's acquisition journey was unique in that she was deeply affected by this lack of English-speaking community. In all of her interviews, she stated that when she was not attending classes at Centro Hispano regularly, she got disconnected from learning:

For me, when I not come to Centro Hispano, I'm lost. Yes, I lost. When I come again, Centro Hispano, I practice, practice. ... When I not come to Centro Hispano, I watch TV in Spanish, my music is Spanish. {laughter} ... When I not come, Centro Hispano, nothing. Off. More Spanish. When I come to Centro Hispano... {indicates light switch on and off} more English

Her words addressed the idea that the Centro Hispano community encouraged student investment, but also reveals just how vital it is for nonprofit adult ESL learners to have people to practice with outside of the classroom. When they do not, like in Anna's case, they may fall back

into familiar patterns of using their L1 because it is easy and comfortable. Overall, these findings indicate just how important it is to expose adult ESL learners to the target language and encourage them to actively interact with native English speakers.

### **What factors help investment?**

It is also vital to examine internal and external factors that encourage students to keep investing and learning English. These findings suggest the factors that most influence student investment include a belief that English is necessary for everyday life, being involved in the community of Centro Hispano, and possessing a highly ambitious learning style.

#### ***A belief that English is necessary***

All participants expressed in their interviews that English was essential for their daily lives, while Dan, Anna, and Jane also specified that it was crucial for their professional advancement. Jane, for example, thought all immigrants must be able to speak English if they live in the U.S.:

And if you don't speak English, you need to start. Some people have a lot of scared, very scared about speaking. And this is not good. It's not good because you are here. If you decide to live here, you need to speak English.

Jane chose to invest in English because she needed to communicate with her husband, interact in the community, work, and "find a good job." The driving force pushing her to learn English is this core belief that English is necessary to her social and professional advancement. She did not talk about needing English to "survive," which is frequently noted in popular culture and scholarship about adult learners, but reported it will help her better connect to the social world

around her. As Knoxville is full of predominantly English speakers, acquiring the language will hopefully increase the value of her “cultural capital” (Norton Pierce, 1995, p. 17).

In her first interview, she mentioned wanting to “find a job in the government” and acknowledges that her current English proficiency is barring her from opportunities in this job sector, yet this does not make her desire for learning English similar to that of instrumental motivation. She does not view English as an avenue for only professional advancement, but for unlocking the imagined L2 selves she envisioned for herself: a government worker who can easily communicate with her husband and the community around her. Overall, she admitted she makes lots of mistakes, but she was fueled by her core belief that English is the only way to reach her imagined L2 selves, such as when she recalled in her first interview:

In the first moment, I always say a lot of mistake. I said, I try. {laughter} I am, I am try to be brave. Because when I take the decision to be here, I said, ‘Well, I’m going to the city. Don’t speak English. What I need to do?’ {claps hands} I need to talk.

Anna also viewed English as necessary for her everyday life and future career prospects, but struggled to find time and ways to practice and learn. She stated that she must improve her English proficiency in order to fully integrate into the community and grow her new business, where she wants to own and operate a crepe food truck. Before being able to build up her business, however, Anna talked about how she should overcome her problem with getting uncomfortable around native English speakers and work on her basic conversation skills. She explained her desire to improve, saying, “I want to speak English. Basic conversation meeting American people. Basic.”

She was an advanced speaker, yet her anxiety was heightened when she encountered native English speakers outside of Centro Hispano. Despite this fear, she continued to invest in the language and find alternative ways to communicate because she was not investing for instrumental motivation or survival purposes. Instead, she had a clear vision of her imagined L2 selves, which were an independent food truck owner who easily interacts with parents at her son's school and takes care of her family. Her clear professional goal was best summed up when she revealed, "Yes, I need to speak English because ... my merchants? ... I need to speak English. Because they speak English with me. I need no ... freeze."

Meanwhile, Dan was also highly goal oriented and invested in English because he viewed the language as crucial to being able to live his daily life, get a better job, go back to college in the future, and take care of his wife and young baby. His belief about the importance of English fluency in his life was best summed up when he said, "I want more English and it {is} necessary for me." His imagined L2 selves were a college-educated man who can take care of his wife and young baby without having to rely on his phone or cousin for translation help. He expressed his desire to learn and advance when he remarked:

I need more practice for English talk with people. I think so, more practice. For knowledge at work ... I want more learning English because I think so, in the future, I will try, I don't know, university.

Mary frequently expressed a "need" to learn the language because she had been living in the country for four years. Unlike the other participants who spoke fondly of their home countries, she did not desire to live in Brazil again and said she and her husband brought their teenage daughter here to live a better, safer life. In all three interviews, she repeatedly talked about how

dangerous it was living in Brazil, recounting stories about having four cars stolen, her home being broken into, and living in fear that her daughter would be kidnapped. She joked about how much she “hates” English sometimes, but she was extremely invested in learning the language because she viewed English as necessary for her everyday life now that she has resettled in the country. Acquiring the language would make her life easier, as demonstrated when she remarked, “Because we live here, I think, because we need the English for life. {laughter} Because when we go to the doctor, we don’t understanding nothing ... You need English for everything.”

Mary did not need English for professional advancement because she was a homemaker, but she was just as dedicated to becoming fluent as the other three participants because she continued to invest even though there was no “financial” gain from her proficiency. During the course of the study, she attended the Conversation class on Mondays and then jumped around to the other levels she had already completed throughout the rest of the week to get more “grammar practice.” Her desire to learn was rooted in the idea that she will speak “correctly” someday, which does not involve a heavy accent. Her imagined L2 selves appeared to be an accentless, fluent speaker who goes about her daily life without any difficulty and provides a safe home for her husband and daughter.

These findings suggest that all participants invested in the ideal of their ideal L2 selves because they believe English was necessary for their everyday lives. The participants did not view English as a tool for basic survival, even though many immigrants are forced into “low-wage jobs” and “shut off from contact with the larger society” due to a lack of English proficiency (Larrotta, 2017, p. 62). Instead, their reason for learning English reflects Norton

Pierce's (1995) notion of investment, where they will "acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital" (p. 17). They invest in learning English because they know it is necessary for social, professional, educational, economic, and/or cultural advancement. Unlike Kanno and Norton's (2005) view of imagined communities where individuals are connecting with future communities "through the power of imagination" (p. 241) or Dörnyei's (2009) view of the ideal L2 self stemming from a theory of motivation, these participant's imagined L2 selves are clear visions of or goals for themselves that they will attain in the near or distant future. The field of SLA and relevant stakeholders should reconsider the harmful stereotype that all adult ESL learners are impoverished, struggling individuals who only want to acquire English to improve their economic status.

### ***Being involved in the community of Centro Hispano***

All participants referred to the community of Centro Hispano as a factor that kept them investing in learning English. Both the community and classroom dynamics at the nonprofit served as main reasons why student participants reported coming back week after week. First and foremost, they came to study and learn English, but the community they had with their peers and instructors was just as important to them. For instance, Anna remarked in her third interview:

It is very important, Centro Hispano, in Knoxville. Is very, very ... for Spanish people.

Or Portuguese people. Brazilian people. And the African people. Yes? It's very important because ... The Centro Hispano is very important for the people ... I hope always stay here, yes. It's important.

In her second interview, Jane echoed Anna's feelings about the nonprofit, saying, "The best decision I take when I arrive here was start to visit Centro. Because Centro is not only for the class, I have friends." The nonprofit primarily serves Latino/a people in the Knoxville area, but the program structure, class offerings, social support, and community dynamics draws in adult ESL students from all walks of life and parts of the world. Mary, for example, speaks Portuguese but attended Centro Hispano because she wasn't afraid to miss classes when life got hectic. She spoke about this lack of "pressure" in her first interview, saying, "I think it's different because the atmosphere. Because it's more flexible. No pressure and I can come back. Yeah, I think it's good. No pressure." Many instructors, like Rachel, echoed this same sentiment, discussing how one of the best parts about the center is that students feel like they can learn at their own pace and come back for community and learning anytime. On this issue, Rachel stated:

One great asset that Centro has is that the students who come, come because they want to be there. It is not mandatory for them to attend, and so even though attendance can be sporadic at times, when students come they usually come with a real desire to learn.

The community of Centro Hispano encourages students to invest because the students feel like they can finish the program and then keep coming back for other classes if they want more "practice." This phenomenon might suggest the program is not fully preparing students to be relatively fluent by the time they complete their classes, but it also allows students to learn at their own pace and in their own way. For example, Mary had completed the program and was in the upper-level Conversation course at the time of the study, but she was also taking lower-level classes during the rest of the week for more "grammar practice."

In Dan's last interview, he spoke about how he just started level 4A and it was much more challenging than level 3B. As a result, he said he might go back to 3B once he completed 4A to get more practice because it was "no problem, no worry for {him}." This flexible learning environment was best articulated by Joy, another volunteer instructor, when she remarked:

The thing that I try to just always make sure that people know, you know, hey, you can keep coming back to class as many times as you want. Like, if you're struggling, sometimes repetition just really helps. If you feel like you didn't get this one unit very well, you know, take it again next cycle. There's no shame. I've had plenty of students who've repeated things, especially towards the end of the curriculum.

Joy encouraged her students to repeat classes if they didn't feel confident enough to move onto the next level or graduate the program. The participants reported enjoying this flexible learning environment, yet this subject does bring up questions about whether or not the classes are fully preparing students to move to the next level. After all, students are attending two-hour night classes four times a week after working during the day and should feel like they are "getting the most" out of their investment. For instance, Jane reported needing a more challenging classroom environment and Mary revealed she wasn't sure she learned anything from the Conversation class. They both solved their own concerns, however, since Jane enrolled in the Pellissippi Community College English program and Mary began taking additional English classes at the center at the time of the study.

### ***Possessing a highly ambitious learning style***

All participants expressed being ambitious learners in some capacity, but Jane and Dan talked explicitly about speaking and practicing English outside of the nonprofit. Of these two,



Jane was clearly a dedicated learner in all areas of her life due to how she described herself in her first interview, saying, “I am a learning person because I love to read and try to everyday find something new for learn. Everyday.” In her second interview, she spoke about how she wasn’t satisfied with the current curriculum offerings at Centro Hispano and wants to continue to learn:

I think I need more advanced class because when I try to have a very hard conversation ... I stuck. And I make a lot of mistakes I don’t need to do. I don’t know if you understand. ... And I don’t know what I need to do. And when I need to write something. Then I need... I think I need more grammar. For talking and for writing.

Her highly ambitious learning style was mirrored in her desire for more advanced classes and practice writing and speaking in English. At the time of the study, Jane attended the upper-level Conversation course that meets on Mondays and involves students and several volunteer instructors sitting around a round table, answering questions from a pack of party-game questions. In a classroom observation of this class on September 14, 2018, students were asked random, abstract questions, such as, “If you could transform back and forth into any object, what would it be?” and “What kind of jobs would you do if you were shrunk to the side of a quarter?” The complex nature of these questions made it difficult for some students to answer, which was further complicated by the fact that there were five students and four instructor volunteers. Joy was the official instructor, but the other volunteers also sat in and answered questions. Jane expressed that the Conversation course was fun and “relaxing,” but acknowledge that she didn’t learn much from the class. By our last interview, she had enrolled in the Pellissippi Community College English program and was slated to start in January 2019. One of the main reasons behind this decision was to advance professionally in her career.

Similarly, Dan was a highly ambitious and competitive learner, which might be attributed to his hobby as a weightlifter. Frequently, he referred to his English process in terms of percentages, remarking that he needed to attain “90 percent or 100 percent” fluency in English in order to get his GED and later apply for university. In his interviews, there was no doubt in his mind that he wouldn’t reach his desired level of fluency. To Dan, he will learn everything he can to achieve his imagined L2 selves. He expressed clear goals of what he wanted to achieve with the language and wouldn't let anything stop him, even his own hobbies and everyday distractions. This competitive learning style was also seen in how he talks about error correction. During his last interview, he showed me his writing homework from class the day before, where he was required to write a paragraph about one of his friends who was successful in life. The instructor had made many corrections and notes on his paragraph. Instead of being discouraged at making so many “mistakes,” Dan reported liking when his instructors corrected him. Like Jane, his ambitious learning style made him want more from the language classroom.

In regards to the desire for more writing assistance, the program does not emphasize this skill set, choosing to help students primarily improve their listening, reading, and speaking skills. As a result, many students are unable to write for a significant length of time. This need for help with writing is echoed by the program director Brian when he revealed that “a lot of students ... can fully have conversations ... but you ask them to write a paragraph and it's just like ... nothing.”

Rachel, another instructor volunteer, complicated this notion when she talked about how her own experience with students indicated that they didn’t work as hard on writing exercises from the book because this was not what they need to know how to do immediately. She

discussed how they want help with conversations with their children's teachers and their bosses, not with writing:

They're not always writing emails, they're not always ... they're definitely not writing essays in English. ... If they need to send to email to a teacher, it's probably going to happen like once every month, for example. They're going to send that, they're going to run it through Google translator, they're going to send it to me or to somebody who speaks English and they're going to get that. And- and then that's going to be it.

Like Rachel mentioned, students may not choose to write because they do not need to write every day. This lack of desire may also be attributed to the nature of the writing prompts presented to them since both Jane and Dan reported needing more advanced classes that push them to succeed professionally and socially outside of the classroom.

### **What factors hurt investment?**

None of the participants reported that any internal or external factor kept them from investing in learning English long term. Any problems they encountered were temporary and kept them from investing as much as they would like. These issues included having a busy schedule, negative attitudes toward the language and learning process due to certain linguistic and age-related difficulties, and poor classroom dynamics. All of these factors were short-term challenges that slowed down their acquisition process, but did not ultimately stop students from wanting or being able to invest in learning English.

#### ***Having a busy schedule***

One of the main reasons adult ESL students discontinue their language studies is due to hectic "life demands" (Eyring, 2014, p. 124). Of the four participants, Dan and Anna had the

busiest schedules, which hurt their investment through not being able to come to class or study outside of the classroom. For instance, Anna struggles with numerous family and work responsibilities. When talking about her chaotic schedule, Anna said:

I work in my busy day. I have a busy day.... My schedule is very busy. All I do is fast. I pressure because...For example, today I return my home 5 o'clock, take shower, eat fast, driving, I come to Centro Hispano. In one hour, I take shower, I cook, I eat, I drive to Centro Hispano. In one hour. {laughter} It's pressure for this. I need work less hours. This is the problem for me.

She felt pressured to work fewer hours, but was unable to do so because she needed to provide for her young son and teenage daughter. In addition to work, she only attended Centro Hispano on Mondays and Wednesdays because she took her son to play piano on Tuesdays and Thursdays. She was highly invested in learning English to advance professionally and in her everyday life, yet she seemed to invest in her son's future even more. Like many dedicated parents, she sacrificed her own needs to learn English for the sake of giving her child a better life. Even so, she expressed frustration about how her family didn't give her enough time to practice and surround herself with English when she remarked:

This is my problem...I need time during...my day, only speak English, learning English. But...all day my life? Is very, very busy...I need my family, I need...I need that my family get me one hour only for me. Only for me.

In Mary's second interview, she talked about how Anna's busy schedule kept her from studying and coming to class. They were friends outside of the nonprofit, which led Mary to discuss her friend's situation when she explained, "But, um, {Anna}, she is sad about this because...I know

she doesn't have time for study. For learning, okay? Because she has a kid, a little kid...she need the pay the bills, okay?" Mary mentioned Anna's predicament in contrast to her own. Unlike the other participants who worked to pay bills, support their families, and more, Mary did not have to work because of her husband's salary and because she suffers from fibromyalgia and hypothyroidism. Due to education requirements in the country, she also cannot work in her old profession as a psychologist because she would have to go back to school to acquire additional certification to practice. As a result, she had no desire to work full time and enjoyed being a homemaker for her family. She brought up Anna's busy schedule to indicate that there are forces outside of Anna's control that slow down her acquisition process and that her lack of attendance has nothing to do with a lack of investment.

Similarly, Dan's encountered difficulty with his erratic work schedule. He was a forklift driver at a factory in Lenoir City, where he worked up to 14 hours a day three to four days a week. Despite his busy schedule, he did usually attend classes Monday through Thursday because he only worked weekends. His schedule itself wasn't a problem for attending classes, but his exhaustion from the work did keep him from studying independently and attending all the time. He expressed this problem in his first interview:

Sometimes, for example, on Friday, Saturday, Sunday ... When 6:30 or 7, I finish the work, I rode home, repose 20 minutes, get up and I went to the gym, maybe two hours, two and a half. Come back home and fix my food, um, take a shower. I'm tired.

{laughter}

The role hobbies and other distractions did impact his investment, but overall, he was highly invested in learning English because English was absolutely necessary for his everyday life and

professional and educational advancement. Like all other participants, he continued to invest in the language because of this core belief that English was important, despite encountering short-term problems that slowed down the acquisition process.

From an instructor perspective, Brooke spoke about how she knew her students were experiencing scheduling problems and she tried to help them as much as she can, even when they were missing lots of classes:

I know they work long hours too.... Um, a lot of them, at least, majority of them ... So, I know they're trying to balance both the learning aspect ... So that doesn't really ever frustrate me. Like I never really get mad at someone who hasn't studied or is like a little bit behind. It's mostly just like trying to help them, like the hard part is trying to help them like catch back up.

Brooke did not divulge how she helped students catch up, yet this is a familiar problem for many ESL instructors, especially in a voluntary setting.

### ***Short-term negative attitudes toward language and learning***

Traditional SLA suggests a learner's attitude toward the language community directly determines how "motivated" the language learner will be, along with the levels of anxiety they may experience in certain language situations (Norton, 2013, p. 43). In this view, a "good language learner" is one who is highly motivated to learn a language, has excellent attention to detail, isn't anxious, and can tolerate ambiguity (p. 43). This theory is certainly true of some learners, such as Jan and Dan, who possessed highly ambitious learning styles, though Mary's experiences complicate this assumption. One of Mary's familiar refrains throughout the study stemmed from her first interview, when she joked, "Sometimes I don't want to learn. Because I

hate. {laughs}” This attitude towards the language and learning should, by all accounts, impede her language learning process. Her negative attitude should keep her from wanting to invest and attending Centro Hispano’s classes. Instead, she was the most regular attendee, coming to class every night and jumping from classroom to classroom to get “more grammar practice.”

Mary’s short-term negative attitude echoes Norton’s (1997) definition of investment, which acknowledges learners’ sometimes “ambivalent desire to learn and practice” the language (p. 411). Her sentiments also illustrate my operational definition of identity that acknowledges the “dynamic and sometimes contradictory way in which people understand and position themselves in their current... contexts.” On one hand, she demonstrates outright “hatred” of learning English because of the linguistic difficulties associated with acquiring it at her age when she expressed, “I don’t like English, okay? {laughs} It’s the true. No, I ... don’t like another language. It’s not easy learning another language this time, okay?” Simultaneously, she actively invested in English by attending Centro Hispano four times a week. What might explain this discrepancy? The answer was that she thought English was necessary for daily life outside her home, but in her home and when running daily errands, she could feel comfortable using her L1 and can “forget” to practice and learn. In a way, it was like she needs time to “recharge” and remember her old life, taking a break from English learning and practice. This was best demonstrated in her third interview, when she stated:

But I don’t think about learning English every day. Or every time. Sometimes ... I forget? ... I wake up, I clean my house, I go ... the shopping for the supermarket? ... I make my food. I talk my friend, every day. I talk my mom, every day. Okay? And ... sometimes I forget I’m here.

Like the short-term impact of scheduling issues, short-term negative attitudes toward language and learning were not detrimental long-term in the language learning journey. There are limitations to these findings, but Mary's "hatred" of the language may stem from natural growing pains associated with the advanced acquisition process. As she was highly fluent, she was encountering frustration with not understanding some of the more nuanced linguistic features of the language and therefore expressed her "hatred" as a result. She then retreated to her safe spaces to recharge with her L1 so she can then return to Centro Hispano to learn.

### *Poor classroom dynamics*

In Darvin and Norton's (2015) work on investment, they argue that students may be highly motivated and eager to learn, but if the language practices in their ESL classroom are "racist, sexist, or homophobic," they may not be invested in learning (p. 37). This study's findings provide a different view of this theory. Students reported two key problems associated with poor classroom dynamics: bad instructors and lack of error correction. Regarding bad instructors, Mary mentioned a few struggles she experienced when she first attended Centro Hispano and how she hadn't encountered this problem since this time:

When I start, the teacher from Monday, class start at 6, finish it at 6:20pm. Last year. And I don't come more on Monday because sometimes I need 50 minutes to come and ... no. And we have another teacher and she looks at the phone all the time. I don't remember the name. It's okay, she's very young. Yes, I think now all the teacher are good, I think.

Unlike Norton's view that these "bad" instructors would keep her from investing in learning the language, Mary persisted and found instructors who better suited her learning needs. Since Centro Hispano runs in 5-week cycles, this change was feasible for her, but would not be if she



attended another program with longer semesters. Additionally, these poor instructors did not keep her from wanting to learn, rather, they just kept her from getting what she wanted at that time. These instructors didn't stop her investment but made her work harder to achieve her language goals and reach her imagined L2 selves.

A lack of error correction in the classroom was a major problem for Mary, specifically when it came to her feelings about the upper-level Conversation course. In her diary entry from September 24, 2018, she wrote, "I still do not know if I learn anything during the conversation class." Curious, I asked her about this entry and she remarked, "I don't know, because I know I speak very ... Not correct, okay? And I think...they don't learn me?" Essentially, Mary was frustrated that she did not receive enough "symbolic and material resources" from this class to "increase the value of" her "cultural capital" (Norton, Pierce, 1995, p. 17). She was still invested in the community because of the people but discussed how the ratio of students to teachers might contribute to this problem:

I like. It's very good. But sometimes, I don't know. I know...I talk, uh, is not correct?

{laughs} Because I don't know. In Monday has ... four students, and ... five teachers.

But they talk and...they don't correct me? Yeah, I know, the talking is... bad. I think it's so big now.

Instead of encountering racist, homophobic, or sexist instructors that kept her from wanting to invest, Mary wanted something more from her time spent in this class and one of the reasons for this lack of error correction was an overabundance of instructors. Mary's concern was illustrated in data from a classroom observation on September 14, 2018. During this class, instructors were more concerned with answering questions themselves than getting students to think critically and

chime into the conversation. Many of these instructors were speaking quickly with advanced vocabulary and many of the students did not seem to follow the conversation.

Moving beyond just the Conversation course, it is important to note that none of the three instructor participants reported having any formal training in teaching ESL. Centro Hispano must rely on volunteers for teaching support to handle the volume of students coming to learn, which means that not all instructors will be trained to teach these learners. Untrained instructors do not necessarily equate to poor classroom dynamics, but it can contribute to not knowing how to meet the needs of a diverse range of students in the classroom, which is a continual problem for many nonprofit ESL programs (Eyring, 2014). The program director, Brian, did mention that many volunteer instructors are bilingual or undergraduate students studying Spanish or Hispanic history, which helps foster community and avoid some language confusion in the classroom. He discussed the challenge of working with volunteers and trying to make them feel welcomed:

One of the things that's difficult about running a volunteer program is just obviously, they're not paid, so you're gonna have people who aren't gonna be as reliable as you'd like them to be. But I think that one thing that I always tried to do was, like, pull myself out of the office, and that's why a lot of times I sit the lobby whenever the students are arriving is because when the volunteers come in ... I think they need a sense of community as well.

## **Conclusion**

Investment involves the relationship of learners to their target language and their seemingly ambivalent desire to learn and practice it. If researchers and nonprofit leaders wish to know how to study and serve nonprofit adult ESL learners, they must explore all areas of this

“relationship.” It is not enough to simply know that students invest in learning English, but scholars and nonprofit leaders must also know how they do it, along with what factors help this investment or hurt this process. For scholars, these findings can serve as a foundation from which to build upon for future studies of other populations of adult learners. For nonprofit leaders, these results may help them better tailor program goals and structures to effectively meet the needs of their students.

Based on the results, researchers and advocates should examine what features of the learning process impede or help the acquisition process for this unique population of learners in the short-term, and devise long-term solutions that make it easier for them to invest, rather than study issues of long-term motivation. After all, participants’ responses indicate that it is not possible for them to choose not to invest in learning English because the language is essential for their social life and professional advancement. Unlike some EFL contexts where learners can choose to stop learning a language because it is not necessary for their immediate social or professional situation, nonprofit adult ESL learners cannot always “choose under what conditions they will interact with members of the target language community” (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 74).

These results show that nonprofit adult ESL learners view English as an avenue to increase their cultural capital in the Knoxville area, but experience problems investing due to scheduling issues, short-term negative attitudes toward the language and learning, not having anyone to practice with, and poor classroom dynamics. Despite these problems, the factors that help investment, which include a belief that English is necessary, the community of Centro Hispano, and possessing a highly ambitious learning style, keep them coming back to Centro

Hispano or practicing on their own in informal ways, such as with English-language materials or having social language support. Essentially, they continue to invest in learning English because they must in order achieve their imagined L2 selves and unlocked future possibilities in a range of imagined communities that are also accessible with English.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### IDENTITY AND POWER

“I would have to be born again in America culture to speak right.” - Mary

This chapter focuses on the intersection of identity and power relations and provides further context and explanations for themes discussed in Chapter Four. The data is divided into micro-level power relations in the community (“outside”) and at Centro Hispano (“inside”). This distinction is demonstrated most clearly in Mary’s second interview when she joked, “Okay, in the Centro it’s okay. All the people know. {chuckles} I just learn, okay? But outside is the real world, okay? {chuckles}” The “outside” power relation findings fall under four categories: Native speakers refuse the communicative burden, native speakers take on the communicative burden, learners refuse the communicative burden, and learners take on the communicative burden. The “inside” power relations have two categories: Native speakers refuse the communicative burden and native speakers take on the communicative burden.

Findings in this chapter answer the study’s fourth research question: How do adult ESL learners perceive and respond to power relations in and out of the nonprofit ESL classroom? The thematic results present participants’ thoughts on these micro-level imbalances in power, along with how they react to these situations. These results also illustrate how participants’ identity may impact their perception and response to these power dynamics, along with how these powers may affect their identity perception.

#### **Outside: Real-world power relations**

All participant framed their outside and inside worlds in relation to language use and social encounters. Similar to Hill’s (1998, p. 681) discussion of the separation of the “inner

sphere of talk” for Spanish- speaking communities and “outer sphere of talk” of the English- dominated society, participants made sharp distinctions between the outside, “real world” and the inner, “safe space” of Centro Hispano. This distinction is reminiscent of the difference between the outside “white public space” (Hill, 1998) of the greater Knoxville community and the “lived space” of Centro Hispano (Lou, 2016). For the “outside world,” the results reflect how native speakers or learners refuse or take on the communicative burden in micro-level communication situations with native speakers. Thematic findings in this section include: inverted English use to combat mocking speech, divided interpretations of accented or developing English, “freezing up” to preserve perceived intelligence and status, reinforcing previous professional identity to process superiority, and frustration with relying on “language brokers” and technology to communicate.

#### ***Inverted English use to combat mocking speech***

Both Mary and Anna reported native speakers refusing the communicative burden through the use of exaggerated, slow speech, which they described as being sarcastic and mocking. Rather than be subdued by these negative encounters and refuse to claim their right to speak (Norton Pierce, 1995), they mocked their oppressors through imitating their speech to validate their identity as legitimate speakers of English, much like Rosa’s (2016) Inverted Spanglish. However, neither Mary or Anna communicated in Spanish like Inverted Spanglish, but chose to mock the English speech of native speakers in a manner that I call Inverted English. In their informal group interview, both women spontaneously expressed their frustration about negative situations with native speakers who use this exaggerated, slow speech. Their discussion is as follows:

**Mary:** Sometimes the people speak slowly, but you know the people don't like, it's, um, sarcastic. {exaggerated, slow speech} "What ... do ... you ... do?"

**Anna:** Yes!

**Mary:** "What ... do...you...want?"

**Anna:** My boss say, {exaggerated, slow speech} "peeennn" "tableee."

**Mary:** Uh huh! I hate! {slaps table}

To clarify, Mary's and Anna's exaggerated use of Inverted English is not like Rosa's (2016) Inverted Spanglish. In his study, teens mocked the way white customers addressed Latinx employees at a Mexican restaurant with a hyper-anglicized "whitey voice" to make these customers feel uncomfortable by "turning the linguistic tables and marking their language practices" (p. 76). Rather, Mary and Anna imitated the speech of native English speakers to highlight the ridiculousness of their actions and express their frustration with these encounters. Unlike the youth in Rosa's study, Mary and Anna were not confronting these speakers directly, but used the informal group interview format to verbally process these imbalances in power. In her second interview, Mary discussed this phenomenon once again, recounting a time she and another non-native speaker of English went grocery shopping together:

I think in the Kroger? ... The cashier look and {indicates her friend saying}, 'I'm sorry I don't speak English very well' because she speak more than me. And the {cashier} ... say, {exaggerated slow speech} "This ... Is ...". She ... so sad, but she so ... angry? Angry. Oh my god - I 'wait, wait' {indicated holding the woman back} because she is very angry, okay? {laughter} Yeah, it's no good. And another day the cashier say for me,

the same. Okay? Okay. Cause for me... {tossed hands in air, clicked her tongue} depends on the day. {laughter}

Mary vented her frustrations through humorously mocking the speech of the cashier, who, upon hearing that their English proficiency wasn't "perfect," decided to refuse his or her part of the communicative burden and make them feel inferior through this slow, exaggerated speech. The end of Mary's discussion is important because she indicated that this kind of situation doesn't always bother her, but it "depends on the day." One reason for her seeming indifference to these imbalances in power might be her use of Inverted English in the interview, which allows her claim her identity as a developing English language learner as legitimate. This use also allowed her to navigate and make sense of this imbalance in power she experienced. This instance is much like Rosa's (2016) work that highlights how Inverted Spanglish helps young students claim both their English and Spanish language identities.

### ***Divided interpretations of accented or developing English***

Participants were divided about how they responded to native speakers who refused their side of the communicative burden through not understanding "accents" or demanding improved English. Anna and Mary believed having an accent was "bad" and something to work hard to get rid of. Dan acknowledged that his English was not "correct," but wasn't discouraged by situations where native speakers challenged his accent or English proficiency. Jane was not phased at all by situations where native speakers might "other" her because of her accent, because, in her own words, "I don't feel the accent {laughter}. I think I talk normally!" All of these reactions, while extremely different in their interpretation of accented English, do reflect a standard language ideology (SLI). All participants acknowledged in their own ways that there



was one “normal” or “right” way to speak. Though issues of intelligibility are relevant to L2 speech, all learners, except maybe Jane, believe they were working towards this idealized, standard language that they may one day achieve, which led to their differing interpretations of developing or accented speech.

In the informal interview with Anna and Mary, I asked, “What does it mean to speak English well?” Mary replied that it was when you “don’t have a lot of accent.” This interaction with Mary echoes Alim and Smitherman (2012, p. 45), who found immigrant adults and the children of immigrant parents felt “honored to be referred to as articulate” because this meant they had “fully mastered English.” In this interaction, both Mary and Anna expressed the desire to speak “correctly” to avoid situations where native speakers refuse their communicative burden by not understanding their accent. To them, “correctly” means unaccented, perfect English. Unfortunately, in later conversations, both referred to themselves as stupid because their accent doesn’t sound like native speakers. In the second interview with Mary, she explained what it felt like to speak with native English speakers and have them “judge” her accent:

It’s not good.... Because the people look for you, ohhhh. {acts judgmental} Different?

Yeah. Okay, because I don’t speak, okay? When, when I try speak ... I know my English is broken, okay? Yes, it’s a little pieces, okay? {laughs} And the people look, ‘Oh, what you say?’

Mary acknowledged that even though her language was in “little pieces,” she was still a legitimate speaker. However, her perception of how native speakers act in these conversations muddied her view of these interactions and kept her wanting to rid herself of the accent and avoid these judgmental looks.

Dan responded differently to a similar situation involving a native speaker demanding that he improve his English because it was not “correct.” He was frustrated and sad when an immigration official treated him badly on his most recent trip back to Mexico while he was on his way back into the U.S. He called this interaction “racist:”

Yeah, immigration, okay, ‘You no speak English. What you took here?’ Yeah, whatever, yeah. Yes, um, but I can do it. Example, mm, today, {sighs} um, I’m learning more English. I talk, I understand a little more. Yeah.

Dan seemed to take this demand as a challenge to learn more and to prove that he can navigate these situations, when he stated “Yes, um, but I can do it” in response to navigating this interaction. This competitive nature seems to fall in line with his interest in bodybuilding since he previously reported approaching his language learning journey much like he did his exercise routine.

Jane was different from the other three participants because she didn’t view her accent as a problem and perceived comments about her accent as positive, rather than neutral or negative. For example, she reported she didn’t “feel the accent” because she thought she speaks “normally.” As a result, when she recounted how people ask her where she is from because of her accent, she reacted strongly, saying she loved when this happens. Reflecting on these situations, she stated that she isn’t from here “for the moment,” but welcomes her differences with native speakers:

I don’t feel the accent. {laughter} I think I talk normally! {laughter} ... No, the people tell me, ‘Where are you from? You have a different accent.’ For me, it’s okay. I love when the people ask me about this. ... because I am not here. {laughter} I am not from

here. And I know my English is not... perfect? You know? And I know the people, uh, I like the people know ... see I am not from here. For the moment. {laughter} I don't know why. But... I like it.

Here, acknowledged, "I know my English is not... perfect?" with a questioning tone, implying that she doesn't necessarily believe she should or can attain "correct" English. Jane seemed content with her speech, even though she still wanted to develop more advanced skills through her time at Centro Hispano. Much of her positive reaction to these situations may be due to her marriage to an English-speaking man, her job in an English-speaking office, her ambitious learning style, and her overwhelming belief that English is necessary for her everyday life. In a diary entry, she mentioned having a positive encounter with her boss about her developing English skills:

Friday, I had a meeting at the office. Normally, it's for information, but this time I needed to talk about some project. Until I was talking noticed that my supervisor was smiling. At the end she told me that my English was more improve. I felt good.

This diary excerpt showed how Jane willingly engaged with native speakers, especially at work, where she had to in order to do her job. While the other participants did not have to speak English at work, Jane worked in an English-only office and had to speak with customers all around the world. This entry and Jane's comments in her interview also reflect Alim and Smitherman's (2012) study of the use of the word articulate to describe the speech of immigrant adults and their children. Like the participants in the study, Jane was honored to be referred to as "articulate" by her because she enjoyed hearing that her English was "improving." Even though her superior and coworkers might not be aware of the weight of their comments, Jane's language

still seems to be “linguistically marginalized” due to its non-standardized variety (Smitherman & Alim, 2012, p. 45). As noted in Smitherman and Alim’s discussion of Racism 2.0 where articulateness is seen as a function of “enlightened exceptionalism,” Jane is encouraged to “transcend” her accent through becoming more like her peers (p. 33). This covert encouragement for linguistic homogenization could be problematic for L2 learners over time.

***“Freezing up” to preserve perceived intelligence and status***

Anna and Mary revealed they sometimes chose not to communicate with native speakers to preserve their perceived intelligence and status. They described this process as “freezing up.” In her informal group interview with Mary, Anna discussed how she felt stupid when she spoke with native speakers. Instead of attempting to engage with these native speakers, she “freezes up” and stops communicating because she can’t “speak English with them.” She felt “stupid” for not being able to engage and chose to preserve her status as an intelligent woman by being silent, rather than show the native speaker that she cannot understand them. She revealed, “Only feel stupid when in front of the people, the American people because I freeze. Yes, I freeze because I can’t speak English with them.” Her struggle was illustrated more clearly in her second interview when she spoke at length about trying to speak with native southern speakers outside of Centro Hispano, such as at the gym. In the following conversation, Anna discussed having to pretend she knew what a native speaker was talking about to avoid admitting she didn’t know what he was saying:

Yes, in Tennessee, the accent, {imitates southern speech sounds}, ‘What? What?’ For example, I can understand when you speak with me. But now, in the gym, one senior ... talk with me. {shivers, acts nervous, and acts confused}. No, nothing, nothing. {yells in

frustration} ... Eh, the senior, ‘Wah, wah, wah.’ {imitates smiling, pretending to understand, and laughs} Yes, ‘Hahaha.’ I ... I think very down. I down because ... the people talk with me, but ... {sighs and slumps down over table} I don’t know to speak with them. No understand when speak ... fast? Nothing, nothing, nothing.

Similarly, Mary suffered from “freezing up” around native speakers and recounted many instances when she and Anna had “frozen up” around native speakers. In her third interview, she reflected on how embarrassing and anxiety-inducing it was to not be able to understand when people were speaking to her:

Yeah. I and {Anna} in the...I don’t remember the name of the store. The man, talk with {Anna}, and {Anna} ... {gasps loudly} She’s so nervous. And I’m nervous together! {laughter} Because I don’t understand the man and I don’t understand {Anna}. And she so ... confused. And I don’t understand the English the {Anna}. {laughter} It’s ... oh my gosh, it’s so ... embarrassing? This situation because another people in the store. Oh. I said, ‘Mariana, stop. Breathe, okay?’

Mary addressed why she “freezes up” in her second interview, “I don’t know. I think ... what another people think about me, okay? ... I think... {imitating their thoughts} ‘Oh, she is dumb.’” Here, she was more focused on how the native speakers perceive her than on her own language production and placed this role of being “dumb” upon herself, not leaving room for native speakers to view her any differently. Then, to further preserve her perceived intelligence, she rejected her side of the communicative burden. When probed further about what scenarios don’t cause her to freeze up, she said that outside of Centro Hispano she freezes “every day. I think I’m not comfortable with people, I freezing.” Not only does this illustrate the value of making

accented speakers of English feel comfortable in everyday communicative situations, but highlights how vital safe spaces like Centro Hispano are for adult ESL learners.

Brian, the program director, recognized how many students “shut down” in communicative situations outside of Centro Hispano and explained how important the center is for letting students know it is okay to make mistakes and to learn from them:

They know that they can come here and like, if they say something incorrectly then we'll go ahead and go over that. But, if they have to talk to their child's teacher, for example, or talk to their doctor, is when they kind of get nervous and then their brain goes blank, and they just kind of shut down .... Yeah ... unfortunately just where we live there are a lot of people who are like, speak English or get out. And they hear that rhetoric all the time, and that's, whenever that's constantly reinforced to them, that's, it puts even more fear in them.

The idea that adult ESL learners get nervous when speaking with native speakers is nothing new. This theme contributes to existing notions of communication anxiety (Wesely, 2012), but also shows the importance of being aware of how and why students respond in these situations.

***Reinforcing previous professional identity to process superiority***

Both Mary and Anna reinforced their previous professional identities to process difficult communication interactions with native speakers, such as when they would refuse the communicative burden by speaking too quickly or acting superior. Throughout their informal group interview, the two expressed how difficult it was to engage with native speakers. Anna became increasingly discouraged and self-deprecating throughout the interview, which led to her blaming herself for not being as fluent as she would like to be. Instead of agreeing, Mary

emphatically reassured Anna that she was “valuable,” even though she was not fluent. This concern was clearly articulated in this back and forth interaction:

**Anna:** The problem is me. Because...

**Mary:** You are not the problem! You...

**Anna:** I don't understand other things! {laughter from both}

**Mary:** You are a lawyer! {slams hand down and jokes in Portuguese}

**Anna:** No, okay.

**Mary:** No! When you, uh, feel down, you say, you think, “I'm a lawyer.”

{smiles and laughter from both}

In this conversation, Mary helped Anna overcome her frustration and sadness about her inability to speak English easily by reinforcing their previous professional identities. As demonstrated in Mary and Anna's conversation, they cannot work these jobs in the U.S. at the moment, but they can still secretly remind themselves about their past selves. This identity preservation helped them affirm themselves as intelligent women even when they thought they are perceived as “dumb” because their lack of English mastery. They both still struggled to communicate in everyday conversations, yet it seemed that this previous identity was highly important to the way they perceived themselves as ESL learners in a new country. In her second interview, Mary reflected on the conversation she had with Anna in the informal interview:

I try, uh, talk with {Anna} because I think she's very sad about the...the language...yeah.

And I say, “{Anna}, you are, uh, a lawyer.” {indicated Anna responding} ‘Just in

Mexico.’ {her responding} ‘I know, but, you are ... Nobody, nobody take off this. You

are! You are! You going to college. You make the course. {emphatic}

This sentiment broadens existing views of educational and professional diversity in the adult ESL classroom. It is already known that students with “no previous education or careers” are in the same classroom as those with “advanced degrees and multiple prior careers,” but there hasn’t much research about how students with advanced degrees feel about learning a new language late in life after holding a previous professional career (Eyring, 2014, p. 123). This conversation indicates that students like Mary and Anna might find it difficult to navigate their conflicting identities of being a professional in their home country and not being a professional in the U.S. This situation is further complicated when they are struggling to learn a new language in a position of “lower power” than they were before.

***Frustration with relying on “language brokers” and technology to communicate***

Another way in which learners refuse the communicative burden is through relying on others to translate for them. Of the four participants, Anna and Dan reported the most frustration with having to use “language brokers,” who serve as the “liaison with influence in exchanges between individuals” in order to assume “independent agency” (Alvarez, 2017, p. 5). Anna expressed having the most difficulty relying on her teenage daughter and eight-year-old son to serve as her “language brokers” in order to communicate with native speakers in the community. She recounted her frustration with this reality and how she longed for the independence she had in Mexico:

My daughter will accompany me because she helps me translate. I depend on people ... I don’t like ... I need to learn English. I feel silly when I depend on people. ... Always in Mexico, always I independent.... I don’t speak English, I depend the people ... Depend the people is...is very hard? Very hard. Yes.



Undoubtedly, depending on her children to translate resulted in an imbalance in power between her and native English speakers. It also disrupted the power dynamics between her and her children. While this power reversal was neither inherently negative or positive and hadn't resulted in problems with her relationship with her children, in this previous quote, Anna was grappling with this fluctuation of power depending on the "contexts and situations" she encountered (Alvarez, 2017, p. 5). In order to navigate certain situations without her children present, Anna did take on the communicative burden by finding other ways to communicate without language, such as texting and translating on her phone. Technology can be an incredibly useful tool for developing English-language learners, yet Anna vented about her problems with not being able to "trust" in herself and only in her phone:

I think, like, no, I think that this phone, this translate is good, but ... no, no is good for me because no ... no ... ah ... I trust my phone. Not trust in me. Because I only, only time...no. ... All time, all time I, I bring my phone.

Her struggle with not being able to trust in her own linguistic abilities is not unusual of adult language learners.

Dan relied on his bilingual cousin and his phone to help him navigate difficult situations. Throughout his interviews, Dan said he was dependent on his cousin for "long" conversations because he needed more practice with pronunciation and vocabulary. While he seemed confident when dealing with low-stakes power relations between himself and native speakers at the gym, store, and in restaurants, it was the imbalances he felt at the doctor, the bank, and other highly technical contexts that make him rely on his cousin for help. When his cousin was not with him, however, he said he used his phone's translating app. Despite its usefulness, he was adamant

about not relying on his cellphone once his wife and baby arrived to live with him from Mexico in December 2018. In order to accomplish this goal, he said, “I need, uh, lose the scare... because my wife here. ... Not every time I need have translate. I need it. For me ... I no understand, I no looking for the cell phone.” Both Anna and Dan said they needed to “lose the fear” in some capacity in order to successfully interact with native English speakers. Dan did not talk about “freezing up” like Anna, but they experienced a similar frustration with relying on language brokers and technology to convey their message. This lack of independence is a huge source of unhappiness for both participants and is likely not unique to them because many other students at Centro Hispano might be experiencing similar struggles.

### **Inside: Centro Hispano power relations**

All participants agreed Centro Hispano was a safe, encouraging, patient space full of passionate and kind instructors who want to help them succeed. Any frustration or power imbalances they felt inside Centro Hispano seemed to be temporary or not relevant to how they feel about the community overall. Learners did not report refusing to communicate inside the nonprofit, nor did they talk explicitly about taking on the communicative burden. Two themes emerged in this section: the important role of safe, lived spaces and instructors isolate certain learners when speaking quickly.

#### ***The important role of safe, lived spaces***

In regards to native speakers taking on the communicative burden, all participants reported Centro Hispano was full of instructors who were patient and made them feel like family. For instance, Jane reported, “I feel very confident in the center” and “I arrive to the center and feel like I arrive to my home.” Her thoughts illustrate just how important the lived space of

Centro Hispano was to her identity. Jane was not as bothered by “outside” power relations as the other three participants. Yet, her remark about the nonprofit being her “home” implies some pressure or uncomfortableness associated with being in the English public space during the day and how she felt confident and relaxed upon entering the safe, lived space of Centro Hispano.

Reflecting on her feelings about the nonprofit, she remarked:

I feel very confident in the center. I arrive to the center and feel like I arrive to my home. Not the same way because I can't take off my clothes and ... {laughter} But I feel like this, I feel confident ... Every people. The new people, we have a lot of new people there. It's good. They are so good. With the other student visiting, always good. I never have problem in the center, never! No, I love it.

The role of Centro Hispano as a safe, familial space seemed to be highly important to all participants, including Dan. Even though he willingly assumed his side of the communicative burden, he still got nervous when interacting with native speakers “outside,” as demonstrated when he revealed, “No, not nervous. Only nervous, usually outside. Outside because, uh, in front of other people, eh, I talk with him, uh, there words I understand and don't understand.” Dan kept going, even though he was nervous, which is significant because it shows how important safe, lived spaces, like Centro Hispano, are for learners like Dan, who need a place to practice English in and not feel anxious. The students were not the only study participants to referred to the nonprofit as a safe space. For instance, Brian, the program director, spoke about how he was intentionally making the nonprofit a “safe space” for their students:

That's kind of what I'm trying to bring to Centro, is making sure that whenever people come in the door that they know that they're part of our community. This is a safe zone,

that they can talk to us about anything, and I think that that's really important, that they have this space that they know that that's their safe haven.

This safe environment, based on previous results, is essential for learners like Mary, Jane, Anna, and Dan. Their responses suggest the nonprofit allows the students to learn and make mistake in a secure environment, which might help relieve any anxieties and fears they have speaking with native speakers over time.

***Instructors isolate learners when speaking quickly***

The poor classroom dynamics theme from Chapter Four is similar to this finding in that students may not be interested in classroom practices if instructors talk too quickly. However, this finding has less to do with students wanting or not wanting to invest in the language and more about how individual instructors make individual students feel in the classroom. For example, Anna reported being disadvantaged by her instructors who spoke too quickly. She felt “silenced” in the classroom, which limited her opportunities for “learning, participating in classroom discourse, and feeling like” she is a legitimate speaker of English (Duff & Talmy, 2011, p. 105). Anna’s situation was an important lesson for nonprofit classrooms to learn in regards to how they might isolate some of their learners without even meaning to do so. Anna was the only student participant who brought up this issue in her interviews. When discussing the Conversation class she attends infrequently, Anna said:

Last Monday? The conversation table. The four people, American people, nice people. Speak very fast... I can understand with Jessica speak. But the other people ... nothing. Because [they] speak fast.

Communicating too quickly for learners to understand is inevitable at times in the ESL classroom, yet Anna internalized these encounters and blamed herself for not being able to keep up in the class discussion. Later, she clarified that she “loves” the class but was completely “lost,” thus resulting in a loss of confidence. She revealed, “I love ... I’m lost. I’m lost. I’m trying, but she asks the question ... She makes the question, I can’t understand. Other things, other concepts. But ... disaster. I’m disaster.” Anna struggled in her acquisition journey because she internalized her lack of proficiency to mean that something was wrong with her and compared herself to the other students in her classroom. Learning a language takes time and the length of the acquisition process is not a sign of weakness, but Anna did not view her language-learning journey in this way. Rather, she got discouraged in the Conversation class when instructors wouldn’t speak slow enough for her to follow the discussion, which she felt was her fault.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter highlights the ways these adult ESL learners encounter micro-level power relations in the greater Knoxville community and inside of Centro Hispano. The study chose to focus only on micro-level power dynamics to demonstrate the day-to-day power struggles learners face and how they perceive and respond to them. The findings illustrate the complex imbalances in power that exist between native and non-native speakers that nonprofit adult ESL learners must navigate on a daily basis.

These results suggest that learners perceive and respond to power relations in many different ways, but these powers do not, ultimately, keep them from continuing to invest in learning English. Power imbalances do, however, seem to impact perceptions of students’ own

identity, such as how Anna and Mary must reinforce their previous professional identity to avoid feeling “unintelligent” for not being fluent in the language. Anna, Mary, and Dan internalized some of these imbalances in power with native speakers, but they view Centro Hispano as a safe space where they can freely express themselves and learn the language. The nonprofit seems to serve as a space where they can process any negative interactions and reaffirm their right as legitimate speakers of the language when they are surrounded by their peers.

Overall, these results indicate a need for adult ESL programs, like Centro Hispano, to pay attention to potential imbalances in power that may exist between their instructors and learners in their classrooms. While nonprofits cannot eliminate problems between their learners and native speakers outside of their program doors, they can help learners process imbalance in power, provide language and emotional support, and give them tools and advice to be more effective navigating in these situations.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSIONS, SUGGESTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This case study of Centro Hispano explored issues of identity, investment, and power relations inside and outside of the ESL classroom. These findings provide clarity into the various challenges nonprofit adult ESL learners face in their acquisition journey through interviews with adult learners, their instructors, and the program administrator, along with diary entries, classroom observations, and surveys. This study showcases how students perceive themselves in and out of the classroom, how they choose to invest in learning English, what factors hurt and help their investment, and the impact power relations have on their identity and acquisition process. The two main goals of this study are to demonstrate how a better understanding of identity, investment, and power relations can better inform nonprofit adult ESL classroom practices and encourage new scholarship about this unique population of L2 learners.

#### **Identity: A theoretical discussion**

My theory of identity contributes to existing scholarship of identity theory in three main ways. First, it emphasizes the “dynamic” and “sometimes contradictory” in the way in which L2 learners understood their own past, present, and future, imagined L2 selves. The way learners perceived themselves and the people around them was grounded upon their own experiences, especially in the current world around them. For instance, Mary both “hated” learning English, but was one of the most dedicated classroom attendees. She both saw herself as a professional woman and “stupid” because of her lack of fluency. Additionally, she loved the “atmosphere” of Centro Hispano, but acknowledged that she wasn’t always learning in the classroom. Just like

Mary, all participants constantly shifted the way they saw themselves and those around them in response to their own acquisition journey and power dynamics in the community

The study also reiterates the necessity of studying identity within the diverse range of contexts learners find themselves in. My study examines adult L2 learners in a nonprofit learning environment, while much of current identity research focuses on K-12, higher education, and for-profit learning contexts (Duff & Talmy, 2011; Ivanič, 1998; Lee, 2012; Matsuda, 2016; Racelis & Matsuda, 2015). This contextual distinction is essential because adult L2 learners in community-based classrooms face different challenges during the acquisition process than young or academic learners. Furthermore, they possess different motives, desires, and needs for acquiring English and, as demonstrated in my research, all believe English is necessary for their daily life. This contextual lens is important for future research because nonprofit learners cannot be studied as static individuals or in the same manner as other adult learners.

These findings on identity also provide insight into how L2 learners can feel more comfortable as language learners in and outside of the nonprofit ESL classroom. For example, this study indicates that many nonprofit adult ESL learners, like Mary and Anna, may draw on their past professional identities to feel more “in control” when faced with imbalances in power when speaking with native speakers. Additionally, Dan and Jane fully envision their imagined L2 selves as being fully independent and successful professionals through acquiring their desired level of fluency. Overall, my identity focus is not just important for researchers analyzing this population, but for the learners themselves who must encounter the day-to-day struggles when acquiring a L2 in mid-to-late adulthood.



Within this discussion of identity, this study also revealed the how, what, and why of student investment in English. Based on these findings, student identity and their current life situations played a huge role in how they learned and used the language. For example, Jane is a highly ambitious learner, who is driven by her belief that English is extremely necessary to her daily life and professional advancement. In order for her to communicate with her English-speaking husband and work in her English-only office, she continues to invest in learning English. All the other learners also believe English is necessary to their daily life, which leads them to consistently invest in the language. There are short-term issues that slow down this investment process, such as attitudes, distractions, and scheduling problems, but this integral belief that the language equals access to various social, cultural, and financial capital keeps them studying, learning, and practicing.

In this study, students viewed and responded to various relations of power outside of the center in vastly different ways. For example, Mary and Anna freeze up to preserve their status as intelligent women, while Jane willingly engages with all native speakers of English, no matter the situation or context. They all acknowledged that problematic power imbalances between native and non-native speakers exist, but only Mary and Anna found it temporarily difficult to talk to certain individuals. None of the participants let these encounters keep them from investing in learning English long term. Rather, these situations seem to spur all the participants on in an effort to reach their imagined L2 selves.

These empirical findings of learner identity, investment, and power relations directly inform a pedagogical reality at Centro Hispano and nonprofits around the country. Specifically

drawing on the results discussed in chapters four and five, this study provides practical advice for Centro Hispano based on the findings from their specific student population.

### **From theory to pedagogy: Identity, investment, and power relations**

As reiterated throughout this study, adult ESL learners face many difficulties in the acquisition process. Two significant challenges facing adult learners are varying program offerings from nonprofits and the teaching practices of volunteer instructors. Many nonprofits, like Centro Hispano, struggle to introduce new curriculum offerings because full-time employees are busy writing grants, managing day-to-day concerns, and more. As a result, employees may not have time or resources to conduct empirical studies and assessments of their learner population to meet their needs. This study addresses this problem by providing valuable learner insights to help Centro Hispano improve its service offerings for their advanced students.

The next challenge concerns how most nonprofits rely on volunteers to teach ESL classes, many of which have had little to no ESL training prior to entering the classroom. These instructors are then faced with classrooms full of diverse learners who come from various educational, racial, social, economic, and cultural backgrounds, making it impossible to find a “one-size-fits-all” pedagogical solution for their students. This study does not provide curriculum offering for Centro Hispano students, but does offer a few suggestions for the program director and volunteer instructors based on the findings. All suggestions might not be feasible for Centro Hispano to implement in regards to time and resources, but they may serve as a guide for future improvements. The four suggestions are provided below. While not comprehensive, this advice may serve as a foundation for Centro Hispano and similar nonprofits to build from and tailor to meet the specific needs of their student populations.

***Suggestion 1: Offer additional social language support***

In Chapter 4, Dan and Jane discussed benefitting social language support outside of the classroom by practicing English with friends and family. The benefits of language socialization are nothing new to the field of SLA, however, these findings suggest how nonprofits could place greater emphasis on providing additional social language support for learners. This social language support could be in the form of weekly volunteer tutors who are paired with students who have less access to English outside of the classroom, similar to buddy programs offered for international students on university campuses. While students at Centro Hispano do benefit from English support in the classroom, it is vital that students are not only exposed to English for two hours one to four times a week. Just as Jane and Dan talk about the benefits of practicing with their families and friends at work, nonprofits should provide adult ESL students with similar social English support through the help of willing volunteers.

***Suggestion 2: Introduce effective, authentic writing prompts***

Both Dan and Jane reported how they need to improve their writing for educational and professional advancement. While Dan seemed relatively content with the current program's writing prompts, Jane desired more challenging and real-life prompts because these would help her more in her daily professional life than the current prompts provided in the program's book. At the time of this study, most writing prompts were more narrative and descriptive, such as Dan's writing prompt mentioned in Chapter 4 that dealt with writing about a friend who was "successful." Descriptive writing can be beneficial by helping students develop their vocabulary and syntax, but studies have found this genre of writing does not help students meet their professional or daily life goals (Fernandez, R., Peyton, J. K., & Schaetzel, K., 2017). For

example, Jane enrolled in the Pellissippi College English program and works in an English-speaking office. She needs more practice writing college-level essays, emails, and reports than she does describing the success of her friends. Dan discussed wanting to go back to college and get a better job once he improves his English. He will need to also know how to write college-level essays and how to write in certain workplace genres he will encounter.

Currently, no instructors formally conduct needs assessments at Centro Hispano. To improve writing instruction, instructors can conduct needs assessments that pay attention to students “necessities, lacks, and wants” (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014, p. 151). Then, they can create effective writing prompts that reflect their students’ current and future needs. These prompts will help students improve their own writing abilities and hopefully be more engaged in writing lessons. From my own time teaching ESL, I have discovered that writing is the most challenging and unexciting skill adult ESL learners encounter. Authentic, targeted writing prompts may alleviate this problem by allowing students to write on topics that interest them and are relevant to their daily lives. These topics may also explicitly address students’ “language-learning dilemmas” to not only improve their writing abilities but to “confront the macrolevel issues” that pressure them outside of the classroom (Mernard-Warwick, 2005, p. 182). To create these prompts, instructor may consider Ferris and Hedgcock’s (2014) suggestions for integrating effective reading and writing exercises into the L2 classroom. These approaches include read-to-write, where students use texts they have read as the basis for what they write about; write-to-read, in order to make sense of ideas before they read; and write-to-learn, which help students think “critically about information” by applying what they already know to the page (pp.102-103).

***Suggestion 3: Incorporate strategies to help students avoid “freezing” up***

As discussed in Chapter 5, both Mary and Anna struggled with “freezing up” when speaking with native English speakers. In their interviews, Mary and Anna revealed how they freeze up to avoid being perceived as dumb for their developing English proficiency. Instructors and the program director might consider incorporating more real-life conversational role-play or other activities into the classroom and hold special events where students can practice going to a job interview or speaking to a medical professional. These activities could help give students the confidence and skills they need to not feel like they must “freeze up” to avoid feeling “dumb.” Dan and Jane did not explicitly report freezing up around native English speakers, yet they could also benefit from these role-play activities, as both acknowledged how difficult it is to speak English in more formal, technical settings. Strategies should incorporate authentic materials or real-life situations to build upon students’ linguistic awareness and alleviate anxiety surrounding these situations to build up self-confidence. After all, classroom instruction should prepare students to engage in future “authentic communication between persons of different languages and cultural background” (Macintyre et al., 1998, p. 559).

Additionally, it might be useful for instructors and program administrators to allow for more opportunities for openness in the classroom as a way to process difficult power relations they encounter in the community. As demonstrated in Mary and Anna’s use of Inverted English, students can avoid growing discouraged if classroom is a safe space for them to vent and make sense of these conversations. Classes could begin with a few minutes of students writing down and then discussing various challenging situations they encountered throughout the week. As a

class, everyone can talk about these issues and, hopefully, feel like they are not alone in their struggle and “claim the right to speak” outside of the classroom (Norton Pierce, 1995).

***Suggestion 4: Introduce training sessions and/or materials for new instructors***

As mentioned in Chapter Four, none of the study’s instructor participants had previous training teaching adult ESL learners. There are volunteers who are trained to teach ESL at Centro Hispano, but the majority of instructors are untrained in ESL but study Spanish at their university or are already bilingual. Bilingualism in the classroom can be beneficial, but there are learners like Mary who do not speak Spanish who would benefit from instructors who are more knowledgeable about fundamental teaching skills for adult learners. All learners regardless of their L1 could also benefit from instructors having additional knowledge, training, or skills in adult education.

Currently, at Centro Hispano, most volunteers shadow a veteran instructor for a short time before taking on their own classroom of students. The textbook series the center uses as its curriculum offering also serves as a helpful guide for new instructors since they merely have to teach from the book’s lesson plans and follow along with their students. But what happens when students ask their instructors about complex grammatical concepts? Or don’t show up several days during the week? Or are consistently late to class? Also, how do untrained instructors deal with students who are highly advanced and others who are struggling in the same class? All of these problems can be difficult for instructors who are not aware of the intricacies of adult education, even if they are passionate about the population they are serving.

According to a Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA) report on the state of adult ESL education in the U.S., adult ESL educators and program administrators should

incorporate principles of second language acquisition into their curriculum and continually assess learners' needs and goals in the classroom. These educators should also encourage learners to draw from their past experiences and leverage various pedagogical approaches to help learners' reach their imagined L2 selves (p. XI). To help instructors meet these goals and improve their pedagogical practices, Centro Hispano should provide or guide them toward helpful materials about these learners because teaching adult ESL students is nothing like K-12, higher education, or EFL settings. Even if instructors have experience teaching L2 learners, they might be at a loss for how to teach students who attend classes erratically, have differing levels of education, and/or ask difficult questions. Centro Hispano and other nonprofits could provide an informal training session or a packet of information for new instructors. In this way, volunteers could be introduced to new ideas and concepts they were not aware of previously, making them better instructors. Based on student responses detailed in Chapters Four and Five, nonprofits should provide basic information on how to assess students' needs, adjust their speech in the classroom, manage a diverse classroom environment, and give explicit, comprehensive error correction feedback (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014).

This study's four student participants are far from reflective of the entire population of learners at Centro Hispano, but the findings relating to issues of identity, investment, and power relations shed light on how to better meet student needs in the classroom. For example, each new semester should begin with instructors conducting a simple needs assessment for their students. Instructors can still teach lessons based on the book, but this needs assessment will provide context into what class dynamics might look like, what extra information they should cover, what skills their learners most want to focus on, and what students want to get out of the class.

This needs assessment would help students like Dan who want more practice writing and Jane who wants more advanced lessons outside of the normal curriculum offering. It could also help Anna by providing outside resources she can use when she cannot attend classes or introduce more role-play scenarios for Mary and Anna to combat the “freezing up” problem mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Overall, these results demonstrate that student identity in the adult ESL classroom is rooted in their past, present, and future circumstances. This identity contributes to the way learners invest and what factors hurt and help their investment in learning English. Finally, the way they perceive themselves and those around them affects what role power relations in and outside of the community have on their acquisition process and identity development. This study provides insight into how students learn, what factors slow down or speed up their process, and what kind of challenges they face in and outside of the nonprofit. Hopefully, these findings will help nonprofit organizations like Centro Hispano better understand their learners and tailor their pedagogical approaches to meet their learners’ needs. These findings may also provide a foundation for future researchers to study issues of identity, investment, power relations, or other issues relating to adult ESL learners.

### **Suggestions for future research**

Adult ESL education is frequently overlooked in the field of L2 studies, SLA, and applied linguistics. When studies do focus on this specific population of learners, they are conducted at for-profit or government-funded institutions, ignoring large populations of learners who choose to invest in studying English at non-academic, community-based programs like



Centro Hispano. There are plenty of opportunities for future research into issues of identity, investment, and power relations for nonprofit adult ESL learners.

Future research should examine larger populations of advanced learners and see if this study's findings are consistent with other proficient learners, especially those with similar educational backgrounds to three of the four participants. Students involving only highly educated, female learners might better explain some of the findings for Jane, Mary, and Anna, or studies only involving younger participants who were born in the U.S. but returned as adults might provide further detail for these findings for Dan. Future studies should also draw from larger populations of learners at all levels of proficiency and be conducted in the students' L1 so students will be able to easily articulate their thoughts. This study's findings of issues of identity, investment, and power relations are valuable contributions to the field, yet there needs to be further work conducted in this area in the learners' own languages to provide greater accuracy of findings and lead to new theories and strategies about how to improve pedagogical practices for the adult ESL classroom.

Future studies should also examine the importance of safe spaces, like Centro Hispano, for immigrant communities in English-dominated cities throughout the U.S. Studies should focus on how the presence of these immigrant advocacy centers affects immigrant populations in cities and how these centers might impact the greater, non-immigrant community. The current political climate around the world toward refugee and immigrant populations makes it essential that scholars do not ignore the challenges facing these learners and do what they can to help organizations best meet their needs socially, culturally, educationally, and legally.

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## APPENDICES

## **Appendix A: Student Consent Form (Spanish)**

## **CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO PARA PARTICIPANTES ESTUDIANTES**

### **TÍTULO DEL ESTUDIO**

Social Identity, Investment, and Power Dynamics: A Study of Immigrant Adult L2 Learners and Their English Instructors at a Nonprofit ESL Program

### **INTRODUCCIÓN**

Está invitado a unirse a un estudio que quiere comprender mejor su identidad como estudiante de ESL para adultos y qué tan interesado está en aprender inglés. Este estudio también quiere saber más sobre cómo interactúa con sus instructores y sus compañeros en el aula. El estudio también quiere aprender más sobre cómo interactúa en inglés fuera del aula. Durante este semestre, su participación incluirá una reunión informal en grupo, dos entrevistas con el investigador, observaciones en el aula, una encuesta y la escritura en un diario.

### **INFORMACIÓN SOBRE LA PARTICIPACIÓN DE LOS PARTICIPANTES DEL ESTUDIO**

Si desea unirse al estudio y tener prácticas adicionales de inglés, comenzará tomando una encuesta informal al comienzo de este semestre. Luego, se unirá a una reunión informal de grupo con otros estudiantes que han aceptado unirse al estudio. Después usted tendrá dos entrevistas con el investigador que serán individuales. También es requerido escribir en un diario por lo menos cuatro a cinco veces por semana para aprender inglés. Finalmente, el investigador va a participar en su clase una vez durante el semestre para ver cómo es el salón de clases. El estudio va a durar cinco semanas, pero el tiempo total será entrevistando no durará más de tres horas. La observación en el aula no durará más de dos horas en cada clase. No necesitará escribir en el diario más de cinco veces a la semana. Grabaré las entrevistas con una grabadora y anotaré la información. Las grabaciones solo se guardarán hasta que se complete el análisis de los datos. Las publicaciones impresas se guardarán en la oficina del asesor del investigador en la Universidad de Tennessee una vez que concluya el estudio. El investigador solo tiene una comprensión de principiante a intermedio del español, pero estará disponible para la traducción básica de frases y palabras o una aclaración adicional, si es necesario. Los intérpretes no participarán en este estudio. Todas las interacciones serán en inglés.

### **RIESGOS**

La pérdida de confidencialidad es un posible riesgo al participar en este estudio. La mayoría de las investigaciones implican cierto riesgo de pérdida de confidencialidad, pero los investigadores creen que este riesgo es muy bajo basado en los procedimientos utilizados para proteger la información de los participantes. Otro riesgo es la divulgación del estado migratorio. En este estudio NO se va a solicitar información sobre el estado migratorio. Tampoco se va a compartir cualquier información relacionada a ese estado ya que esa información no es relevante para en este estudio. Otro riesgo al participar es que debido al bajo número de participantes en este estudio, es posible que sea identificable por su información demográfica. Para solucionar esto, todos los datos se mantendrán protegidos en una unidad de computadora con acceso restringido, y puede optar a no responder las preguntas en el cuestionario demográfico que usted cree que

pueden ayudar a identificarlo.

## **BENEFICIOS**

Es posible que no se beneficie directamente de su participación en este estudio de investigación. La investigación es de beneficia más directamente a los estudios de Adquisición de Segundas Lenguas y a los estudios L2 para adultos, proporcionando datos actualizados y relevantes sobre una población específica de estudiantes L2 adultos (programas basados en la comunidad). También sirve como un beneficio para la sociedad en general y para la comunidad de Knoxville, ya que atraerá una mayor atención a los programas de L2 para adultos de la comunidad, específicamente al Centro Hispano, y se espera que impulse futuros estudios de investigadores interesados en este campo de estudio. El beneficio de pago para los participantes del estudio es el siguiente:

**a.** Al aceptar participar en la encuesta informal, la reunión informal del grupo, dos entrevistas individuales con el investigador, una observación en el aula y llevar un diario durante el estudio de 5 semanas, recibirá UNA tarjeta de regalo con valor monetario de \$15 al final del estudio. También recibirá práctica adicional de inglés por el programa descrito en Centro Hispano debido a la naturaleza interactiva del estudio.

## **CONFIDENCIALIDAD**

La información en los registros del estudio será confidencial. Los datos se mantendrán protegidos y estarán disponibles únicamente para las personas que realiza el estudio a menos que los participantes específicamente den permiso por escrito para compartir la información con otras personas. No se hará referencia en los informes orales o escritos que podrían vincular a los participantes al estudio. Su información no será utilizada o compartida con otros investigadores en futuras investigaciones, incluso si se eliminan los identificadores personales. Además, pedimos que mantenga la confidencialidad de otros miembros del grupo de las reuniones informales.

## **INFORMACIÓN DEL CONTACTO**

Si tiene preguntas en cualquier momento sobre el estudio o los procedimientos, (o si tiene problemas que han resultado al participar en este estudio), puede contactar a la investigadora principal, Abby Hassler, en el correo electrónico [ahassler@vols.utk.edu](mailto:ahassler@vols.utk.edu) o al número de teléfono (865) 809-3228 y su consejera docente, Tanita Saenkhum, en [tsaenkhum@utk.edu](mailto:tsaenkhum@utk.edu) o (865) 974-6955. Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante, puede comunicarse con la Junta de Revisión Institucional de la Universidad de Tennessee Knoxville en [utkirb@utk.edu](mailto:utkirb@utk.edu) o (865) 974-7697.

## **PARTICIPACIÓN**

Puede optar por dejar de participar en cualquier momento durante el estudio sin ningún problema. También puede elegir no participar. Si deja de participar, puede retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento sin penalización y sin la pérdida de los beneficios a los que de otra

manera tenga derecho. Si se retira del estudio antes de que se complete la recopilación de datos, los datos serán devueltos o destruidos.

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### **FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO**

He leído la información anterior. He recibido una copia de este formulario. Acepto participar en este estudio.

Nombre del participante  
(impreso)\_\_\_\_\_

Firma del participante\_\_\_\_\_

Fecha\_\_\_\_\_

Estoy de acuerdo en que las entrevistas serán grabadas.

Firma del participante: \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha\_\_\_\_\_

Firma del investigador: \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B: Student Consent Form (English)**

## **INFORMED CONSENT FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS**

### **STUDY TITLE**

Social Identity, Investment, and Power Dynamics: A Study of Immigrant Adult L2 Learners and Their English Instructors at a Nonprofit ESL Program

### **INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to join a study that wants to better understand your identity as an adult ESL student and how invested you are in learning English. This study also wants to know more about how you interact with your instructors and your peers in the classroom. The study also wants to learn more about how you interact in English outside of the classroom. During this semester, your participation will involve one informal group meeting, two interviews with the researcher, classroom observations, one survey, and writing in a diary.

### **INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY**

If you want to join the study and have additional English practice, you will start by taking an informal survey at the start of this semester. Then, you will join one informal group meeting with other students who agreed to join the study. Next, you will join the researcher for two interviews by yourself. You will also write in a diary at least four to five times a week about learning English. Finally, I may join your class once during the semester to watch what the classroom is like. The study will take five weeks, though the total time I will be interviewing you will not go over three hours. The classroom observation will not go over two hours for each class. You will not need to write in the diary more than five times a week. I will record the interviews with a recorder and by writing information down. The recordings will only be saved until analysis of the data is complete. The hard-copy journals will be locked away in the researcher's advisor's office at the University of Tennessee following the conclusion of the study. The researcher only has a beginner to intermediate understanding of Spanish, but will be available for basic translation of phrases and words or further clarification, if needed. Interpreters will not be involved in this study. All interactions will take place in English.

### **RISKS**

Loss of confidentiality is a possible risk to participation in this study. Most research involves some risk to confidentiality, but the researchers believe this risk is very low because of the procedures used to protect participant information. Another risk is regarding disclosure of immigration status which **WILL NOT** be requested or shared as this information is not relevant to the course of the study. A risk to participating is that due to the small number of study participants in this study, you may potentially be identifiable by your demographic information. To address this, all data will be kept on an access restricted computer drive, and you may choose to not answer questions on the demographics questionnaire that you believe may help identify you.

### **BENEFITS**

You may not directly benefit from your participation in this research study. The research is of direct benefit to the fields of Second Language Acquisition and adult L2 studies, by providing

up-to-date and relevant data on a specific population of adult L2 learners (community-based programs). It also serves as a benefit to greater society and the Knoxville community, in that it will bring greater attention to community-based adult L2 programs, specifically Centro Hispano, and will hopefully prompt further studies from interested researchers in the future. The payment benefit for study participants is as follows:

a. By agreeing to participate in the informal survey, informal group meeting, two one-on-one interviews with the researcher, a classroom observation, and keeping a diary for the duration of the 5-week study, you will receive **ONE \$15 gift card** at the end of the study. You will also receive additional English practice from the outlined program at Centro Hispano due to interactive the nature of the study.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will kept safe and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study. Your research information will not be used or shared with other researchers for future research, even if identifiers are removed. Also, please maintain the confidentiality of other informal group meeting members.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience problems as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the main researcher, Abby Hassler, at [ahassler@vols.utk.edu](mailto:ahassler@vols.utk.edu) or (865) 809-3228 and her faculty advisor, Tanita Saenkhum, at [tsaenkhum@utk.edu](mailto:tsaenkhum@utk.edu) or (865) 974-6955. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board of The University of Tennessee Knoxville at [utkirb@utk.edu](mailto:utkirb@utk.edu) or (865) 974-7697.

### **PARTICIPATION**

You can choose to stop participating at any time during the study without any problems. You may also choose not to participate. If you stop participating, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, data will be returned to you or destroyed.

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### **CONSENT FORM**

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I **agree** to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (printed)

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Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

I **agree** that interviews will be recorded.

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C: Instructor Consent Form**

## **INFORMED CONSENT FOR INSTRUCTOR PARTICIPANTS**

### **STUDY TITLE**

Social Identity, Investment, and Power Dynamics: A Study of Immigrant Adult L2 Learners and Their English Instructors at a Nonprofit ESL Program

### **INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to participate in a study that aims to better understand adult L2 learner identity and their level of investment in learning English. Additionally, this study seeks to discover what power dynamics, if any, exist inside and outside of the English classroom for adult L2 learners in their language learning journey. The specific context of this study centers on a community-based adult ESL program (Centro Hispano) in Knoxville, Tennessee. The study will involve three key groups of participants involved at Centro Hispano: students, instructors, and the program administrator. This study consists of interviews, classroom observations, surveys, and diary entries, for some participants.

### **INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY**

By participating in this study, you will take the informal, online survey at the beginning of the semester and participate in one, one-on-one interview with the researcher. In addition, I may also observe your class once during the semester. The study will take 5 weeks, though the total interview time will not exceed one hour. Classroom observations will not exceed two hours per classroom. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. The audio recordings will only be saved until the transcriptions are complete, and at that time they will be deleted. The hard-copy journals will be kept locked away in the researcher's advisor's office at the University of Tennessee following the conclusion of the study.

### **RISKS**

Loss of confidentiality is a possible risk of participation in this study. Most research involves some risk to confidentiality, but the researchers believe this risk is very unlikely because of the procedures used to protect participant information

### **BENEFITS**

You may not directly benefit from your participation in this research study. The research is of direct benefit to the fields of Second Language Acquisition and adult L2 studies, by providing up-to-date and relevant data on a specific population of adult L2 learners (community-based programs). It also serves as a benefit to greater society and the Knoxville community, in that it will bring greater attention to community-based adult L2 programs, specifically Centro Hispano, and will hopefully prompt further studies from interested researchers in the future. The payment benefit for study participants is as follows:

- a. By agreeing to participate in the informal survey, one-on-one interview with the researcher, and classroom observation, you will receive **ONE \$5 gift card** at the end of the study.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study. Your research information will not be used or shared with other researchers for future research, even if identifiers are removed.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the principle researcher, Abby Hassler, at [ahassler@vols.utk.edu](mailto:ahassler@vols.utk.edu) or (865) 809-3228 and her faculty advisor, Tanita Saenkhum, at [tsaenkhum@utk.edu](mailto:tsaenkhum@utk.edu) or (865) 974-6955. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board of The University of Tennessee Knoxville at [utkirb@utk.edu](mailto:utkirb@utk.edu) or (865) 974-7697.

## **PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, data will be returned to you or destroyed.

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## **CONSENT FORM**

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I **agree** to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I **agree** that interviews will be recorded.

Participant's Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D: Administrator Consent Form**

## **INFORMED CONSENT FOR ADMINISTRATOR PARTICIPANT**

### **STUDY TITLE**

Social Identity, Investment, and Power Dynamics: A Study of Immigrant Adult L2 Learners and Their English Instructors at a Nonprofit ESL Program

### **INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to participate in a study that aims to better understand adult L2 learner identity and their level of investment in learning English. Additionally, this study seeks to discover what power dynamics, if any, exist inside and outside of the English classroom for adult L2 learners in their language learning journey. The specific context of this study centers on a community-based adult ESL program (Centro Hispano) in Knoxville, Tennessee. The study will involve three key groups of participants involved at Centro Hispano: students, instructors, and the program administrator. This study consists of interviews, classroom observations, surveys, and diary entries, for some participants.

### **INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY**

By participating in this study, you will participate in two one-on-one interviews with the researcher. The study will take 5 weeks, though the total interview time will not exceed two hours. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. The audio recordings will only be saved until the transcriptions are complete, and at that time they will be deleted. The hard-copy journals will be kept locked away in the researcher's advisor's office at the University of Tennessee following the conclusion of the study.

### **RISKS**

Loss of confidentiality is a possible risk to participation in this study. Most research involves some risk to confidentiality, but the researchers believe this risk is very unlikely because of the procedures used to protect participant information.

### **BENEFITS**

You may not directly benefit from your participation in this research study. The research is of direct benefit to the fields of Second Language Acquisition and adult L2 studies, by providing up-to-date and relevant data on a specific population of adult L2 learners (community-based programs). It also serves as a benefit to greater society and the Knoxville community, in that it will bring greater attention to community-based adult L2 programs, specifically Centro Hispano, and will hopefully prompt further studies from interested researchers in the future. The payment benefit for study participants is as follows:

- a. By agreeing to participate in two one-on-one interviews with the researcher, you will receive **ONE \$10 gift card** at the end of the study.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give

permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study. Your research information will not be used or shared with other researchers for future research, even if identifiers are removed.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the principle researcher, Abby Hassler, at ahassler@vols.utk.edu or (865) 809-3228 and her faculty advisor, Tanita Saenkhum, at tsaenkhum@utk.edu or (865) 974-6955. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board of The University of Tennessee Knoxville at utkirb@utk.edu or (865) 974-7697.

**PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, data will be returned to you or destroyed.

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**CONSENT FORM**

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I **agree** to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I **agree** that interviews will be recorded.

Participant's Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix E: Informal Survey Protocol**



## **E.1 STUDENT INFORMAL SURVEY**

- a. What is your name? (This is for my own reference)
- b. Are you male, female, or prefer not to answer?
- c. What is your age?
- d. What is your native country?
- e. How long have you attended Centro Hispano?
- f. What is your class level at Centro Hispano?
- g. Would you like to participate in a study about learner identity, power dynamics in the classroom, and student investment in learning English?
- h. If so, please read over the following consent form, provide your contact information, and best times for availability.

## **E.2 INSTRUCTOR INFORMAL SURVEY**

- a. What is your name? (This is for my own reference)
- b. Are you male, female, or prefer not to answer?
- c. What is your age?
- d. What is your nationality (drop down choice)?
- e. How long have you been volunteering at Centro Hispano?
- f. What class/classes do you currently teach at Centro Hispano?
- g. Did you have previous experience teaching adult ESL learners before to your time at Centro Hispano?
  1. If so, please describe this experience.
- a. Would you like to participate in a study about learner identity, power dynamics in the classroom, and student investment in learning English?
- b. If so, please read over the following consent form and email me for your availability.

## **Appendix F: Student Interview Protocols**

## Student Informal Group Meeting Questions

1. My study is about learner identity, levels of investment in learning English, and power dynamics inside and outside the English classroom. Would each of you please describe your identity in the English classroom?
  - a. For example, how do you act in the English classroom and do you feel like you change at all in comparison to your personality outside the classroom?
2. Describe why you are seeking to improve your English? Additionally, why do you feel you need to learn English?
3. Have you encountered any difficulties in your English learning journey inside or outside the classroom and what are they? If so, can you provide specific examples?
4. Do you find it more or less challenging to speak, write, listen, and read English inside or outside the classroom and why?
5. Do you find that your daily responsibilities, such as raising a family, working, or going to school, have any impact on your language learning journey and why?
6. Why have you decided to attend Centro Hispano's evening ESL classes to improve your English?
  - . For example, why did you choose Centro Hispano's program, as opposed to the other programs available in Knoxville?
7. How would you describe the relationship between you and your instructors?
  - . For example, do you learn more from or enjoy some teachers than others and why?
8. How would you describe the relationship between you and your peers in the classroom?
9. How would you describe interactions in English between you and the Knoxville community?
10. What are your biggest challenges with learning English? How does, if applicable, Centro Hispano play a role in overcoming these challenges?
11. Do you have any feelings about the Centro Hispano curriculum or its teaching practices?
12. What would you like the instructors or Centro Hispano's administrators to know about your learning style and experience?
13. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?

## Student Interview Questions - Number Two

1. Please describe your identity as a language learner in your classroom.
  - a. For example, how do you act inside the classroom with your instructor and your peers?
  - b. Additionally, what other factors outside the classroom (such as family responsibility, work, ect.) may affect your identity and why?
2. Please describe why you want/need to learn English and what your level of investment is learning English?  
Do any factors outside the classroom or at Centro Hispano negatively or positively impact this process? Please explain.
3. According to your response in the informal group meeting, you said \_\_\_\_\_. Could you explain this?
4. You said \_\_\_\_\_ in the informal group meeting. Could you explain this?
5. According to your response in your diary entries, you wrote \_\_\_\_\_. Could you explain this?
6. You wrote \_\_\_\_\_ in your diary. Could you explain this?
7. According to the classroom observation, you/your teacher did/said \_\_\_\_\_. Could you explain this?
8. In the classroom observation, you/your teacher did/said \_\_\_\_\_. Could you explain this?
9. As you continue to write in your diary during this 5-week semester, what have you noticed anything about the way you learn English or specific challenges you are encountering that you didn't know about before?
10. By participating in this study, do you think you have more opportunities to reflect or think about your English language journey and why?
11. By participating in this study, have you learned anything new about yourself as a language learner? If so, what?
12. Please describe what an average day for you using English in the community is like.
13. Please describe what an average day for you using English in the Centro Hispano classroom is like.
14. Are there parts of your life that make it difficult or more easy to learn English and what are they?
15. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?

### Student Interview Questions - Number Three

1. According to your response in the last interview, you said \_\_\_\_\_. Could you explain this?
2. You said \_\_\_\_\_ in the last interview. Could you explain this?
3. According to your response in your diary entries, you wrote \_\_\_\_\_. Could you explain this?
4. You wrote \_\_\_\_\_ in your diary. Could you explain this?
5. According to the classroom observation, you/your teacher did/said \_\_\_\_\_. Could you explain this?
6. In the classroom observation, you/your teacher did/said \_\_\_\_\_. Could you explain this?
7. Looking back, have you learned anything new about yourself as a language learner from this study? If so, what?
8. As the study is about to end, have you changed the way you look at yourself as an English learner and why?
9. Now that the study is concluding, do you believe the way you interact with people in the Knoxville community in English has changed? Why?
10. In this last interview, has your desire to learn English has changed at all? And why?
11. Do you feel that the way you interact with your instructors or your peers in the classroom has changed? And why?
12. Finally, what are your biggest challenges and/or opportunities in learning English and have they changed at all from the beginning of the study?
13. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?

## **Appendix G: Instructor Interview Protocol**

## Instructor Interview Questions

1. How did you hear about or get involved teaching at Centro Hispano?
  - a. How long have you been at Centro?
  - b. Why did you choose to work at Centro?
  - c. How many nights a week - and on what days - do you teach at Centro?
2. What kind of training in adult ESL teaching, if any, did you receive prior to working at Centro?
  - . If no prior ESL training, what kind of relevant training have you received prior to working at Centro? Please explain.
3. Have you received any additional ESL training while teaching at Centro?
  - . What kind of training, if any, would you find helpful to conduct your teaching at Centro?
- a. What are your feelings and thoughts about the set curriculum at Centro, if applicable? Please explain.
4. Please describe your teaching style and how you go about designing your nightly lessons.
  - . For example, do you bring in any additional activities, lessons, or other pedagogical practices in addition to Centro's curriculum?
5. Please describe the power dynamics that exist in your classroom, if applicable.
  - . For example, what do the interactions between you and your students, and then your students and their peers feel like in the classroom? Please provide specific examples.
6. Please describe how your students negotiate their identity in your classroom, if applicable.
  - . For example, do you notice issues of race, class, gender, or other social identity factors finding their way into your classroom, either explicitly or not? Please provide specific examples.
7. Do you have any other thoughts to share?

## **Appendix H: Administrator Interview Protocol**



## Administrator Interview Questions - First Interview

1. Please describe, in your own words, what the mission statement of Centro Hispano's adult ESL program is.
  - a. More specifically, please describe what the needs of Centro's students are and how Centro's adult ESL program addresses these needs.
2. Why do you believe adult immigrant ESL learners from the community choose Centro Hispano over other programs in the Knoxville area?
  - . For example, what makes Centro Hispano unique or more appealing to adult ESL learners? Please use specific examples.
3. In your own words, please describe the average Centro Hispano student that attends nightly English classes.
  - . For example, using specific examples, feel free to describe everything from their personality to the way they present themselves in the English classroom.
4. Please describe the current curriculum offered for students in classes 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b.
5. Please describe any changes you foresee Centro Hispano making in the future, if any, regarding the adult ESL program.
  - . For example, do you foresee any potential curriculum changes, introducing teacher training sessions, ect.?
  - a. Additionally, do you foresee making any changes based on recommendations from my study?
6. How did you get involved with Centro Hispano and how long have you been involved in a volunteer and now professional capacity?
  - . Why did you choose to work with Centro? Why have you continued to work with Centro?
  - a. What motivated you to work with adult ESL learners?
7. Were you involved with designing the program's adult ESL curriculum, as in, choosing the textbooks the students use for their nightly lessons?
  - . If not, please explain.
8. As my study covers learner identity, levels of learning investment, and issues of power dynamics in the adult ESL classroom, how do you think this study's findings will benefit students, instructors, and administrators at Centro Hispano? Please explain.
9. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?

## **Appendix I: Diary Entry Prompt**

## **DIARY ENTRY PROMPT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This portion of the study will involve weekly diary entries from student participants in a hard-copy journal provided by the researcher. The diary entries will be used to better understand the identity of an adult English-language learner inside and outside of the classroom. Once again, your participation is entirely voluntary.

### **WHAT YOU WILL DO**

Once given the hard-copy journals, you will be required to write 4-5, one-paragraph entries a week during the course of the 5-week study. For example, maybe you choose to write one paragraph a day on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays. When writing, try to use some of these key questions to guide or organize your thoughts:

- Did I use English outside of the classroom today? What was my interaction like?
- Have I learned anything new about English today? Did I learn it in or outside of the classroom?
- Did anything challenging or surprising happen to me today involving my use of English
- Did anything challenging or surprising happen to me today about my identity as an immigrant adult or English-language learner?
- Did anything challenging or surprising happen in my English class today?
- If I missed an English class, why did I? What other factors (example: family responsibilities, work, lack of desire) kept me from going and why?
- Has anything happened to impact my mood, feelings toward, or investment in learning English?

During this semester, you will keep the hard-copy journals at your home so you can record the weekly entries. Please bring the journals with you to your two one-on-one interviews with the researcher. At the end of the study, your journals will be kept locked away in the researcher's advisor's office at the University of Tennessee for data analysis. If requested, the journals will be destroyed or given back to you when no longer needed for research purposes. Please contact the researcher if you require any additional information or have any questions.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study. Your research information will not be used or shared with other researchers for future research, even if identifiers are removed.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the principal researcher, Abby Hassler, at [ahassler@vols.utk.edu](mailto:ahassler@vols.utk.edu) or (865) 809-3228 and her faculty advisor, Tanita Saenkhum, at [tsaenkhum@utk.edu](mailto:tsaenkhum@utk.edu) or (865) 974-6955.

## **Appendix J: Classroom Observation Protocol**

## **OBSERVATION PROTOCOL**

The researcher will observe 2 to 5 evening class periods at Centro Hispano during the 5-week study, where either one participating instructor, one participating student, or both participating groups are present. The class periods last two hours, during the hours of 6-8pm in the evenings on Monday through Thursdays. The researcher intends to observe classes on Wednesdays as this is the writing intensive day of classes and most relevant to her research. This in-person observation allows the researcher to gain a better perspective of the classroom environment, in terms of learner identity, power dynamics, and student investment. This in-person visit will also further humanize research process and allow for a different point of view.

### **The researcher observing these classes WILL:**

- Take notes on her observations of the class session (either on paper or on the computer to file in the notes saved on the password-protected Google Drive folder).
- Sit in the back corner of the room, away from students and the instructor.
- Be present for entire two-hour class period.
- Ask permission from student and instructors to observe the class.
- Give instructor at least one week's notice of her attendance of the class.
- Receive any relevant class material the instructor is using during the class period.
- Use pseudonyms for student and instructor interactions.
- Share notes with instructor or students, if requested.

### **The researcher observing these classes WILL NOT:**

- Record or videotape the class session, unless otherwise requested.
- Speak to the instructor or students during the class.
- Ask any questions during the class related to the study.

### **The instructor participating in the study WILL:**

- Inform the students that the researcher will be observing their class.
- Provide the researcher observing the class with any relevant course material, which may include the lesson plan for the day or classroom activity ideas.
- Teach his or her class as they would during any other class session without the researcher present.

### **After the classroom observations, the researcher WILL:**

- Write up the observations.
- Code the observations, looking at:
  - Classroom teaching approaches and practices.
  - Power dynamics between the instructors and students/ students and their peers.
  - How students enact their identity in the classroom.
  - Students level of investment in learning, as demonstrated in the classroom.

## **Appendix K: Investment Codes**

<b>How Students Invest in English</b>	<b>What factors help investment?</b>	<b>What factors hurt investment?</b>
By formal English instruction <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Centro Hispano</li> <li>b. Church programs</li> <li>c. Private tutor</li> <li>d. Community classes</li> <li>e. College English classes</li> </ol>	A belief that English is necessary <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. For everyday life</li> <li>b. For personal reasons</li> <li>c. For professional advancement</li> <li>d. For education advancement</li> </ol>	Scheduling issues <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Because of work</li> <li>b. Because of family</li> </ol>
By informal English practice <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. With English materials (TV, music, reading)</li> <li>b. With free English lessons/textbooks</li> <li>c. With L1 speaking friends</li> <li>d. With other L2 learners</li> </ol>	Community of Centro Hispano <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. For community dynamics</li> <li>b. For classroom dynamics</li> </ol>	Lapse in personal desire <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Due to attitudes toward language and learning</li> <li>b. Due to distractions (hobbies, everyday life)</li> <li>c. When not part of Centro Hispano community</li> </ol>
	Personal learning style <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Highly ambitious</li> </ol>	Difficulty learning the language <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Because of age</li> <li>b. Because of linguistic factors</li> <li>c. Because of other programs</li> <li>d. Because no one to practice with</li> </ol>
	Social pressure or support <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. From family to learn</li> <li>b. From community</li> </ol>	Poor classroom dynamics <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Bad instructors</li> <li>b. Lack of error correction</li> <li>c. Not challenging enough</li> </ol>
		Personal circumstances <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Due to health-related issues</li> <li>b. Due to exhaustion/tiredness</li> <li>c. Due to living far away</li> </ol>

## **Appendix L: Power Relation Codes**



<b>Outside, Real World Power Relations</b>	<b>Inside, Centro Hispano Power Relations</b>
Native speakers refuse communicative burden <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. By speaking quickly</li> <li>b. By using exaggerated slow speech</li> <li>c. By acting superior</li> <li>d. By not understanding the accent</li> <li>e. By being rude</li> <li>f. By demanding improved English</li> </ol>	Native speakers refuse the communicative burden <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. When instructors speak quickly</li> <li>b. When instructors are young, unprepared, or uninterested</li> </ol>
Native speakers take on the communicative burden <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. By speaking slowly</li> <li>b. By helping with English</li> </ol>	Native speakers take on the communicative burden <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. When learners feel safe</li> <li>b. When instructors speak slowly</li> <li>c. When instructors are patient</li> <li>d. When instructors explain</li> <li>e. When instructors make them feel like family</li> <li>f. When instructors make them feel confident</li> </ol>
Learners refuse the communicative burden <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. By “freezing up”</li> <li>b. By relying on others to translate</li> </ol>	
Learners take on the communicative burden <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. By willingly engaging with native speakers</li> <li>b. By finding alternative ways to engage (texting, nonverbal)</li> </ol>	

## VITA

Abby Elaine Hassler earned her Master of Arts in English in the Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics program at the University of Tennessee, where she specialized in nonprofit adult ESL education, second language acquisition, identity, investment, and power relations. She hopes to use her findings to improve nonprofit adult ESL program teaching practices and bring more attention to this population of learners.