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# An Activity Theoretical Approach to Social Interaction During Study Abroad

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This case study examines how one study abroad student oriented to social interaction during a semester in Spain. Using an activity theoretical approach, the findings indicate that the student not only viewed social interaction with his Spanish host family and an expert-Spanish-speaking age peer as an opportunity for second language (L2) learning, but also had other goals, such as relationship building and enjoyment. The analysis further highlights changes over time in the focal student's orientation to L2 learning in social interaction, with attention to the way in which his relationships mediated those shifts. Results from the study reveal the dynamic nature of social interaction, the importance of age peers, and the usefulness of activity theory for making links between micro-level interactions and macro-level social structures.

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## INTRODUCTION

Given the academic foundations of *study* abroad, it is not surprising that discourses of learning are a central component of study abroad programs. Apart from second language (L2) learning in the classroom abroad, interactions that study abroad students may have with members of the host country are commonly cast in terms of L2 learning opportunities by study abroad programs. For example, one Spanish study abroad program's website described a language partner exchange as "offering the possibility to have conversations with the objective to intensify practice of the Spanish language." The website further indicated that, "Living with a host family, you'll need to always communicate in Spanish, which gives you more time to practice and learn the language with Spaniards." Discourses about learning in study abroad extend beyond international programs to the university as a whole, as evidenced by efforts to internationalize the curriculum and by discussions about the employability of graduates (e.g., Kreber, 2009). Such discourses can also be observed outside of academe, in U.S. society, in analyses of the skills required of workers in the twenty-first century global economy (e.g., Elchik, 2014). In the context of the increasing international mobility and economic interconnectedness that characterizes present-day globalization, study abroad is presented as an opportunity to learn the skills necessary to function successfully after graduation.

While the learning that takes place during study abroad can, indeed, have a positive impact on students' professional careers (e.g., Allen, 2013; Coleman, 2013), Coleman (2013) suggests that the most memorable and transformative aspects may not be L2 learning: "Ask any applied linguist confidentially, in the corner of a bar, about their own time abroad as a student, and the emphasis will never be on enhanced TL [target language] lexis and mean length of utterance, but rather on romance, on discovery of self and others, on people and places" (p. 29). For some students, L2 social interaction during study abroad may not only

be about L2 learning, but also about other goals, such as building relationships with local people and enjoyment. For other students, L2 learning and social interaction with locals may not figure prominently as goals of study abroad where, instead, travel and leisure with co-nationals in the Grand Tour tradition predominate (e.g., Gore, 2005).

As Firth and Wagner (2007) argue, when L2 users engage in interaction in the L2, SLA researchers tend to frame that interaction in terms of learning, whether or not the individuals in question position themselves as L2 learners, orient to learning, or would identify L2 learning as the purpose of a specific interaction. Similarly, in study abroad scholarship, social interaction in the L2 between students and expert L2 speakers tends to be viewed by researchers as an opportunity for L2 learning without considering whether or not the parties to the talk themselves view L2 learning as the goal of the interaction or whether they view the interaction as some other activity (e.g., commercial transaction, work, play) with different goals, in which incidental learning may be the result (Lompscher, 1999). As the case study presented here will suggest, this distinction is consequential for understanding the ongoing negotiation of interpersonal relationships and the emerging talk-in-interaction.

The purpose of this study is to examine one student's motives to engage in L2 social interaction during study abroad with two people: his host mother and an expert-Spanish-speaking age peer. In order to offer a rich account of the interconnected factors that mediated the focal student's orientation to social interaction, the analysis employs activity theory, a framework that is conceptually well equipped to make links between micro-level interactions and macro-level social structures (e.g., Engeström, 1999, 2001; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Activity theory situates individual development in everyday social practices and connects it with the symbolic artifacts and historical and material circumstances of the individual and society—in this case, twenty-first century globalized societies.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Activity theory has its origins in the cultural-historical school of psychology founded by Vygotsky and continued by Leont'ev and Luria, which has been further developed in more recent decades by scholars from a variety of disciplines, most prominently Engeström (1999, 2001, 2015). *Mediation*, the concept that “breaks down the Cartesian walls that isolate the individual mind from the culture and the society” (Engeström, 1999, p. 29), is at the heart of cultural-historical thought. All activities in which humans engage are mediated by culturally created physical and symbolic artifacts, as well as by relations with other people. In social interaction, participants mediate each other's experience through the use of language as a symbolic tool (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The concept of mediation upends the dualism between individual control of one's behavior (e.g., free will) and social control of an individual's behavior by theorizing that humans control their own behavior and can transform social structures through the use and creation of artifacts (Engeström, 1999). Hence, individuals cannot be understood without their cultural artifacts, and social relations and society cannot be understood without accounting for individual agency (Engeström, 2001).

Although the role of mediation in human activity was put forth by Vygotsky (1978), later theorists shifted the unit of analysis from the individual to the collective by proposing the notion of *activity*. Following Leont'ev (1978), an activity is motivated by a need or desire, directed toward an *object*, and carried out collectively. An object emerges from a *motive*, “the cultural-psychological-institutional impetus that guides human activity toward a particular

object” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 223). One activity is distinguished from another through its object, examples of which include work, play, and learning. Activities, in turn, are realized by means of *actions* directed toward a goal. Actions are independent from specific activities, since a particular action can achieve different objects. Actions, in turn, are divided into *operations*, the real-time and often routinized ways in which actions are carried out and which are constrained by the immediate circumstances. While the motive and the object give direction and meaning to actions, operations constitute the only observable aspect of an activity. The following example illustrates the aforementioned concepts. Two study abroad students who are taking the same L2 conversation course may both diligently study the course materials (action), but one student’s impetus may be to improve communication with her L2-speaking boyfriend (object) whereas the other student’s desire may be to achieve a high grade in the class (object). The two students realize the same goal-oriented actions, but their actions are motivated by different needs, directed at different objects, and, hence, the students engage in different activities. The specific practices by which each realizes the action of studying (e.g., practicing speaking, memorizing vocabulary) constitute operations.

These foundational concepts are integrated into Engeström’s (1999, 2001, 2015) model of an activity system, which is a unified approach to understanding relationships between participants, artifacts, and processes that mediate individual social practices in a particular community. Engeström extended Vygotsky’s triadic model of subject, mediating artifacts, and object to include the community and its rules and division of labor, schematized in Figure 1. In this model, the basic unit of analysis is not the socially mediated individual, but rather, the whole activity system. Engeström (1999) argues, however, for the analyst to take both an etic and emic view of the activity system:

Activity system as a unit of analysis calls for complementarity of the system view and the subject’s view. The analyst constructs the activity system as if looking at it from above. At the same time, the analyst must select a subject, a member (or better yet, multiple different members) of the local activity, through whose eyes and interpretations the activity is constructed. (p. 10)

As indicated in Figure 1, the *subject* in an activity system is a focal individual or a group. The other participants that constitute the *community* in an activity system include the local communities of practice in which the individual or collective subject engages, as well as distant or imagined communities to which he or she belongs (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Communities are characterized by explicit and tacit *rules* for interaction that may be cultural, historical, or institutional as well as by a *division of labor*, in which community members take on identities or social roles, related by “horizontal” interaction or “vertical” relations of power (Engeström, 1993, p. 67). *Mediating artifacts* include material tools such as books, pencils, and computers, as well as symbolic tools such as concepts, ideologies, and language (Engeström, 1999). Finally, the central piece of the activity system is the *object*, understood as described above, which is projected to a desired *outcome* or result and gives meaning to one’s actions (Engeström, 1999). Over time, as people engage in activities, the objects may change—some may be modified, delayed, or abandoned—and new objects may arise depending on the circumstances (Engeström, 2015; Lompscher, 1999).

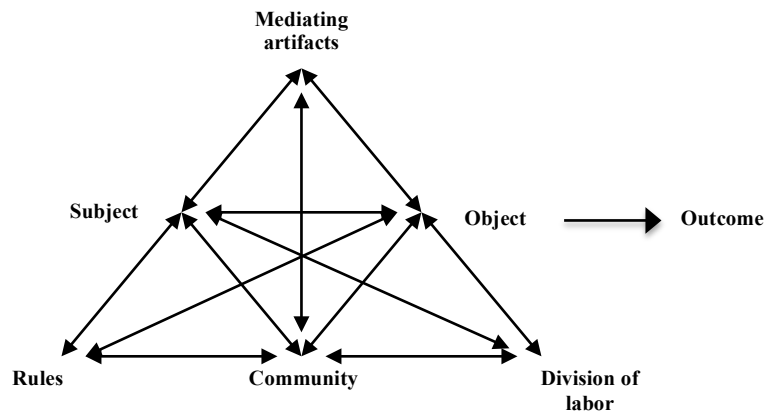


Figure 1. Engeström's activity system model

The analysis of relationships between the individual elements of the activity system supports an understanding of human action, learning, and development. Engeström (2001) argues that a key feature of the relationships between elements of an activity system are structural tensions that can provoke instability, disturbances, and trouble, but also transformation and innovation. Indeed, “internal contradictions” are “the driving force of change and development in activity systems” (Engeström, 2001, p. 135). With regard to development, Sannino, Daniels, and Gutiérrez (2009) highlight that, “Although it is individuals who experience the dilemmas, contradictions, and performance shortcomings of the systems of activity they work within, solutions can be developed only collectively” (p. 29). One tool in the creation of solutions is activity theory itself, which Engeström (2015) argues can be used not only by researchers but also by practitioners to spur positive change and development, reflecting an interventionist orientation to work collectively to improve the world.

### Application of Activity Theory to L2 Learning in Study Abroad

Activity theory has been applied in a variety of fields, such as psychology, anthropology, education, communication, as well as applied linguistics. The number of empirical studies that have employed this framework in the L2 context is modest, but expanding (e.g., Allen, 2010a, 2013; Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Douglass, 2007; Gillette, 1994; Lantolf & Genung, 2002; Li, 2013; McCafferty, Roebuck, & Wayland, 2001; Nelson & Kim, 2001; Parks, 2000; Thorne, 2000, 2003). In the study abroad literature, only a handful of studies have applied activity theory specifically (Allen, 2010a, 2013; Douglass, 2007), although others have situated their analyses in the cultural-historical tradition more generally (e.g., Allen, 2010b; Kinginger, 2004, 2008). Work by Allen (2010a) and Douglass (2007) is particularly relevant to the present analysis, as these studies employed activity theory to investigate students' motives for L2 learning abroad. As Allen and Douglass show, an activity-theoretical approach highlights the historically situated and socially mediated nature of motives, which are shaped by the history of the learner and shift over time.

Allen (2010a) described six students' motives to participate in a short-term study abroad experience in France, their self-regulation during study abroad, and their motivation after returning home. Students' motives for studying French both at home and abroad fell into two categories: linguistic and pragmatic. The former referred to a desire to gain proficiency

for professional, academic, or personal reasons and the latter to an interest in improving career prospects. By the end of their sojourn abroad, those whose motives were linguistic had increased their motivation to continue their L2 studies, while pragmatically-motivated students had not changed in their motivation to learn French. Allen argued that if students' object in going abroad was not primarily about L2 learning, it is not surprising that motivation to learn French was unchanged as a result. Conversely, those students who set linguistic goals and used effective strategies to achieve those goals tended to view social interaction as beneficial and to experience an increase in their L2 motivation during study abroad. Students' goals were also observed to shift over time as they engaged in social interaction. For example, after a frustrating encounter, one student adopted a new goal to focus on L2 listening comprehension, developed strategies to achieve that goal, and reported improved interactions and motivation as a result. In contrast, lack of interaction with her host family and difficulty communicating led another student to become demotivated about French.

In a case study of an L2 learner of French ("Claire") who spent one semester studying in France, Douglass (2007) described how the circumstances of study abroad resulted in shifts in motives. Claire was motivated to study French abroad by a desire to increase her L2 proficiency for both interpersonal communication and academic goals and to integrate into French society. Initially, Claire had hoped that her coursework would help her improve her L2 skills, but she felt that her classes lacked academic rigor and were not beneficial. As a result, Claire's motive shifted from a desire to improve French through her coursework to taking a "break" in her classes. Claire did not abandon her object of improving her French, but looked to independent study and out-of-class interactions instead. While Claire did find opportunities to speak French outside of class, her efforts to meet local people and to look and act French in order to integrate into the local community were largely unsuccessful. Like many other study abroad students (e.g., Coleman, 2013), Claire faced difficulties in establishing local social networks and in shedding her foreigner identity. Consequently, Claire gave up on her desire for integration into French society and settled for observation of French culture from the margins. Douglass argued that, despite these setbacks, Claire maintained learning French as an object due to her determination to be successful and as a result of the high value she placed on improving her L2 abilities.

These activity-theoretical studies stress the role of mediation, the dynamic nature of motives, the agency of individuals, and a historical perspective in understanding language learning in study abroad. The present study continues this line of research by closely examining one student's social interactions with his host mother and an age peer, using the concept of an activity system to understand to what objects the student oriented in those interactions and how his objects shifted while in Spain as a result of mediated interaction. The following research questions guided this analysis: To what objects did the student orient when he engaged in L2 social interaction with his host mother and with his age peer? Did those objects change over the course of the semester in Spain? If so, what factors help explain those changes?

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Research Site**

The research site was an institute for international studies in Toledo, Spain. At the institute,

classes were taught exclusively in Spanish and covered a range of topics related to Spanish language and culture. Only international students attended the institute: approximately 90% were English-speaking U.S. students and 10% were Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican students.

Students at the institute could sign up for a language partner exchange, which matched each international student with a local Spanish student for conversational practice. The language partner program was one of the few ways that study abroad students were able to meet locals aside from their host families. In terms of accommodations, the institute offered both homestays with local families as well as housing in an international student residence. Host families were carefully screened by the institute and instructed to speak only Spanish with their students. Students, too, were asked to sign a language oath, promising to speak only Spanish in Toledo.

### **Focal Participant**

The data for this case study were collected under the auspices of a larger project. The case study participant, “Jared,” was chosen because his background was unique and his case raised questions about the objects to which students orient as they engage in L2 social interaction during their stay abroad.

Jared was a 21-year-old male native speaker of English in his third year at a large university in the Midwest U.S. when he chose to spend the spring semester of 2007 studying at the Toledo institute. Jared was majoring in Spanish and Economics and had taken five semesters of upper-division Spanish literature and linguistics classes at his home university before going abroad. Although Jared described being more interested in Latin America and Latin American varieties of Spanish, particularly Mexican Spanish, he reported choosing Spain because it was easier to transfer academic credits. Considering his interest in Latin American Spanish, it is not surprising that Jared identified his overarching L2-learning goal for study abroad as developing his “fluency” in Spanish, not adopting features of Peninsular Spanish.

Prior to his sojourn in Toledo, Jared had only traveled briefly to a Spanish-speaking country on vacation. However, Jared had a long history with Spanish: he began speaking Spanish in kindergarten at a Spanish immersion school. Since Spanish immersion was unavailable after fifth grade in his school district, the remaining years of his education were in English-medium schools. Starting in sixth grade, all students were required to study a foreign language, and since Jared’s friends took Spanish, Jared chose to do so as well. He described his middle school Spanish learning experience as a failure:

I could communicate anything I needed to in fifth grade. Learning it again in middle school ruined my Spanish. Completely ruined it. Because before, it was almost innate. I wouldn’t say it was innate. But it was almost- just out of my thought. It was as if I’d learned it as if I was native, in the sense that I learned it so young in the- in a more natural way. We didn’t even have language class in [immersion] school. We were just taught in Spanish...and then to actually learn it the real way threw me for a loop. I did horribly in [middle school] Spanish classes...and in all my other classes I had As. And I was like, “I know Spanish better than anyone else in this class, and I’m getting these bad grades,” and my Spanish got worse and worse and worse. Then, you know, I went off to college and- I don’t know. But I’ve always loved Spanish. I’ve just never loved the grammar learning. (Interview)

The way that Jared constructed his language learning history in the quote above can be understood using activity theory. For Jared, learning Spanish the “real way” in a foreign language classroom seems to refer to a learning activity in which the object is the acquisition of declarative or metalinguistic knowledge of the formal principles of L2 Spanish. Conversely, Jared’s preferred way of learning Spanish was through participation in learning activities that were conducted in Spanish but that—at least in Jared’s view—had objects other than declarative Spanish L2 learning. In the immersion school setting, those other objects would likely have included learning goals related to subjects such as math and science, as well as developing competence to communicate about academic topics in Spanish. Finally, Spanish also played a role in Jared’s history through his use of that language in his workplace in the U.S. prior to going to Spain. Jared worked in a restaurant and described the enormous enjoyment that he felt speaking Spanish with the Mexican kitchen staff.

In Toledo, most of Jared’s out-of-class interaction in Spanish was with his host family, principally his host mother (“Carmen”), who was in her fifties and with whom he reported speaking 3 hours per week, on average. An interview with Jared’s host parents at the end of the semester indicated that the family had become very fond of Jared and thought highly of him. He was described as being respectful, sincere, and attentive to the needs of others. Jared also reported spending 1-2 hours per week, on average, with one of the Puerto Rican students at the institute, a male student (“Luis”) of similar age with whom Jared developed a fairly close friendship during study abroad.

Apart from his host family and Luis, Jared had few friends in Toledo who were expert Spanish speakers and no friends from Spain. At the start of his semester abroad, Jared was enthusiastic about meeting Spaniards and reported making an effort to get to know local people by signing up for a language partner exchange and striking up conversations in cafés and bars. According to Jared, his language partner did not follow through with the exchange and locals were uninterested in getting to know him. While difficulty in building social networks with members of the host culture is well attested in the literature, Jared did not pursue all of his options for making connections with locals; for example, he could have requested a new language partner, but did not do so.

## Data Collection

The data were collected during 11 weeks of Jared’s semester in Toledo beginning two weeks after arrival and consisted of naturalistic audio-recordings, journals, interviews, questionnaires, and the researcher’s field notes. Jared was provided with a digital audio-recorder and was asked to record a total of eight 30-minute conversations in Spanish, four with his host family and four with an expert-Spanish-speaking age peer, spread evenly throughout the semester. Jared followed a recording schedule provided by the researcher, which asked him to alternate the person with whom he recorded: host family (weeks 3, 6, 9, and 11) and age peer (weeks 5, 7, 10, and 12). The specific day that Jared chose to record each week was left to his discretion, for flexibility. In the four host family recordings, Jared conversed with Carmen at home. For the peer interactions, Jared recorded the first week with his Spanish language partner, but, after that partnership fell through, he made the remaining three recordings with Luis. The researcher was not present during the recorded conversations, did not determine the topics of conversation, and did not inform Jared about

the focus of this analysis.

Weekly journals in which Jared was asked to discuss social interaction, relationships, and L2 learning represented a second source of data. Toward the end of the semester abroad, after all other data were collected, the researcher also conducted a semi-structured interview with Jared (in English) and a separate one with his host family (in Spanish). In the latter, the researcher asked the family to describe their relationship with Jared and to discuss his learning during study abroad. Given that the research was focused primarily on the student, no journal data were collected from the host family and no journal or interview data were collected from Luis.

Additional instruments in the study were two questionnaires and field notes. The former included a background questionnaire, completed at the beginning of the semester, and a language contact survey, completed at the end. Finally, the researcher spent the semester living at the Toledo institute and interacted with Jared, other study abroad students, staff at the institute, and local people in a variety of situations, keeping notes about those encounters.

## Data Analysis

Jared's journals, his interview, and the host family interview were analyzed qualitatively, with a focus on themes concerning participants' orientation to social interaction, their objects, motives, goals, histories, relationships, as well as their views on L2 learning. The researcher's field notes served as a source of information about the larger Toledo institute community.

The audio-recordings were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively. More specifically, the researcher identified and analyzed instances in the talk when Jared and his interlocutors oriented to L2 learning. For the purposes of this analysis, orientation to L2 learning included practices in the talk focused explicitly on developing knowledge or competence regarding any aspect of the Spanish language (e.g., pronunciation, lexis, morphology, syntax, sociolinguistics, pragmatics) and discussing learning as a topic of conversation. In the analysis of orientation to learning conducted in the present study, no claim is made that learning has occurred (see e.g., Gardner, 2008).

## RESULTS

This section is organized by activity system. Jared's interactions with his host mother are presented first, followed by those with his peer.

### Host Mother Interactions

Engeström's (2001) triadic schematization is a useful tool for understanding the elements of the activity system formed by Jared and his host mother, Carmen, in the early weeks of study abroad (Figure 2). The journal, interview, and talk data suggest that, at the start of the semester, Jared viewed the interactions with his host mother as having four objects: L2 learning, communication, development of his relationship with Carmen, and enjoyment.

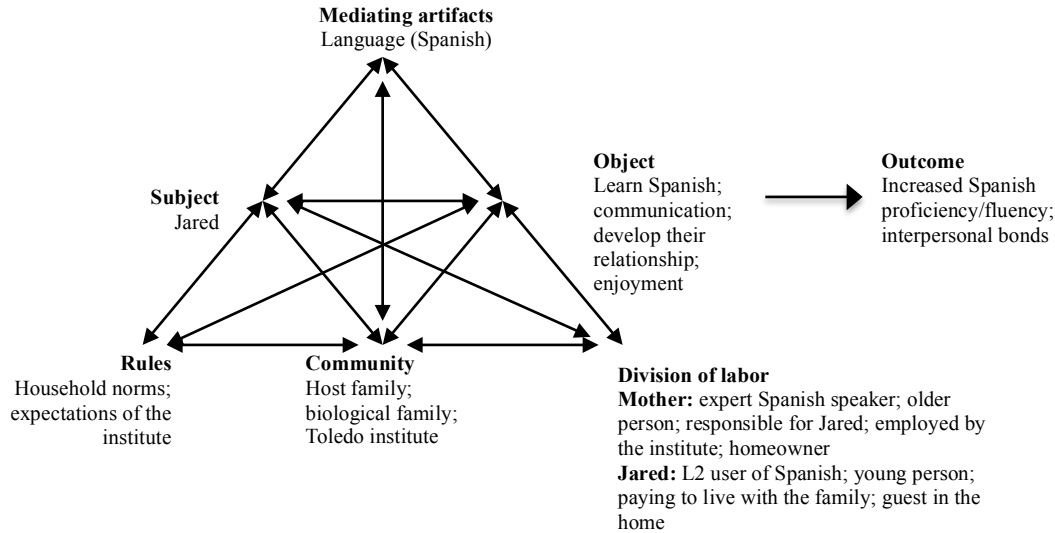


Figure 2. Activity system of Jared and Carmen early in study abroad

An orientation to the object of L2 learning during interaction is evident from Jared's early journals and in the recorded conversations. Writing about his first recorded interaction with Carmen in week 3, Jared indicated that he learned Spanish most effectively through participation in conversation: "I learn Spanish best in two ways. The first is to participate in a conversation and the second is to listen to a difficult conversation between native speakers" (Journal). In the recorded conversations, Jared regularly oriented to L2 learning through practices such as eliciting confirmation of correct forms from Carmen through utterance-final rising intonation, asking questions about lexical items and grammar, and discussing L2 learning as a topic. The former two actions are exemplified in Excerpts 1 and 2 below.

### Excerpt 1

*First recorded interaction between Jared (J) and Carmen (C) in week 3*

1	J: este ole?	this *smell?
2	se llama ole?	is it called *smell?
3	C: oler	to smell
4	J: oh- [no- no-	oh- [no- no-
5	C: [este olor	[this smell
6	J: o- olor	sm- smell
7	muy bueno	very good
8	(...)	(...)
9	J: sí, sí es muy bien	yeah, yeah it's very well
10	C: es muy bueno	it's very good
11	J: m- muy bueno	v- very good
12	sí	yes
13	(1.5)	(1.5)
14	C: son judías mexicanas	they're Mexican green beans
15	(1.0)	(1.0)
16	C: dicen judías mexicanas	they call them Mexican green beans
17	pues porque llevan picante	well because they're spicy
18	J: jódías?	*jódías?
19	C: judías	judías [beans]

20	J:	judías	<i>judías</i>
21	C:	[que-	[that-
22	J:	[qué son judías?	[what are <i>judías</i> ?
23	C:	judías es esto que le dicen chile (.)	<i>judías</i> is what they call <i>chile</i> (.)
24		en México (.) no?	in Mexico (.) right?
25	J:	frijole?	* <i>frijole</i> [bean]?
26	C:	frijoles	<i>frijoles</i> [beans]
27	J:	frijoles, bueno	<i>frijoles</i> , OK
28	C:	pues [en España	well [in Spain
29	J:	[no se llaman frijoles aquí?	[they don't call them <i>frijoles</i> here?
30	C:	no, aquí son judías	no, here they're <i>judías</i>
31		judías [pintas	pinto [beans
32	J:	[judías	[beans
33		sí, sí	yeah, yeah
34	C:	hay judías blancas, judías pintas	there are white beans, pinto beans
35	J:	vienen de: la palabra [judío?	do they come from: the word [ <i>judío</i> [Jew]?
36	C:	[judías negras	[black beans
37	J:	[judío?	[ <i>judío</i> ?
38	C:	[no, no=	[no, no=
39	J:	=no? no?	=no? no?
40	C:	no, es una legumbre	no, it's a legume

Excerpt 1 occurred at the beginning of a recording that Jared made while the participants were eating dinner. Jared began in line 1 eliciting assistance from Carmen for the lexical item *olor* ('smell') in order to compliment her on the good smell of the food. Carmen provided first the verb *oler* ('to smell') and then the noun *olor* in lines 3 and 5. In line 9, Jared reiterated and upgraded his compliment about the delicious smell of the food saying "*es muy bien*" ('it's very well'). While grammatically incorrect, the meaning was clear in context, but Carmen offered the error correction "*es muy bueno*" ('it's very good') in line 10. Jared recognized Carmen's utterance in line 10 as a repair and in line 11 produced the correct form. Carmen then explained that the dish was called Mexican green beans because they were spicy (lines 14-17). Jared was evidently unfamiliar with the lexical item for green beans in Peninsular Spanish (i.e., *judías verdes*) and so asked clarifying questions in lines 18, 22, and 25. In her explanation, Carmen indexed Jared's knowledge of Latin American Spanish by suggesting that green beans are called *chiles* in Mexico. Jared further oriented to L2 learning and to Carmen's status as an expert Spanish speaker by asking whether the word *frijoles* ('beans') was used in Spain and if the lexical items *judías* and *judío* ('Jew') were etymologically related.

While Excerpt 1 provides an instance in which Jared oriented to L2 lexical meaning and dialectal variation in Spanish, Excerpt 2 offers an example later in the same conversation of a clarification question about grammar. Jared initiated the sequence in this excerpt by noting (lines 1-5) that he always used the analytic future construction (e.g., *voy a correr*, 'I'm going to run') instead of the synthetic future (e.g., *correré*, 'I will run') in Spanish. Carmen explained (lines 6-13) that the analytic future was correct in that context and provided examples. Jared further tried to clarify in lines 15, 18-19, and 23-27 how far into the future the analytic future could be employed, a question to which Carmen provided guidance in lines 28 and 30-31.

## Excerpt 2

*First recorded interaction between Jared (J) and Carmen (C) in week 3*

1	J:	lo que yo- (1.0) uh (0.5) hago	what I- (1.0) uh (0.5) do
2		e:s (.) siempre yo uso voy	i:s (.) I always use <i>voy</i> [I'm going]
3	C:	voy	<i>voy</i>
4	J:	yo voy a correr	I'm going to run
5		en vez de yo correré o-	instead of I will run or-
6	C:	yo correré	I will run
7	J:	sí, yo correré	yeah, I will run
8	C:	no, pero si dices yo voy a correr está bien	but if you say I'm going to run it's fine
9	J:	sí	yeah
10	C:	porque tú ahora te pones el pantalón corto	because if you put your shorts on now
11		y dices yo voy a correr	and you say I'm going to run
12	J:	sí	yeah
13	C:	bien	fine
14		(2.0)	(2.0)
15	J:	pero:: [sí- sí sí sí sí sí	bu::t [yeah- yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah
16	C:	["de dónde vienes?"	["where are you coming from?"
17		he ido a correr	I went running
18	J:	sí, pero e- está- si es en la mañana	yeah, but it- it's- if it's in the morning
19		y yo::	and I::
20	C:	eso es en la noche igual	that's the same at night
21	J:	s::	s::
22	C:	yo voy a correr=	I'm going to run=
23	J:	=sí, no no no no	=yeah, no no no no
24		sí, sí yo entiendo pero-	yeah, yeah I understand but-
25		si es en la mañana	if it's in the morning
26		y yo:: estoy hablando de:: la noche	and I::m talking abou::t the night
27		hh como yo voy a correr esta noche	hh like I'm going to run tonight
28	C:	está bien dicho	that's correct
29	J:	sí:: pero- es- es mejor decir=	yea::h but- it's- it's better to say=
30	C:	=también puedes decir-	=you can also say-
31		no, no [está correcto	no, no [it's correct
32	J:	[no?	[no?
33		oh, bueno	oh, OK

Hence, the evidence suggests that early in the semester Jared viewed L2 learning as one of the objects of his interactions with Carmen. By the third week of his sojourn, however, Jared made a conscious change in his specific L2 learning goals, shifting from a concern with lexical and grammatical accuracy to a greater focus on acquiring specifically those vocabulary items and structures that enabled him to express himself in Spanish. Discussing the week 3 interaction with Carmen, Jared wrote in his journal:

I haven't taken grammar classes in a long time and I'm not confident about my grammar at all. I am very confident that I can get any point across to anyone that I need to but the grammar only stops me from doing so. Therefore, I usually try to ignore grammar altogether because that's when I'm most successful in having a conversation...if I know that there is a grammar point or a vocabulary word that is imperative to communicating a point, I will try to ask it while trying to maintain all of my focus on what I'm trying to say so that it does not get lost. This is something I've picked up while being here...when I arrived, I would constantly ask "Is that right?"...and the conversation would be

lost...Or I might have questioned “¿*íbamos o fuimos?*” [‘we would go/were going or we went?’.] Now I maintain all concentration on the future and...it’s easier to continue talking without losing my place.

The dislike of grammar and emphasis on meaning in Jared’s journal entry is consistent with his history learning Spanish naturalistically in elementary immersion (i.e., where the primary focus was not on learning the formal properties of the L2) and his subsequent feelings of failure acquiring metalinguistic knowledge about Spanish later in life. Jared’s focus on maintaining the flow of the conversation is also consistent with his overarching motive for study abroad: gaining fluency in Spanish. In line with the talk data, this journal entry also indicates that communication (i.e., exchanging ideas, information, feelings) was another object of Jared’s interactions with Carmen, which came to be prioritized over the specific learning goal of grammatical accuracy.

In addition to L2 learning and communication, building a relationship and enjoyment were additional objects of Jared’s interactions with Carmen. From the beginning of study abroad, Jared looked to Carmen as a “confidant” and reported enjoying being able to tell her anything, like he would his biological mother. Jared’s relational goals were reflected in the recorded interactions: Jared confided his frustrations to Carmen, asked for advice, made jokes, and did other relational work, such as showing concern for her problems, complimenting her cooking, and flattering her about her hospitality. Jared felt that their relationship grew closer over time, as they got to know each other. By week 5, the growing closeness and comfort of their relationship impacted the extent to which Jared reported taking Carmen’s error corrections seriously:

I enjoy talking to my [host] mom the most because at this point in the semester because she’s become like a mother and I like having that close relationship. While my conversation with her was pretty relaxed at the beginning [of the semester] because she made such a point to consider me “her son,” I feel like conversation now is even more relaxed. This is good in some ways and bad in others. When she corrects me, I find myself trying to apply what she’s taught me less than before. That is to say, if I make a mistake and she corrects me, I’m very likely to make it again whereas at the beginning of the semester I usually tried to make sure to learn the right way after her first correction. (Journal)

Again, this quote suggests that Jared subordinated the goal of grammatical accuracy to enjoyment of his conversations with Carmen.

Based on Carmen’s practices in the talk data and her interview comments, assisting Jared in learning Spanish seemed to be a primary object of their interactions for her. L2-learning-oriented practices on Carmen’s part, observed in the recorded conversations, included commenting on Jared’s L2 abilities and progress explicitly, providing him with precise vocabulary, praising him for producing a grammatical form correctly, offering advice on L2 learning, and performing error correction on Jared’s Spanish grammar and vocabulary. With regard to error correction, Carmen made a total of 33 corrections in the two hours of recorded conversations (28 focused on grammar and 5 on lexical items). In some cases, Carmen provided error correction when Jared displayed uncertainty about a form, but in others, Carmen’s error correction was not in response to a repair initiation by Jared or a genuine misunderstanding, but rather, reflected her focus on Jared’s grammatical accuracy. An example of error correction can be viewed in line 10 in Excerpt 1, as well as in Excerpt 3

below.

### Excerpt 3

*Second recorded interaction between Jared (J) and Carmen (C) in week 6*

1	J:	la llamada de antes? (0.8)	the call from before?
2		fue mi amiga	it was my friend
3		(1.5)	(1.5)
4	J:	y::	a::nd
5	C:	del [Instituto de Toledo]?	from the [Toledo Institute]?
6	J:	sí:	yeah:
7		con que estoy viajando a:: Valencia	with *whom I'm traveling to:: Valencia
8		antes de que: [(Jake)	before: [(Jake)
9	C:	[con la que viajaré a Valencia	[with whom I'll travel to Valencia
10	J:	sí	yeah
11		(1.5)	(1.5)
12	J:	con la que- [qué?	with whom- [what?
13	C:	[viajaré	[I will travel
14	J:	víajaré (.) a Valencia	I will travel (.) to Valencia
15		hh y::: (0.9) tenemos una problema grande	hh a:::nd (0.9) we have *a big problem
16		con nuestros-	with our-
17	C:	<u>un</u> problema grande	<u>a</u> big problem
18	J:	un- un problema grande he he	a- a big problem he he
19		con he nuestros tarjetas he de avión	with he our airplane he cards

In Excerpt 3, Jared related to Carmen that he had accidentally bought a plane ticket with the incorrect return date for an upcoming trip to Valencia. During his account, Carmen made grammatical corrections in lines 9 and 17, correcting the relative pronoun construction (*con la que*, ‘with whom’), verb tense (*víajaré*, ‘I will travel’), and gender agreement (*un problema*, ‘a problem’). In addition to assisting Jared with L2 learning, Carmen also regularly oriented to the role of cultural informant in the talk data, providing Jared with explanations about Spanish holidays, social norms, and material culture.

In her interview, Carmen emphasized two aspects of her role as a host mother: to help Jared learn Spanish and to be a good host. With regard to the former, in her interview, Carmen described her role as providing immersion in Spanish, serving as a resource about Spanish, and helping students correct their own errors:

*Yo siempre les digo, “Tenéis tres meses para hablar español y toda la vida para hablar inglés.” Si llaman por teléfono, tsch, “Prohibido el inglés. Sólo español.”... La razón de ir a casa de una familia es para aprender más español. Cuando tengas una duda, cuál sea, tú la preguntas... Cuando dice algo, solo con levantar el dedo él se da cuenta... y él mismo se corrige.*

I always tell [students], “You have three months to speak Spanish and all of your life to speak English.” If they call you, *tsch*, “English is prohibited. Only Spanish.” The reason to stay with a family is to learn more Spanish. When you have a doubt, whatever it is, you ask about it... When he says something, just with lifting my finger he realizes [his error]... and he corrects himself.

Carmen’s own error correction practices, as well as comments in the interview and in the recordings, suggest that she viewed error correction as important to L2 learning. In the

second recording (week 6), Carmen encouraged Jared to speak Spanish with other study abroad students in public to take advantage of correcting each other's errors and of being corrected by Spaniards who might overhear:

*Si habláis en español, cuando tú dices una cosa mal, si el otro estudiante sabe que lo has dicho mal te corrige. Y tú puedes corregir a la otra persona. Porque yo he ido en el autobús y han ido estudiantes hablando español. Y algún chico, alguna chica que va escuchando la conversación les ha enseñado a decirlo bien. Les ha corregido. Entonces, es la ventaja que tenéis salir hablando el español: que las personas generalmente te ayudan.*

If you speak in Spanish, when you say something incorrectly, if the other student knows that you said it incorrectly, s/he corrects you. And you can correct the other person. Because I was on the bus and there were students speaking Spanish. And some young person who was listening to the conversation taught them how to say it correctly. S/he corrected them. So that's the advantage of speaking Spanish while you're out: people generally will help you.

While the existing data do not provide a complete picture of Carmen's view on L2 learning or her objects for interacting with Jared, L2 learning appeared to be a primary object for Carmen in her interactions with Jared, and key components of learning included immersion, practice, and error correction.

In addition to her role in Jared's L2 learning, Carmen described taking great care in making her host students feel comfortable, saying, "*Se sienten igual que en su casa*" ("They feel like they're at home") and "*Tú eres el rey de la casa*" ("You're the king of the house"). She further positioned Jared as a son and herself as a mother: "*Por tres meses soy tu madre*" ("For three months I'm your mother").

Both as a teacher and as a host, Carmen's rules for Jared were informed by her history as a mother and by her institutional role in the study abroad program. In her interview, Carmen indicated that her only two rules for Jared were: not speaking English and phoning when coming home late. She justified her Spanish-only rule by referencing her history with her own adult children: when they were trying to learn a new language, they would speak only that language together. Carmen's relationship with the Toledo Institute was also invoked by emphasizing that her rule about phoning home was, in part, due to her responsibility for Jared's safety. Carmen's institutional responsibilities also extended to helping Jared learn Spanish. Considering Carmen's institutional and maternal roles, her expert speaker status, as well as the age difference and the fact that it was her home in which Jared was staying, the division of labor between Jared and Carmen was characterized, to some extent, by a "vertical division of power and status" (Engeström, 1993, p. 67). The respective roles held by Jared and Carmen were not viewed negatively by Jared until about the middle of the semester.

## Structural Tensions in the Activity System

Jared's biological mother and sister came to visit him in Toledo around the mid-point of study abroad, during which time Carmen invited Jared's family to have dinner at her house. Prior to the dinner, Jared mentioned to Carmen that his biological sister had also attended a Spanish immersion program and could speak Spanish. Admitting to being very competitive with his sister, Jared bragged to Carmen in the recordings that his Spanish was better than his sister's. After the dinner took place and Jared's biological family returned home, Carmen

gave him her assessment of the siblings' comparative Spanish abilities: Jared's sister spoke Spanish better.

At first this comment did not bother Jared. But after Carmen brought up the topic again at a later time, he reported feeling uncomfortable:

I enjoyed talking with my [host] mom [this week]. It's nice to have some time dedicated specifically to talk, even if it's not about anything specific...The only thing I don't like is when my host mom tells me that my sister speaks better Spanish than I do. I don't disagree with her but I've taken about twice as much Spanish as my sister and have taken about three times as many college courses. You might notice a change in the tone of my voice due to discomfort. (Journal, week 9)

As time went by, Carmen's comment began to affect how Jared viewed their relationship and, consequently, the object of their interactions shifted for Jared. Jared reported shifting his focus to L2 grammatical accuracy in order to prove that he had a superior command of Spanish compared to his sister. Jared described his perspective at length in his interview:

After [my sister] left and my host mom goes, "Your sister's way better at Spanish than you are." And I was like, "Gosh, that's not your job. Your job is to tell me that my Spanish is good." And ever since then, my Spanish has gone down the drain with her. And she started correcting me a lot more and stuff. And she hasn't suggested it and I don't want to tell her, but I'm sure, 100% sure that even no matter how much I try and strike it out of my mind somewhere in my subconscious I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh, I pale in comparison to the 27 students she's had in the past. I pale in comparison to my sister."...I guess I'd say I'm intimidated in a way...every time I talk to her I try a little bit harder, and when I do that, when I try- Spanish doesn't come when you try. It comes when you're relaxed...You know in the beginning I loved the correction. I absolutely loved the correction. Something changed when she made that comment. Because now every time she corrects me, it kind of brings that back. It's kind of like, "Oh, would my sister have made that mistake?"...And you know, now whenever [Carmen] makes a correction, it doesn't sound as good. And I honestly think that because of that, my Spanish has not improved since my [biological] family left.

During the first half of the semester, Jared viewed Carmen's error correction positively, even though her focus on grammatical accuracy did not align with his goals to focus on fluency and meaning. Later in the semester, however, the same practice triggered the memory of Carmen's unfavorable comparison between Jared and his sister and mediated how he viewed their interactions. Jared began to give less importance to the objects of enjoyment, communication, and L2 learning for communication, and to foreground his relationship with Carmen. More specifically, Jared perceived that Carmen valued grammatical accuracy as a characteristic of a competent L2 user and, as a result, attempted to gain Carmen's approval and recognition of his superior L2 abilities—relative to his sister and to previous students—through displays of L2 grammatical accuracy. Given that Jared believed that a focus on grammar was ineffectual for his L2 learning, his shift from focusing on meaning to emphasizing grammatical accuracy was not motivated by a desire to improve his L2 abilities, but rather, by a desire to be positively regarded by Carmen and to, consequently, enhance his own face. Being recognized as a comparatively good L2 speaker appeared to be an important

part of Jared's self-aspect and, therefore, constituted a *face sensitivity* (Spencer-Oatey, 2005). While Jared tried to earn Carmen's positive evaluation, he also expressed a belief that Carmen's "job" as host mother was to praise, not to criticize. Jared asserted that an ideal host mother would take into account his face sensitivities and affective needs by providing encouragement about L2 use. Given that Carmen took pride in her hospitality toward Jared, she likely did not intend to deeply offend him with her comments. The data, therefore, suggest a mismatch and tension regarding the participants' perceptions of the host mother's role and affiliated behaviors.

Returning to the activity system shown in Figure 2, tensions can be observed between the object, the division of labor, and the communities involved. First, Jared's object for the interactions shifted several times during study abroad as a result of the emerging mediated circumstances. In the beginning, L2 learning, communication, relationship building, and enjoyment were identified as objects. By the third week, Jared's specific L2 learning goal changed from speaking with grammatical accuracy to acquiring linguistic resources to express his ideas effectively. After Carmen's comment comparing Jared and his sister, Jared's object shifted once again from L2 learning for communication and enjoyment to a greater emphasis on the relational object of obtaining Carmen's esteem and enhancing his face through demonstration of L2 grammatical accuracy. The latter change was the result of Jared's desire to be viewed as a competent speaker of Spanish and his perception that in two communities of practice of which he was a member (i.e., both his biological and host families) being a successful L2 user meant using grammar correctly. Jared's aversion to grammar can be attributed to his history of learning Spanish naturalistically as an immersion student and his belief that grammar was his weakness, as well as to his experiences abroad in which a focus on grammar hampered communication.

For her part, Carmen's institutional role as a host mother and her family history with L2 learning informed her interactions with Jared. Carmen's status as a mother figure and expert speaker empowered her to do what, from her perspective, was in the best interest of the student for whom she felt responsibility in terms of both safety and learning. Carmen stressed her role as a good host, going to great lengths to meet all of Jared's needs. She believed that full immersion in Spanish and taking advantage of that immersion to receive error correction were crucial components of L2 learning. Jared, for his part, felt that Carmen's negative assessment of his L2 abilities in comparison to others was incompatible with her role as a supportive host mother. In sum, an analysis of the activity system and the tensions therein helps to understand the objects to which Jared oriented and why those objects shifted over the course of study abroad.

### **Age Peer Interactions**

Apart from Carmen, the only other expert Spanish speaker with whom Jared spent considerable time during study abroad was a fellow student at the Toledo institute from Puerto Rico, Luis. Figure 3 offers a visual representation of the activity system constituted by interactions between Jared and Luis.

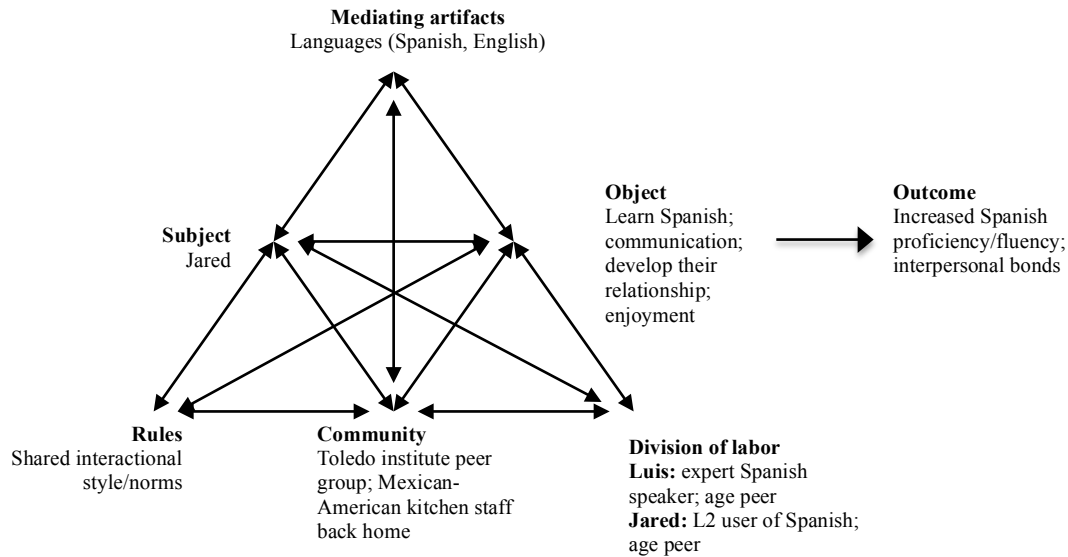


Figure 3. Activity system of Jared and Luis early in study abroad

Based on Jared's journal, interview, and talk data, he expressed the same four objects for his interactions with Luis as with Carmen: L2 learning, communication, relationship building, and enjoyment. A key element was the community of Mexican kitchen staff with whom Jared worked in his home city. In his first journal entry of the semester, Jared discussed his social interactions thus far in Spain and compared them to those back home:

I miss speaking Spanish in the kitchen at my restaurant. The Spanish I spoke in the kitchen at my restaurant was 70-80% trash talk that covered sports, degrading women, inflating women, talking about food...drug/alcohol use, cautionary terms and elaboration on them ("Don't slip, *pendejo* ['asshole']?") and more. (week 3)

Jared's history with his U.S.-based workplace community and the interactional norms he experienced (e.g., swearing, teasing, making sexist remarks) would be invoked in how he viewed his interactions with Luis.

About one month into the semester, Jared asked Luis if he would be interested in being his language partner, since Jared's assigned language partner from Toledo had not returned his emails. Jared and Luis did not know each other well at the time. Hence, from the beginning of their relationship, Jared framed his meetings with Luis as an opportunity to enhance his L2 learning through conversational practice. According to Jared, Luis also viewed social interaction as a means for Jared and other English-speaking students to learn Spanish, however, Luis's perspective was not perceived as accuracy-oriented: "I am very comfortable talking with [Luis] because I know he's not judging me and whenever I see him he's always telling us to speak Spanish so I know he doesn't care I speak correctly as long as I'm trying" (Journal, week 7). Indeed, in all three recordings with Jared, Luis made a total of only two error corrections, in one case because Luis perceived that Jared was having a difficult time producing the correct verb form and in another because Jared elicited Luis's help with a verb form. The former instance of correction is shown in Excerpt 4 below.

## Excerpt 4

*First recorded interaction between Jared (J) and Luis (L) in week 7*

1	J:	recuerd- recuerdes cuando: Alex	do you remem- remember when: Alex
2		(0.8)	(0.8)
3		u:::m	u:::m
4		(1.3)	(1.3)
5		hicist- (.) hicier-	di- (.) di-
6	L:	hizo	did
7	J:	hizo? (.) una:: probado de vino?	did? (.) a:: wine tasting?
8		uh huh?	uh huh?
9		y él- (.) probó (.) tres vinos	and he- (.) tried (.) three wines
10		y:: cada vino (.) fu- um (.) pasada::	and:: each wine (.) wa- um (.) amazing::
11	L:	tú estabas ese día?	were you there that day?
12	J:	no:: no	no:: no

Excerpt 4 was part of a discussion about Spanish wine. In lines 2-5, Jared hesitated because he could not produce the appropriate form of *hacer* ('to do'). Luis provided the correct form in line 6 and then, in the following turn, Jared took up his account again. Luis's brief correction was not oriented to drawing Jared's attention to grammatical form, but rather, it functioned to help Jared express what he wanted to say. Further, Luis did not offer the verb form at Jared's first hesitation in line 2, but rather, gave him time to try to complete his idea himself, only contributing *hizo* after two pauses, hesitation marker *um*, and two failed attempts at the verb by Jared (lines 2-5). Similarly, Jared commented:

I'm very much able to express myself with [Luis]. He is patient so I feel like if I'm trying to say something, he will give me time. I also feel that he might understand what I'm going to say more than my host mother would just through facial expressions and association with being male. For example, if I'm talking about school and I have a distressed look but I can't find a word, he'll probably still understand that I have a lot of work and be able to help me out a little more. Another example would be if I'm talking about girls, he might begin to ask questions or suggest certain things for me to say that are very close to what I was going to say anyway. (Journal, week 7)

In his journal entry, Jared attributed the ease with which he could express himself with Luis to his peer's patience as well as the common ground and intersubjectivity that they shared as young males.

In all of their recordings, Jared and Luis rarely oriented to L2 learning explicitly. Luis did not regularly orient to expert/novice roles, L2 learning was seldom a topic of conversation, metalinguistic discussions of the L2 were largely absent, and Luis infrequently engaged in error correction. Luis's lack of orientation to L2 learning in the talk could be due to his own object for the interactions, beliefs about L2 learning, awareness of Jared's preferences, as well as status as Jared's peer. Unlike Carmen, Luis was not in a social or institutional position in which he felt responsible for Jared or Jared's L2 learning, although as an expert speaker of Spanish, he could serve as a resource. Jared, for his part, expressed his preference for learning through simply participating in conversation, as described earlier. On occasion, Jared oriented to Luis as an expert Spanish speaker in order to receive grammatical or lexical assistance, but rather than L2-learning-oriented practices, Jared and Luis's interactions were

overwhelmingly characterized by an orientation to the objects of communication, relationship building, and mutual enjoyment. Accordingly, their conversational topics centered on common interests (e.g., movies, music, drinking, traveling) and their interactions involved a great deal of mutual teasing and jocularity, as Excerpt 5 illustrates.

### Excerpt 5

*First recorded interaction between Jared (J) and Luis (L) in week 7*

1	L:	yo fui a- yo fui a Ámsterdam	I went to- I went to Amsterdam
2	J:	sí: y cómo fue?	yeah: and how'd it go?
3	L:	he he he	he he he
4		la pas- la pasé muy muy bien	I had a very very good time
5		(( <i>laughing</i> ))	(( <i>laughing</i> ))
6	J:	muy muy bien?	very very good?
7	L:	muy muy bien, sí	very very good, yeah
8	J:	has asistido a algunos lugares (.) ahí [como- museos?	did you attend some places (.) there [like- museums?
10	L:	[t- te-	[t- te-
11		Red Zone	Red Zone
12	J:	qué?	what?
13	L:	Red Zone	Red Zone
14	J:	oh:: oh oh oh oh	oh:: oh oh oh oh
15		sí:: [la zona roja	yeah:: [the red zone
16	L:	[coffee shop coffee shop he he he	[coffee shop coffee shop he he he
17	J:	coffee shop	coffee shop
18	L:	he he he he [he he he	he he he he [he he he
19	J:	[he he he	[he he he

In Excerpt 5, Luis told Jared how much fun he had had visiting the Red Light District of Amsterdam and the marijuana clubs, to the amusement of both of them, as evident by the laughter and joking repetition of “coffee shop.” English was infrequent in their interactions, but Luis occasionally inserted English words (e.g., “Red Zone” in line 11), usually for comic effect.

In his journal entry about the first recording with Luis, Jared linked his interaction with Luis to his experiences back home speaking Spanish in his workplace:

[Luis] seems to have that *no pasa nada* [‘no problem’] personality ALL OF THE TIME...he is a guy and can relate a little better which I think is an advantage...Before I came to Spain I was used to speaking kitchen Spanish with Mexicans so talking to [Luis] brings me back to my ORIGINAL comfort zone...I guess I’d say that talking to [Luis] reinforces my knowledge that there is a difference between what I would call “kitchen Spanish” and more formal Spanish...With my [host] mother I feel comfortable communicating anything to her, just in a different manner. For example, if I have a hangover, I’ll say “*Tengo una resaca*” [‘I have a hangover’]. To [Luis], I might say, “*Esta resaca que tengo es un pedazo de mierda, estoy jodido*” [‘This hangover that I have is a piece of shit, I’m screwed’]. (week 7)

In his comments, Jared demonstrated a sensitivity to register, highlighting specific phrases that he viewed as appropriate with different interlocutors. Due to perceived similarity in

interactional style (e.g., joking, swearing, laid back attitude) and male camaraderie between the Mexican cooks back home and Luis, Jared made an association between the two. Most of the other interactions in Spanish in which Jared engaged in Toledo were with his host mother, so having a male student to interact with reminded Jared how much he enjoyed speaking Spanish with other males. In emphasizing the perceived similarities between Luis and his Mexican co-workers back home, however, Jared essentially minimized differences between them, a way of thinking that could potentially lead Jared to stereotype Latin American men.

Over the course of the semester, Jared reported that he and Luis developed a fairly close friendship and that he continued to enjoy their interactions more than any others in Spain. Although Jared and Luis's exchanges were initiated with the explicit object of L2 learning, Jared realized toward the end of the semester that what primarily motivated him to interact in Spanish with both the Mexican kitchen staff back home and with Luis in Toledo was enjoyment, as he explained in his interview:

I think- working in the restaurant is the epitome of you know dirt talk. And I love it. Cause it's like an escape from this formal day. I've got this formal day and I can go off in my own world for an hour of total talking time over my six hours of work...I'll turn around and I'll have the most pleasant conversation and they'll be talking and I'll just shoot over there and spout off some swear words you know. And I just love it because it's this big release for the day and it's probably my favorite thing to do, is talking with those guys. Like out of anything. I would- I'd stay after work, off the clock, and just talk to the cooks because they're so much fun. Um, and you know I was kind of hoping to- like I guess I assumed when coming to Spain that I would find- that I just enjoyed speaking Spanish so much...I think maybe it's just the fact that it's that release from the day that I've enjoyed...and so I'm used to kitchen Spanish. But- so I feel like [Luis's] more along those lines.

In this quote, it is clear that Jared's desire to speak Spanish was strongly rooted in the enjoyment he had derived from previous interactions in Spanish. By the end of study abroad, Jared was disappointed that social interaction in Spain had not largely been similar to "kitchen Spanish," with the exception of his time with Luis. Further, it was precisely through a focus on communication and enjoyment that Jared felt he was most effective at L2 learning. When queried in his interview about what helped him learn Spanish during his semester abroad, Jared pointed to his conversations with Luis as the most important factor:

I really feel like for me the way that I learn the most is just spending time talking. And not worrying about the grammar, even though I need to do that at some point. And with [Luis] it's just- he could care less if I say, "*¿Estás terminado con los exámenes?*" [*\*Are you finished with exams?*], whereas my [host] mom is going to try and help me. And that- it kind of impedes in the conversation a little bit. Whereas with [Luis] the conversation just continues and continues and continues. So I guess starting to talk with him [my Spanish] improved a little bit.

This quote is consistent with Jared's previous statements in which he emphasized his desire to improve his fluency and his ability to use vocabulary and structures to express himself, as well as his disinterest in learning L2 grammatical forms for the sole purpose of speaking

accurately. In his quote, Jared gave an example of an utterance that he knew to be grammatically incorrect (i.e., *¿\*Estás terminado...?*, which is correctly expressed with *¿Has terminado/terminaste...?* (“Have you finished...?”)). Although Jared alluded to the need to be concerned with L2 grammar “at some point,” accuracy was not his object in these interactions. Jared felt that Carmen’s practice of correcting L2 grammar errors that were not—in his view—crucial to expressing his ideas, was less effective in helping him achieve his goals than Luis’s focus on communication and meaning. In addition to not “impeding” the conversation, Jared may have appreciated Luis’s lack of error correction because it did not threaten his self-aspect as a competent L2 user of Spanish, as Carmen’s error corrections did.

The triadic representation of the activity system formed by Jared and Luis’s interactions (Figure 3) highlights key elements of the analysis. Jared’s stated object for meeting with Luis initially was to practice and improve his L2 speaking skills, but, ultimately, Jared oriented most strongly to the objects of communication, building a friendship and enjoyment. L2 learning as an object of their interactions remained constant throughout the semester, but both Jared and Luis focused on L2 learning through and for communication, not grammatical accuracy. The two participants’ objects and interactional style aligned, and, rather than a vertical division of labor, Jared and Luis’s developing friendship was overwhelmingly horizontal and of equal power. Although Luis was an expert speaker of Spanish and Jared an L2 user of Spanish, the two participants only occasionally oriented to those roles in their recorded conversations. For Jared, their shared interactional style and intersubjectivity as young males linked Luis with the positive experiences in Jared’s workplace community back home. All of these elements help explain why Jared highly valued Luis’s friendship and their conversations in Spanish, as well as why Jared believed that his interactions with Luis had done the most to enhance his L2 learning in study abroad.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The results indicated that the focal student of this case study, Jared, was motivated to engage in social interaction with his host mother, Carmen, and his age peer and friend, Luis, by a desire to learn Spanish, but also by a desire to communicate his ideas, to develop relationships, and to enjoy their conversations. As activity theory proposes, participants mediate each other’s experiences such that the circumstances of social interaction are always in the process of emerging and, as circumstances shift, the object and the associated behaviors may also shift. In his interactions with Carmen, Jared came to prioritize their relationship by trying to improve his L2 grammatical accuracy in a bid to earn her high esteem for his L2 abilities. This shift to foregrounding grammatical accuracy was not motivated by the desire to learn Spanish, since Jared believed that he learned Spanish most effectively when he focused on meaning rather than form. In Jared’s interactions with Luis, in contrast, Jared’s objects remained constant over time: enjoying their conversations and becoming friends. It was through the relaxed and friendly environment of their exchanges, where L2 grammatical accuracy was of little concern, that Jared felt able to effectively orient to the object of L2 learning for communication.

Despite institutional discourses that emphasized L2 learning as the goal of social interaction in study abroad, Jared himself did not cast conversations with his host family or language partner solely as an opportunity for L2 learning; he also viewed interactions with Carmen and Luis as a means by which he could find enjoyment and develop interpersonal

bonds. Indeed, Jared realized by the end of the semester that what motivated him most to speak Spanish was relaxing and having fun speaking with other people, in particular with other males. In the end, Jared was somewhat disappointed with study abroad in Spain because, apart from his conversations with Luis, he did not find many opportunities for the male camaraderie in Spanish that he had enjoyed with his Mexican co-workers back home. Coleman's (2013) concentric circles model of social networks in study abroad suggests that developing relationships with local people tends to be more difficult than with co-national and other international students. The prediction of Coleman's model was accurate in the case of Jared, who had difficulty making friends with local Spaniards. However, Jared developed a meaningful friendship with an international student and expert Spanish speaker, with whom he could converse for reasons that included but also went beyond L2 learning.

The communities of practice, rules, and division of labor in an activity system, as well as participants' own histories, also influence the nature of interaction. Whereas Carmen interpreted her institutional role of host mother as having responsibility for Jared's L2 learning, Luis held no institutional role vis-à-vis Jared. Carmen's history with previous foreign students and her own children informed her views on L2 learning. Likewise, Jared's history first as a Spanish immersion student and later as a foreign language student influenced how he believed he learned best and the specific L2 learning goals he pursued. Further, Jared repeatedly used his experience with "kitchen Spanish" in his workplace in the U.S. as a point of reference for comparing subsequent interactions in Spanish. Without taking into account Jared's individual L2 history, his orientation to social interaction in Spain would not be fully understood. His history also highlights the effects of twenty-first century globalization in U.S. society, which saw a dramatic increase in immigration from Mexico, from fewer than one million Mexican immigrants in 1970 to a peak of 12.5 million in 2007 (González-Barrera & López, 2013). Globalization, with its mass movements of people around the world, means that for students of some languages, study abroad is not unique in its affordance of opportunities for L2 use outside the classroom. Before going abroad, Jared was already a member of a classroom-external, Spanish-speaking community of practice in his place of employment. In Spain, that community was physically remote, but Jared carried his identity as a member of that community and their interactional norms with him, which, in turn, mediated his study abroad experience.

Although Jared viewed the association that he made between his workplace community back home and Luis positively, it can be problematized from an etic perspective. First, in emphasizing similarities between the two, Jared may have overlooked important differences and been unable to get to know Luis on his own terms, both as an individual and as a member of another culture (i.e., Puerto Rican rather than Mexican). Second, in light of Jared's difficulties in meeting local Spaniards and the tensions that developed with his host mother, Jared's enthusiasm for the familiar relationship dynamic with Luis may reflect an escape from the challenge of trying to meet local people and resolving tensions with Carmen. By focusing on interactions with Luis, Jared could pursue his overarching goal of developing L2 fluency through conversational practice in a situation in which he felt comfortable and in which his desire to be viewed as a competent L2 user was unchallenged. A retreat to the familiarity of his "comfort zone," however, means that Jared may have missed opportunities to seek out and appreciate aspects of the local language and culture that were different from his experiences with Spanish back home. Language-wise, exposure to a wider variety of interactional styles could have pushed Jared to expand his L2 sociolinguistic repertoire and, culture-wise, greater experiences with cultural difference could

have helped him further develop his intercultural competence (e.g., Bennett, 1993).

Structural tensions between Jared and Carmen remained unresolved by the end of his sojourn abroad. From an activity theoretical perspective, finding a solution to disturbances in the activity system is a collective endeavor that can result in innovation and transformation (e.g., Engeström, 2001). Activity theory itself can be applied not only as a descriptive model, but also as an interventionist tool to effect positive change. However, an intervention should take into account all elements of the activity system, that is, the communities of practice, rules, division of labor, mediating artifacts, and the objects of all participants, not just those of the student. In the case of Jared and Carmen, a knowledgeable program administrator could have intervened to guide Jared in looking at his interactions with Carmen from her perspective. Either by asking Carmen directly or by making hypotheses, Jared could have attempted to understand how Carmen's history with previous study abroad students and with her own children informed her notions of L2 learning, the role she assumed as a host mother, and her motives. For example, one hypothesis concerning why Carmen compared Jared unfavorably to his sister is that she wanted to compel Jared to work harder at L2 learning while in Spain. Another possible hypothesis is that, in Carmen's culture, pointing out another's flaws did not carry the same degree of potential offense as in Jared's culture. An intervention such as this example could have not only helped to mend ties between Jared and Carmen, but also to assist Jared in developing his ability to consider perspectives from other cultures and to avoid rushing to judgment about someone else's motives, both of which represent skills involved in developing intercultural competence (e.g., Bennett, 1993).

As the previous analysis indicates, activity theory allows the analyst to situate the individual L2 user in society and make connections to social structures, institutional discourses, and even globalization, on the one hand, while affirming the individual's own history and agency and focusing on local social practices, on the other. In this way, activity theory enables a unified approach to linking micro-level interactions (e.g., conversations) and macro-level phenomena (e.g., institutional discourses, roles, and norms). Taking the activity system as the unit of analysis also represents one method by which to research study abroad students as "whole people," as Coleman (2013) has suggested: "Study abroad research can escape the narrow confines of cognitive SLA and see its subjects not just as language learners, but as rounded people with complex and fluid identities and relationships which frame the way they live the study abroad experience" (p. 18).

## Limitations

The present study offers insights into the objects to which one student oriented in L2 social interaction during his sojourn abroad, how his objects shifted over time, and the role of mediation in activity systems. However, the analysis focused largely on the student perspective and only in a limited way on the perspectives of the host mother and peer. While a focus on the L2 learner is common in activity theoretical work in applied linguistics (e.g., Douglass, 2007; Lantolf & Genung, 2002), to fully understand an activity system, all participants' perspectives should be taken into consideration. Hence, a limitation of this study is the relative lack of data about the host mother's perspective and the absence of data about the age peer's perspective. Future studies would benefit from a more balanced view of the participants in the activity system. This suggestion is also in line with a call in study abroad research to incorporate more extensively the views of members of the host country, not just those of study abroad students (Kinging, 2013). An additional limitation of the

present study is the fact that Jared chose which conversations to record each week, without being asked to explain his choices; doing so may have offered additional insights.

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