

A Phenomenological Investigation of Participation in Target-Language Theatre Productions  
by Undergraduate Learners in Mixed-Level Courses

by

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## ABSTRACT

Target-language theatre productions within the university foreign language curriculum offer undergraduate students a uniquely holistic and multifaceted learning environment. One of many possible models is a mixed-level course with undergraduate and graduate students, native speakers and second language learners, collaborating on a joint production.

In this dissertation I present the findings of a phenomenological investigation into the learning experience of undergraduate non-native speaker foreign language learners who participated in target-language theatre productions alongside graduate students and native speakers. I interviewed participants about their experiences in order to better understand how working collaboratively with peers of varying language proficiency impacted their learning. I followed Seidman's (2006) methodology for conducting phenomenological interviews, and the theoretical lens I used to interpret the interview data draws on Bakhtin's concepts of dialogized heteroglossia (1981, 1986) and carnival (1965/1968), and on the ecological framework for language learning articulated by van Lier (2000, 2004, 2010).

Important conclusions from this research include the finding that, although undergraduates are initially intimidated by the presence of graduate students and native speakers, they eventually come to value them greatly as role models, and they may begin to envision themselves also someday pursuing graduate study. The initial perception of hierarchy in the course is weakened and blurred when it moves into the production phase, echoing Bakhtin's (1965/1968) observation that carnival creates a space of social equality and does away with the structures that normally govern social hierarchy. Participants enter into a dialogic relationship with the L2 text that facilitates their heteroglossic appropriation of the target language, and through their exploration of the text and the execution of their individuated responsibilities, they discover and make use of a wide variety of affordances in the learning environment. Through metaxis, they can temporarily suspend their identity and assume a fictitious target-language persona.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

In this dissertation I present the findings of my qualitative research study, a phenomenology of participation in target-language theatre productions by undergraduate (UG) nonnative speaker (NNS) learners of foreign languages. I interviewed undergraduates participating in semester-long credit-bearing French and Spanish courses that began with a classroom-based, literature focused phase (Phase I) in which students analyzed dramatic texts and read theory and criticism. The courses then transitioned into theatrical production (Phase II) and students were involved in auditions, rehearsals, memorization of lines and various technical tasks geared toward the culmination of their semester, a full-scale public production of a theatrical work in the target language. In order to better understand the learning experience in this environment, I interviewed undergraduate students in these courses, using the methods of phenomenological research to distill the essence of the experience. I interpret the findings through a Bakhtinian lens, using his concepts of dialogized heteroglossia (1981, 1986) and carnival (1965/1968) to understand how my participants experienced the theatre project. I also apply van Lier's (2000, 2004, 2010) ecological framework and the concept of affordances (Norman, 1988) to understand my participants' experience of the learning environment.

### Context of the Study

#### *Academic Setting and Participants*

The topic of this dissertation, theatre-based language learning in the university curriculum, frames the discussion within a context focused on *foreign* languages. Many of the references cited throughout, however, focus on contexts of *second* language learning and/or *world* language education (WLE), and a number of sources refer to English as a Second Language (ESL). The abbreviation *FL* is employed with reference to university departments, programs, and curricula, but *L2* designates the target language across all levels of formal as well as informal study and with respect to second and additional as well as foreign

languages. *L1* refers to the participants' native language.

This study was conducted with participants in intact mixed-level classes in two FL departments at a large midwestern research university. The classes were an established part of the curriculum and were offered at the 500-level. As such, they were open to graduate students as well as to undergraduates. The participants for the present study were recruited from among the undergraduate L1 English students in both courses.

One participant in the study is an early bilingual with two native languages. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) provides criteria for defining L1, in recognition of the fact that some individuals have more than one native language. L1 can be conceptualized in terms of one's origin, identification, competence, and/or the degree to which one functions in that language on a day-to-day basis. For the purposes of the present study, competence is the criterion of greatest importance: because I focus on L2 learners, the most relevant aspect for defining L1 is that it be the participants' fully-acquired language in which they enjoy complete proficiency, as opposed to the L2 they are in the process of acquiring.

#### *Curricular Context*

The 2007 Modern Language Association (MLA) report "New Structures for a Changed World" and the subsequent position paper issued by the MLA Ad Hoc Committee (2008) addressed several interrelated issues: the pervasive breach between language and literature study in university foreign language departments, the students' need to continue developing communicative proficiency while transitioning to literary analysis, and the present curriculum's failure to support continued linguistic development through upper levels of study. The report and position paper issued a call for curriculum integration across all levels of instruction and deliberate steps to foster "translingual and transcultural competence" (MLA 2008) among students of foreign language.

If learners are to achieve this in a meaningful way, language educators must explore ways of encouraging greater development of oral proficiency and creating alternative immersion-like experiences

within which language learning is supported and fostered. Byrnes (2008) commented that this will require an unprecedented level of explicit attention to language learning in upper-level literature courses. Magnan *et al.* (2012) noted the paucity of research into student perspectives on the curriculum in the published literature. Polio and Zyzik (2009) emphasized that curricular modifications need to be grounded in a thorough understanding of course and program goals *as seen by the students* as well as by the faculty and administration. They investigated how learner and instructor perspectives (as well as the perspectives of second language acquisition [SLA] research) do or do not converge, noting that “instructional changes can be successfully implemented only when the participants’ points of view are understood” (p. 552-553).

#### My Interest in This Research Topic

Polio and Zyzik’s (2009) concern for student goals, perceptions and beliefs and Magnan *et al.*’s (2012) observation that “the perspective of the learner is critically lacking in published studies” (p. 171) relate to my own interests in studying L2 theatre production (the rehearsal and performance of plays in the target language, in conjunction with and as an extension of the literary study of the dramatic texts, with an attendant focus on the target language-in-use in performance) as a means of integrating the university FL curriculum.

My interest in this topic stems from my own prior experience teaching and participating in target-language theatre courses. I believe that theatre offers an exceptionally rich and holistic learning environment that can stimulate both language development and the skills of literary analysis and appreciation. Target-language theatre is both undertheorized and underutilized in higher education, and I offer this dissertation as a contribution to further the scholarly attention to the topic.

I taught a Spanish Theatre Workshop (STW) course at the university level for three years prior to beginning my doctoral studies. I worked with an exclusively undergraduate population of mostly L2 Spanish learners (L1 English). I pre-selected a text which was introduced at the beginning of the semester; analyzed, memorized, and rehearsed over the course of the term; and performed at semester’s

end. The productions ranged from classic works by Cervantes and Lope de Vega to modern compositions written by student playwrights from RESAD (*Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático*, Spain's premiere institution for theatre training and one of the most prestigious theatre schools in Europe).

While completing my doctorate I had two opportunities to participate as a student, actor, and crew member in courses that culminated in target-language productions. Unlike my STW course, which was offered to undergraduates only, these courses were taught at the 500-level and included both graduate students and advanced undergraduates. Furthermore, they were structured with two distinct phases. In my STW we had begun working on the early stages of production and rehearsal at the start of the semester; in contrast, these courses consisted of a literature-oriented Phase I in seminar format during the first half of the semester. Class meetings revolved around the discussion of the primary dramatic text or texts, as well as secondary texts relating to theory, history, and analysis. Following the semester break, Phase II of these courses focused on theatrical production.

One of the courses was in Spanish, a language in which I was already proficient, but I was deeply impressed by the progress I witnessed in one of my fellow actors. Of the three male students in the class, only one wanted to act, so it was a foregone conclusion that he would play the lead male role. In addition to being an inexperienced actor and one of the less-proficient Spanish speakers in the group, this student also suffered from memory problems due to a medical condition.

It looked like a disaster in the making, both for the success of the production and for this individual. We seemed to be setting him up for linguistic and pedagogical failure, as well as public humiliation. Rehearsals were difficult, the student struggled, and everyone involved was nervous about the production's chances for success. However, as opening night drew nearer, the student began to make remarkable progress. In the last week before the performances, he made truly amazing strides in the quality of his acting, his pronunciation, and his ability to convey the expressive weight of the text. As the director remarked, "*¡por fin se puso las pilas!*" (literally, "he finally inserted his batteries," i.e. we finally

began to see the results of his efforts). The production was a resounding success, and the student decided to pursue study abroad the following year.

My other student participant experience in target-language theatre was in a French course. In that situation, I was the least proficient French speaker in the group. It was my first opportunity to experience a target-language theatre production as an intermediate learner surrounded by more-proficient speakers. I played two minor characters and carried out several backstage technical responsibilities. It was both intimidating and exhilarating. It was also quite different from my previous experience in the Spanish play.

Students who choose to participate in target-language theatre do so for many reasons. Some of them are longtime lovers of theatre and experienced performers. They may be talented language learners and already highly proficient in the L2. These are the students most likely to win large roles requiring the memorization of a lot of text. Some learners, like the young man in the aforementioned Spanish play, might be thrust into a large role by circumstance more so than by inclination, and respond accordingly. Many participants' experience is like mine in the French play: they are less-proficient speakers than their peers, and are given supporting roles and/or responsibilities as part of the production and technical crew.

These students, while they may have fewer lines to learn, have relatively more to (potentially) gain from their participation and their interaction with more-proficient peers. It is precisely these students whose learning experience has not been widely studied, and I have chosen to focus my dissertation research on them.

#### Reason for Selecting a Phenomenological Approach

I designed a phenomenological investigation of the target-language theatre production experience to establish an empirical understanding of student perspectives on this learning environment. Although some research into L2 theatre has been undertaken (Banchieri, 2010; Colangelo & Ryan-Scheutz, 2010; Essif, 2006; Lutzker, 2007; Marini-Maio, 2010), further investigation of participants' experience and perceptions of the learning environment is needed. It is worthwhile, furthermore, to investigate the



various models available for organizing this learning environment. In particular, few studies focus on mixed-level courses that include both undergraduate and graduate students, and the various advantages and disadvantages they may afford to their participants.

Phenomenology, a research approach that describes the meaning of lived experience, is well-suited to the study of something as complex and socially-embedded as L2 theatre. Phenomenology originates in the philosophical writings of Edmund Husserl (1931/1977; 1964; 1970) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945/1981), was developed as a methodology for the social sciences by Alfred Schütz (1972), and has been elaborated by authors such as Moustakas (1994), van Manen (1997), and Seidman (2006). Creswell (2007) described the basic purpose of phenomenology as the distillation of the “universal essence” (p. 58) of a phenomenon by interrogating the experience of a number of individuals and identifying common themes to uncover deeper meaning.

A further rationale for the use of phenomenology is that a number of scholars (Fortier, 2002; Garner, 1994; Rayner, 1994; Wilshire, 1982; Zarrilli, 2004, 2007) have identified it as a particularly suitable approach for studying the experience of theatre. Fortier (2002) stated that “in a manner different from literary or pictorial arts, theatre has a special relationship with the presentation of lived experience ... Theatre appears to the spectator’s senses as something to be seen and heard ... The sensory effects of theatre are central to phenomenological concerns.” (p. 39) Theatre scholars (Garner, 1994; Wilshire, 1982) have pursued phenomenology as an appropriate framework for analyzing the experience of the theatre spectator; Zarrilli (2004, 2007) used it with actors; I now propose it to understand the lived experience of participants in theatre-based language courses.

Theatre phenomenologist Stanton B. Garner defined the aims of the phenomenological approach: to redirect attention from the world as it is conceived by the abstracting, “scientific” gaze (the objective world) to the world as it appears or discloses itself to the perceiving subject (the phenomenal world); to pursue the thing as it is given to consciousness in direct experience; to

return perception to the fullness of its encounter with its environment. (1994, p. 2)

The abstracting, scientific gaze of mainstream SLA research is prone to lose sight of the individuality and complexity of socially-situated L2 activity and of the dimensionality of participants seen only as research subjects. Osborn (2006) proposed that a positivist approach to SLA research risks damaging language teaching and learning because it leads to a failure to understand the complexity of language learners as humans and language learning as a socially situated human activity. In selecting a phenomenological approach to analyze the experience of participating in target-language theatre, I seek to unmask the learner experience in order to question and perhaps supplant assumptions held by teachers and researchers about what transpires (and, perhaps, what does not transpire) among students so engaged.

Most research into target-language theatre takes for granted that participants experience it as a language learning endeavor, but to date there has been no explicit research into how they make sense of their own learning process. In a critique of SLA research trends that treat learners as representative of variables rather than as entities unto themselves, Ushioda (2009) argued that

we should not position the central participants in our research simply as language learners, since this is just one aspect of their identity ... we need to understand second language learners as ... people who are necessarily located in particular cultural and historical contexts. (p. 216)

Aspects of L2 theatre regarded as salient by instructors and researchers may or may not coincide with those that students experience as most meaningful. Therefore, before making any specific recommendations about curricular implementation of L2 theatre it is essential to consult the participants.

My goal is to gain a phenomenological understanding of participation in target-language theatre by undergraduate learners (L1 English) when they participate in mixed-level courses alongside native speaker (NS) and graduate student (GS) peers whom they perceive to be more linguistically advanced than themselves. Therefore, I am asking the following research questions: What is it like to be a participant in this type of course? What benefits and limitations do learners experience when engaged in

theatre production with more advanced peers? What do UG L2 learners experience as a result of taking this course alongside GS and NS classmates?

I have chosen undergraduate L2 learners as my population of interest in order to explore the concept of affordances (Norman, 1988; van Lier, 2000, 2004, 2010) in the learning environment of L2 theatre. Two intact courses on the theory and performance of French and Latin American/Spanish theatre, respectively, were available to me as research sites. Both courses were situated at the upper end of the curriculum and included both advanced UG and GS participants. I refer to the courses as French 555 and Spanish 555, respectively, borrowing from film and television the prefix conventionally used (in the United States) for fictitious telephone numbers. As a course number, 555 is equally fictitious, but it accurately reflects that the courses were situated at the upper reaches of the undergraduate curriculum and were also available to graduate students. I chose to focus on the experience of L1 English-speaking undergraduates who perceived themselves as less proficient than their GS and/or NS classmates in order to better understand the implications for these students of participating in this uniquely configured learning environment. Language learning depends upon interactions with more-proficient interlocutors, and on the derivation of affordances from those interactions. The focus of this investigation includes the sustained interactions that take place within a formally-constituted peer group of more-proficient speakers and comparatively less-proficient learners over one semester. The less-proficient participants have opportunities to learn from their instructor, their more-proficient classmates, and the text. L2 theatre may offer particularly rich affordances to these learners, as a complement to the more traditional literature, linguistics and culture courses typically found in the third and fourth years of the curriculum.

#### The Need for More Research Into Theatre-Based Language Learning

In the third and fourth years of study, language majors typically complete a required sequence of literature survey courses along with electives. They may also have the option of focusing on linguistics at some institutions. They develop the reading skills necessary to negotiate a variety of texts, and they are

expected to master the conventions of academic writing in the L2. Recent research (Donato & Brooks 2004; Mantero 2005, 2006; Polio & Zyzik 2009) has commented on the need for students at this level to develop their speaking proficiency to a more advanced level, and the difficulty of actually doing so in text-centered lecture classes. The incorporation of L2 theatre in the curriculum can offer a valuable complement to the existing literary/linguistic focus: it privileges spoken interaction and engages participants in repeated, ever-deepening encounters with a single text. Through memorization, rehearsal and enactment, learners hone their oral mastery and deepen their understanding of and appreciation for the target literature and the use of language in social interaction. Matthias (2011) is among those who articulate the potential value of L2 theatre for achieving the various goals that comprise an integrated FL curriculum:

Offering theater-based classes serves a wide variety of purposes, ranging from improving our students' level of proficiency in the foreign language to raising their awareness for cultural semiotics, introducing them to the much-feared field of literary analysis and criticism, responding to newer trends in foreign language pedagogy ... to helping foreign language departments gain greater public visibility, thus supporting their recruitment and retention efforts. (p. 64)

At present, where target-language theatre exists, it often involves students who are already the most-proficient speakers in their peer group, especially in the principal roles. The conventional wisdom is that those students are best equipped to handle the linguistic burden of learning and performing a large quantity of L2 text. However, the less-proficient learners have much to gain from the intensive practice that learning a target-language role entails, as well as from the interaction with their more-proficient peers. At present we lack a well-developed understanding of these learners' experience in this type of language learning environment.

Theatre-based language learning currently occupies a peripheral position in the FL curriculum. I propose that theatre could be more effectively employed to meet a broader array of needs for the

individual student as well as to enhance the overall articulation of the sequence. As a natural consequence of L2 theatre's marginality in the FL curriculum, it is also a peripheral concern in SLA research. A problem of circularity complicates the proposal to reposition L2 theatre: without research evidence to demonstrate effectiveness, FL departments are understandably reluctant to dedicate more resources to implementing L2 theatre as a way of fostering proficiency. However, the derivation of such evidence depends on having those theatre courses to study. Fruitful lines of inquiry could be developed once these courses exist: possibilities include looking at gains in global proficiency; gains with respect to specific L2 structures; the effect of the experience on L2 confidence; development in the ability to integrate the spoken L2 with appropriate gesture; vocabulary acquisition; motivation; development of an L2 identity; the impact of group relationships on the learning process; and the effect of the experience on participants' L2 writing, to name just a few. At present, to determine whether sound arguments exist for positioning theatre more centrally in the FL curriculum, we must study it in the available circumstances.

Van Lier (2000, 2004, 2010) proposed an ecological approach to SLA research that regards language development as emergent, dynamic, and socially situated within complex environments. (2000, p. 246) Van Lier's discussion of ecology as a framework within which to study cognition, language and learning includes the premise that language is studied as a network of *relations* rather than objects. (2000, p. 251) He also offers the concept of linguistic *affordances* as an alternative to *input*. Norman (1988) originally introduced the term to refer to "the perceived and actual properties of [a] thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used." (p. 9) For van Lier, an affordance is

a particular property of the environment that is relevant ... to an active, perceiving organism in that environment ... What becomes an affordance depends on what the organism does, what it wants, and what is useful for it ... If the language learner is active and engaged, she will perceive linguistic affordances and use them for linguistic action. (2000, p. 252)

The ecological perspective views the learner as situated within an environment full of language opportunities. The learner perceives and is able to make use of these opportunities in various ways, depending on perceptual salience, developmental level, motivation, communicative need, and other social and affective factors. It is the learner's engagement with the linguistic opportunities through his or her activity that turns them into affordances. Anything a learner is able to derive from an exchange becomes an affordance, and may or may not coincide with what the instructor anticipates as being useful or instructive.

As an L2 learning environment, theatre offers a wide range of potential affordances. These include: multiple instances of repeated, sustained engagement with a single text over several weeks or months, during which participants undertake fine-grained analysis of the parts in order to assemble a coherent whole; rehearsal with the goal of routinizing L2 forms, together with culturally and contextually appropriate gestures; focus on pronunciation and prosody; the development of L2 confidence; contextualization of the target culture; and the opportunity to explore the L2's resources for enacting, participating in, and negotiating situations of conflict and emotion. By entering into deep and detailed analysis of a text's content, learners can appropriate the target language forms and structures through which the particular situations of a given play are created, negotiated and resolved. According to Cunico (2005), dramatic text is fertile territory for exploring the construction of culture through language because it offers interactions suffused with condensed meaning in a way in which normally occurring exchanges are not. "In drama, anything said by the characters is relevant and loaded with meaning: it contributes to our understanding of the characters' personality and of their conversational goals." (pp. 23-24) A further advantage is "the opportunity of slowing down and re-playing the dialogue to focus on the characters' strategies to manage them." (p. 24)

Although the texts are deliberate artistic constructions rather than naturally occurring exchanges, they lend themselves to exploration and experimentation. Part of working with a dramatic text is the

process of testing out different interpretations of the lines, shaping the interaction through the many possible variations in pace, the use of pauses, and vocal inflection. Engaging in this process helps students to understand how small differences on the micro-levels of discourse can influence the overall message.

Students are also afforded the opportunity to explore types of language they may rarely see in more conventional classroom, especially language associated with conflict and intense emotional outbursts. Because conflict is the *sine qua non* of drama, the language of theatre texts is often fraught with contention and discord, and richly evocative. Dramatic texts confront taboo topics and place their characters in extreme situations. Here we find the language of terror and mourning, seduction, denunciation, aggression, and heartbreak. In literature classes, students may have opportunities to read this kind of language, but they rarely get to *use* it in target-language interactions. L2 theatre productions give students opportunities to explore the language of conflict through enactment of dramatic situations.

The element of roleplay inherent in theatre may also be beneficial to language learning by freeing learners from the constraints of their day-to-day identities and allowing them to experiment with language. Sosulski (2008) commented that learners “have *license* in dramatic play to experiment with things like vocal inflection, intonation, accents, and cadence when their own personalities are allowed to recede into the background.” (p. 4) This *metaxis*, the temporary suspension of one’s own identity when roleplaying a character, sets the L2 theatre course apart from other literature courses. Although learners do encounter highly emotionally charged language through L2 novels or poetry, the classroom-based study of literature does nothing to affect the social roles of the students and the professor, and the text remains an object of study discussed within a narrow discourse mode (see Seedhouse, 2004). When the focus becomes *enactment* of texts rather than discussion, the imaginary world of the L2 community is created and students suspend their social identity of “L2 student” to assume the fictitious identities of their roles. This brings about a qualitatively different encounter with the text.

### A Bakhtinian Perspective on Target-Language Theatre

The participants' own actions, decisions, perceptions, and experiences shape these linguistic encounters and merit exploration in this study. Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) dialogic heteroglossia offers a lens for examining participants' exploration of the dialogic nature of the target language through participation in L2 theatre, shedding light on their understanding of their language learning experience and illuminating its potential to help achieve the goal of curriculum integration. Bakhtin (1986) frames language as contextualized utterances that exist in an embedded relationship with previous and subsequent utterances. All language derives from the social sphere and retains the quality of addressivity, existing in a dialogic relationship between speaker and addressee. It is not generated originally by individuals, but rather appropriated from pre-existing speech genres, and one's speech can be said to "belong" to him or her only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation ... it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293-294)

The Bakhtinian perspective on theatre in the target language adds a layer of intercultural nuance, as participants speak the already heteroglossic words of the playwright, thus entering an existing network of dialogic relationships between and among the play's characters, the playwright, and the culture that produced the work. By appropriating the words and populating them with their own intentions, participants appropriate the L2 dialogically as they use it to accomplish the various socially-mediated tasks required to mount a theatrical production.

Furthermore, Bakhtin's (1965/1968) analysis of carnival's relationship to the subversion of hierarchies as well as the destruction of the old and the emergence of the new sheds light on participants' comments about how their relationship to their language studies changed over the course of the project.



Phase I established the structure of a typical literature seminar, in which authority rested with the professor and the graduate students tended to dominate class discussions. The dynamics of the course changed significantly in Phase II when the focus moved from the classroom to the theater and from discussion to production. In the theater, expertise was more distributed and the undergraduates were better able to contribute to the course on more equal footing, in spite of their perceptions of lower language proficiency and their inhibitions about speaking the target language. They also reported that it was transformative to witness exchanges in which the professor did not know how to answer a question, solve a problem, or, especially, pronounce something in the text. When they witnessed that she, too, was learning new things about theatre, the play's text, and the language, they experienced it as surprising, but also liberating and encouraging.

#### Summary of Methodology

This brief overview of the curricular issues related to university FL study, the place theatre currently occupies relative to the wider FL curriculum, the social dimensions of participation in L2 theatre and the particular affordances it may hold for less-proficient learners demonstrates that target-language theatre is a complex entity, a whole greater than the sum of its parts, that cannot easily be abstracted from its institutional setting nor from the perspectives and unique contributions of its individual participants. To understand this multifaceted, socially-situated phenomenon, I conducted non-directed phenomenological interviews with participants of French 555 and Spanish 555, exploring their past, present, and anticipated future experiences with language learning and theatre. During the semester-long courses, I collaborated with the instructor and students as a participant observer. I identified undergraduate participants from an L1 English background and invited them to be interviewed for the study.

Seidman (2006) recommended incorporating a pilot study in phenomenological research design, particularly for novice interviewers. I completed a pilot study with students from French 555, which gave

me an opportunity to gain direct experience with the phenomenological interviewing process, identify my own strengths and weaknesses in working with it, and refine my approach ahead of my main data collection with the students in Spanish 555. This allowed me to verify and improve my methodology and it provides a basis for comparison of my findings.

I employed a *post hoc* single-interview protocol in the pilot study with the French 555 students, in which I asked them to reflect on the entire experience of participating in the French 555 course and play. Subsequently, I revised my approach for the Spanish 555 data collection to follow Seidman's (2006; pp. 16-18) three-interview series. In the first one, I asked the participants to reflect on their past experiences with language learning and with involvement in theatre productions of any sort. The second interview focused on the details of the individuals' experiences with the Spanish play, and the third one explored intellectual and emotional connections between the experience and the participants' lives. All interviews for both the pilot study and the main data collection were conducted in English. They were conducted several weeks apart during the latter half of the semester, in order to explore the experience as it unfolded over time. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. In the next phase of the phenomenological approach, they were analyzed for important themes.

The last stage in the process is interpretation, in which the researcher identifies the meaning he or she has made of the data that has been collected and analyzed. I applied a Bakhtinian lens to the findings that emerged from my analysis, and I considered them in assessing the potential value of wider implementation of L2 theatre in the FL curriculum. I also looked at the participants' descriptions of their experiences in light of the ecological framework for language learning and identified aspects of the learning environment that constituted affordances for them.

#### Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study is to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of this learning environment's affordances for post-secondary L2 learners, those of middling and lower proficiency as

well as our most linguistically advanced students. The analysis of my participants' experience will be useful to instructors and administrators interested in the benefits and limitations of a theatre performance component in the university FL curriculum. It is time to reevaluate a course model that holds promise for fostering rather than stifling the ability to interact verbally in the target language, promoting a vivid experiential understanding of the target culture, raising the FL department's profile within the institution, and inviting collaboration with other departments. As the profession comes to terms with the challenge of addressing curricular fragmentation and providing students with a more coherent learning experience, it is imperative that we investigate and understand the perspectives of all the stakeholders, and notably the students, ahead of implementing curricular changes. Precisely because I believe strongly that theatre-based language learning holds promise as a means to integrate the acquisition of speaking skills, grammatical knowledge and literary understanding at the heart of the university FL curriculum, it is necessary to undertake a phenomenological investigation of the theatre-based language learning experience to question that conviction, ascertain what L2 theatre means to participants and how, from their standpoint, its possibilities and limitations are understood. At present, the theoretical foundations for theatre-based language learning are beginning to be articulated. A fuller research-based understanding of the learning environment of L2 theatre depends upon its having enough of a presence in the FL curriculum to earn the wider attention of the research community. I will help establish this presence.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

It has always been my intuition that target-language theatre offers the potential for a particularly rich and holistic language-learning environment in which participants are able to find, and often create, niches that satisfy their individual skills, abilities and linguistic needs rather than attempting to conform to a one-size-fits-all syllabus. A complex, collaborative project such as the production of a play transforms the classroom community into an interdependent network in which actions and tasks are inherently goal-oriented, participants are motivated by the high-stakes consequences of their success or failure, and affective involvement is all but assured. The repetition and internalization involved in memorizing lines, the kinetic dimension inherent in the activity, and the fine-grained attention to how culture is embodied and enacted are aspects of theatre-based language learning that are difficult to achieve in the regular literature classroom.

However, a theatrical production requires a sizable investment of time, energy, and attention on a single dramatic work. When these resources are lavished on one play, they carry an opportunity cost: students deepen their knowledge in a specific area rather than broadening their knowledge in other areas. From a curricular standpoint, then, theatre-based language learning makes sense *in conjunction with* a literature curriculum, to enrich students' appreciation of a particular work, author, culture, and time period against a backdrop of wider familiarity with the language and its literature. If theatre-based language learning were to *supplant* the study of literature, however, we would actually risk impoverishing the curriculum: students would achieve deep but relatively decontextualized knowledge of a single work, and they might not be afforded the opportunity to make broader connections.

As a practitioner seeking to understand how best to integrate theatre-based language learning into the wider foreign language curriculum, my goal in this dissertation is to explore the potential affordances and limitations of the experience as seen by the students and compare their observations with the

conventional wisdom and the existing research literature on the ways in which theatre- and drama-based learning have been investigated. To that end, this literature review will cover a wide range of subtopics.

The first section of the literature review will deal with literature specifically focusing on target-language theatre, and it will begin with a clarification of a number of terms that occur frequently in the research literature but that are not always applied in consistent ways, particularly across the different fields that this dissertation touches on. Next I will provide an overview of perspectives from the field of SLA, beginning with the earliest published research into theatre-based language learning. I will examine the research related to theatre-based language learning at the secondary level, and then I will turn to theatre-based language learning in higher education. Although my specific focus is on a course model that culminates in a public theatrical performance, this literature review will survey publications related to a number of different models: those that involve students in theatre appreciation as audience members rather than in theatre production; those in which students rehearse and enact scenes but that exclude performance to an audience; those that involve performance before peer audiences; those that perform to a wider, perhaps a public, audience; and those that take place in an interdisciplinary context.

In the second section of the literature review, I will consider the perspectives of theatre & drama (T&D) professionals, and I will look at research into the kinds of improvisational activities that often form part of the rehearsal process for a more formal production.

The third portion of the literature review will focus on curriculum issues more directly related to the concerns of foreign language departments, including the entrenched breach between language-focused and literature-focused courses; the need for undergraduate FL programs to foster greater proficiency among their students, particularly in extemporaneous speaking skills; and the importance of investigating student perspectives when making policy recommendations that impact curriculum. I will articulate the foundations of my choice to focus on the undergraduates in these mixed courses, whose self-perceptions of efficacy and relative proficiency were such a pervasive part of their descriptions of the experience. I

will also situate the present study within the perspective of curriculum integration and motivate it by indicating a lacuna in the research literature that it attempts to remedy.

Next, I will consider the literature that suggests that target-language theatre exhibits specific qualities and features that render it suitable for addressing some of the aforementioned curricular issues. I will summarize the available literature on the various potential affordances of the theatre-based language learning experience, including repeated and prolonged engagement with text, memorization of lines and routinization of verbal and gestural components of language, the deliberate combination of language with gesture, and the explicit focus on targetlike pronunciation and prosody. I will also survey literature examining the relationship between target-language theatre and L2 confidence, the opportunity to contextualize the presentation of the target culture through theatrical enactment, and the ability to explore the linguistic dimensions of conflict and emotional situations through dramatization of theatrical texts.

I will also briefly review the research on the social dimensions of participation in a theatre production in the target language. In light of the unique social context of my study examining mixed-level courses involving both undergraduate and graduate students, I will note examples from the literature that shed light on group dynamics, on participation by students at different levels, and on participants' self-perceptions of their performance within the context of groups that encompassed a range of proficiency levels.

The next section of the chapter will review the relevant theoretical literature on Bakhtin (1965/1968; 1981; 1986), dialogism, heteroglossia, and carnival, as well as van Lier (2000, 2004, 2010), the ecological framework for language learning, and the concept of affordances. I will then situate the present study within its conceptual framework, phenomenology, and establish the compatibility of a phenomenological approach with Bakhtin's theories and the ecological framework for language learning.

#### Literature on Theatre-based Language Learning

This section of the literature review will examine the past several decades' research literature on

L2 language learning through theatre and drama. Although theatre and drama have been used at various times through history to foster language learning, it is only recently that these methods have begun to be formally incorporated within higher education and treated as a subject of academic inquiry into educational theory and curriculum design. Therefore, this portion of my literature review will focus on work being done in theatre-based language education in contemporary instructional settings, especially where it occurs in the context of an academic research program.

#### *Clarification of Terms*

Theatre-based language learning stands at the intersection of a number of fields: Theatre and Drama, Second Language Acquisition, World Language Education, and language and literature study within the context of foreign language departments. A clarification of terminology is necessary at the outset because, in these fields, precisely the same terms are used with (sometimes very) different meanings.

#### *Drama, Theatre, and Theater*

*Drama* is the first and most essential of the necessary clarifications. In FL departments, the term *drama* denotes a genre of literary text; it is juxtaposed with *theatre* to distinguish the text-as-literature from the text-in-performance. In T&D departments, as well as in schools of education, *drama* is understood to mean something quite different: as opposed to *theatre*, which implies performance before an audience, usually of a fixed text, and usually as a repeatable occurrence (Wilshire, 1982), *drama* is used to mean a collaborative improvised scenario through which the participants explore an idea or theme. According to Weiss (2008), “the fundamental difference between DiE [*Drama in Education*] activities and theatre work ... [is that] in the latter there is an audience and a rehearsed play, the former lacks an external audience and the group activities are unrehearsed.” (p. 3) Some practitioners make the further distinction that drama in this sense is, by definition, not repeatable. This activity may be called Drama in Education, educational drama, creative drama, creative dramatics, or process drama.

In trying to sort out the two acceptations of *drama*, we move from *drama-as-literary-text* (infinitely repeatable, not bound by time and space, with reader as both “performer” and “audience” simultaneously) to *theatre-as-text-enacted-in-performance* (temporally and spatially bounded, quasi-repeatable, and performed before an audience) to *drama-as-enacted-improvisation* (a unique event in time and space, unrepeatable and usually not performed for an audience separate from the participants). In other words, *drama* paradoxically can mean both “text alone” and “no text at all.” Furthermore, some authors are not consistent with the norms of their fields in how they observe the distinction. Some references, for example, use *drama* when speaking about the enactment of a text. There is also inconsistency of usage between the conventions of *theatre* to denote the art form and *theater* to designate the place of performance, versus *theater* as the Standard American English spelling of what in British English is spelled *theatre*. In the interest of clarity I shall establish the following designations: *theatre* is used in reference to the enactment of a text of some type, however cursory (with the understood goal of eventual performance, even if only for an audience of peers), and *theater* specifies the place of performance; I avoid the problematic term *drama* altogether, and use instead *dramatic text* to refer to the literary genre when regarded as text alone, *theatre text* when it serves as a script for enactment and performance, and *improvisational drama* to refer to non-text-based, non-performance-oriented activity. When a quoted source uses a term in a way that differs from these parameters or might otherwise cause confusion, I provide a clarification, italicized and in brackets, within the quote.

#### *Performance, Production, and Rehearsal*

A few other terms need to be mentioned, as there is notable overlap between the vocabulary of the theatre and that of linguistics and SLA. In the Chomskyan tradition, *performance* refers to speakers’ real-world use of language (frequently error-ridden and fragmentary), as opposed to the *competence* of the ideal speaker-listener’s fully proficient knowledge of the speech community’s language. The theatrical sense of *performance* before an audience need not have anything to do with spoken language



(although in practice it often does involve speech). Both understandings of the term bear a relationship to definitions offered by Goffman in *Frame Analysis* (1974): “that arrangement which transforms an individual into a stage performer, the latter, in turn, being an object that can be looked at in the round and at length without offense and looked to for engaging behavior, by persons in an ‘audience’ role.” (p. 124) In a footnote to his own definition, Goffman also recommends one from Hymes (1973), characterizing *performance* as “an attribute of any behavior, if the doer accepts or has imputed to him a responsibility for being evaluated in regard to it” (Goffman, 1974, p. 124) Clearly, theatrical performance is more literally connected to Goffman’s understanding, while linguistic performance falls under the broader Hymesian understanding, transforming an utterance, rather than an individual, into an object of study for the linguist audience. In this dissertation, *performance* will refer to “theatrical performance” unless otherwise specified.

*Production*, along similar lines, is used by linguists and SLA professionals to refer to language (whether spoken or written) generated by an individual (as opposed to the *reception* of language generated by another and heard or read by the individual). Herein, *production* is used in the theatrical sense, to refer to the public staging of a performed play unless specifically noted otherwise.

Likewise, *rehearsal* has a linguistic meaning as well as a theatrical meaning; while both refer to practice (often of verbal utterances in both cases) in advance of presentation before (an)other person(s), there are important differences between the private, inaudible (because either mental or subvocal) rehearsal of linguistic items and the visible, enacted, and usually socially mediated rehearsal activity undertaken as one of the principal components of theatre production. Unless specified as *linguistic rehearsal*, in this dissertation the term refers to the latter.

### *Play and Role*

*Play* and *role* are two other terms that have differing acceptations within linguistics and theatre. *Play* is understood by linguists as repetitive, ludic use of language. A number of recent studies (Belz,

2002; Bjork-Willén & Cromdal, 2009; Broner & Tarone, 2001; DaSilva Iddings & McCafferty, 2005; Jensen & Hermer, 1998; Sullivan, 2000) have explored facets of play within language acquisition research, employing a range of operational definitions with varying degrees of focus on language production alongside the accompanying activities which also constitute play (particularly among younger learners, as in Bjork-Willén & Cromdal, 2008; Broner & Tarone, 2001; and DaSilva Iddings & McCafferty, 2005, who studied preschoolers, fifth graders, and third graders, respectively). Broner and Tarone (2001) characterized ludic language play as “a use of language that does not involve the negotiation of meaning” (p. 364) and they noted that it may contribute to the development of interlanguage. They also noted that play can be seen as both “fun,” i.e. for the learner’s own enjoyment and self-amusement, and “serious,” for purposes of linguistic rehearsal. Belz (2002) adopted the neutral definition “the conscious repetition or modification of linguistic forms such as lexemes or syntactic patterns.” (p. 16) In theatre, a *play* is a dramatic work (usually, but not necessarily, a literary text) intended for presentation before an audience; as a verb, *play* also refers, somewhat paradoxically, to the work of the actor in representing his or her role. As in linguistics, both theatrical senses of the term can imply fun as well as seriousness. (For a more complete discussion of the various senses of the word *play* with respect to the theatre, see Barish, 1981, pp. 72-77.) Here, *play* primarily refers to the activities of the theatre; conscious repetition and manipulation of linguistic forms is designated *language play*.

*Role* refers to the function exercised by an individual, whether in verbal interaction or within the framework of an activity. In the theatre context, it may refer to one’s character within a play and/or to one’s responsibilities within the organization of the production (for example, the stage manager and the costume designer virtually never appear on stage, yet they exercise significant roles). In instances where clarification of *role* becomes necessary, *literary role* and *production role* distinguish the two senses. *Role* has also been adopted as a useful metaphor in sociology alongside other theatre concepts (see Goffman, 1974, and Hare & Blumberg, 1988, for a discussion of role theory, and Wilshire, 1982, for a discussion of

the limits of theatre as a metaphor for social interactions). Halliday's (1994) systemic functional linguistics also made use of the term *role* to refer to the status and other relevant social attributes of participants in an interaction. This dissertation focuses primarily on the theatrical context. Where necessary, *social role* denotes the Hallidayan sense of the term in which interactants orient to one another and exercise functions in contexts outside of theatre.

### *Perspectives from SLA and FL Professionals*

#### *Overview of Foundational Publications in Theatre-based Language Learning*

Recent years have witnessed a burgeoning interest in the application of theatre and improvisational drama methods to second and foreign language learning. In part, this is an outgrowth of efforts to implement Drama in Education (in the L1) as an established part of educational praxis. Practitioners such as Heathcote and Bolton (1998) and Wagner (1998, 2002) have done much to promote the use of improvisational drama and theatre in educational contexts across the curriculum, especially at the primary and secondary levels and with a particular focus on the language arts (Wagner 1998).

An important early contribution to the research literature on the use of theatre in language learning was S. Smith (1984). A glance at the reference section of this monograph is illuminating: in a list just over a page long, the author cited theatre theorists and practitioners, applied linguists, second language acquisition and language education theorists, and a number of plays, but not a single one of his sources was specifically focused on target-language theatre. Prior to S. Smith, Via (1976) had written about using improvisational drama and text-centered scene study activities for ESL learners. As the initial publications laying the groundwork in the field, S. Smith and Via adopted a practical orientation and covered a wide range of topics, including an overview of the parallels between language teaching and the theatre arts, teaching strategies for the rehearsal process, theatre strategies for importation into the language classroom, examples of useful dramatic texts, and a step-by-step guide for readers wishing to undertake L2 theatre production.

In the decades since the publication of these two sources, the body of research literature has grown considerably and the theoretical grounding of theatre-based language learning has been developed, although there remains work to be done. In 2004, in an issue of *GFL Journal* dedicated to the topic, Jung published the third installment of an international multilingual bibliography on theatre and improvisational drama in FL teaching. Together, the three sections of his bibliography aggregated over 500 entries on the topic, primarily in English, German and French. In 2006, Essif published an up-to-date, more comprehensive and critical realization of the work begun by Via and S. Smith with his guide to L2 theatre production. There now exists a peer-reviewed journal, *Scenario* (<http://www.ucc.ie/en/scenario/>), established in 2007 and dedicated specifically to improvisational drama and theatre in foreign and second language education, and articles on the subject have appeared in many other journals. Dissertation Abstracts International lists a number of theses and dissertations on improvisational drama- and theatre-related topics specific to language learning and acquisition, most written within the past decade (Fujita, 2008; Haught, 2005; Kratochvil, 2006; Mattevi, 2005; Rivera Martinez, 1996; Shand, 2008). Several recently published books, notably Lutzker (2007), Marini-Maio & Ryan-Scheutz (2010), and Ryan & Marini-Maio (2011) represent important contributions to the research literature. Lutzker undertook a dual-focus study on the benefits of an improvisational clowning course to language teachers' professional experience and the academic, personal and social growth experienced by tenth-grade participants in a foreign language play. Marini-Maio & Ryan-Scheutz (2010) is an edited volume on teaching Italian through theatre, primarily at the university level, although Colangelo and Ryan-Scheutz (2010) focused on Italian theatre production with secondary students. Ryan & Marini-Maio (2011) expands the focus of the previous volume to include other languages. DiNapoli (2003), Donnery (2009), Fleming (1998), Gasparro and Falletta (1994), Haught (2005), Haught and McCafferty (2008), Kao and O'Neill (1998), Liu (2002), Matthias (2007), Moody (2002), Norris (2000), Stinson and Freebody (2006), and Vilanova Vila-Abadal (2001) investigated improvisational drama within second- and foreign-language learning

contexts. Haught (2005), Haught and McCafferty (2008), Louis (2005), Retzlaff (2008), Schewe (2008), and Shier (2002) focused on the bodily-kinesthetic aspects of improvisational drama-based approaches to the L2. Schewe (1993) made an important theoretical contribution in the early stage of the field's development. Blair (2008) undertook an investigation into the cognitive effects of the acting process, and her work was expanded upon by Kemp (2012). Burke and O'Sullivan (2002) and Maley and Duff (2005) have published books of resources and techniques to assist FL professionals with the implementation of dramatic activities in the L2 classroom, and Essif (2006), Marini-Maio and Ryan-Scheutz (2010), S. Smith (1984), and Via (1976) have contributed guidelines for instituting full-scale play production. Elgar (2002) studied the affordances of student playwriting in ESL.

Researchers specifically investigating the use of theatre and the performance of L2 texts included Aita (2009), Banchieri (2010), Banning (2003), Carlson (2009), Colangelo and Ryan-Scheutz (2010), Cunico (2005), Del Fattore-Olson (2010), Haggstrom (1992), Koerner (2004), Lauer (2008), Lutzker (2007), Lys *et al.* (2002), Marini-Maio (2010), Miccoli (2003), Noé-LeSassier and Boyd (2010), Ryan-Scheutz (2010), Ryan-Scheutz and Colangelo (2004), Savoia (2010), Shier (2002), S. Smith (1984), Sosulski (2008), and Staddon (2007). These contributions are discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

### *L2 Theatre at the Secondary Level*

The theatre-focused portion of Lutzker (2007) involved participants in an L2 English play performed by Grade 10 students (L1 German) in a Waldorf School in Germany. Lutzker collected survey data from all participants, supplemented by observations from teachers and parents. He then identified five of the students for more specific case study analysis. Lutzker looked at the students' linguistic as well as their social and personal development over the course of their participation in the English play. Lutzker identified areas of growth and development beyond language skills alone for each of the five students he described in depth: one young woman made significant progress with her social anxiety (p. 345-352); a

young man who had never excelled in his scholastic pursuits flourished when he had the opportunity to apply his design talent and carpentry skills to building the set (p. 328-338). One participant (p. 318-328), an academically strong student in English even before the play experience, expressed reaching a point where she no longer even noticed that she was interacting in a foreign language rather than in her mother tongue (p. 324). As significant as this is in terms of language acquisition, Lutzker commented that it was of secondary importance for this participant because it was merely one aspect of the larger breakthrough she experienced, the ability to overcome an at-times crippling self-consciousness and absorb herself in *what* she was doing rather than constantly evaluating *how* she was doing.

Colangelo and Ryan-Scheutz (2010) advocated for the use of theatre in the high school Italian classroom in the United States, either in the form of full-scale play production or as within-class text-based scene work, as appropriate to local circumstances. Noting the constraints of state and national assessment criteria, as well as the heterogeneous and not necessarily self-selected populations of high school language classes, the authors encouraged high school FL faculty to consider incorporating L2 theatre in the secondary curriculum by emphasizing the connections between theatre and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) national standards, the advanced placement (AP) Italian language and culture course, and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences.

#### *Non-performance-oriented Models: Students as Audience*

Aita (2009) outlined the Theatre in Language Learning (TiLL) model. TiLL bears a resemblance to Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA): in Aita's description of TiLL, professional actors (native speakers of the target language) performed authentic target-language plays for middle-school-aged students. Prior to the performance, students had the opportunity to read and study the text, and following the performance they were able to converse with the actors in the target language to discuss the play. Vienna's English Theatre has been producing TYA performances using the TiLL model for twelve- to fourteen-year-olds in Austria since 1966. Audience participation was a component of TiLL productions:

prior to the performance students were introduced to target-language songs in class, and then when the songs were used as part of the performance, the students were invited to sing along. Aita described the model as centered on reading, seeing, and hearing the text, with the goal of exposing the young audiences to theatre semiotics alongside the target language.

Noé-LeSassier and Boyd (2010) reported on a university Italian course developed around opera, studied for its linguistic content, its portrayal of culture, and, especially, its relationship to questions of identity and role. The authors noted that “for language learners, such role-play is a metaphor for the psychological experience of finding a voice in another language and culture.” (p. 229) Their course was aimed at beginning learners (L1 English); the opera librettos were not the main course text. Learners did read the lyrics of some arias, but the course also made use of visuals, program notes and summaries, press reviews, interviews and commentary from critics. The course culminated in a field trip to attend a performance by a professional opera company.

#### *Nonexhibitional Theatre: Enactment of Texts Without a Performance Component*

Haught (2005) investigated the mediational affordances of dramatic language activity; however, although the project began with an orientation toward improvisational drama, Haught adapted it to the needs and requests of his participants and ultimately spend much of the time working with texts. The scenes and one-act plays were never performed for an external audience; borrowing from DiNapoli (2003), the activities in Haught’s study can be described as *nonexhibitional* theatre. Haught worked with seven adult ESL learners (L1 Russian, Japanese and Korean). The participants had studied English for anywhere from one to 20+ years and had lived in the United States for between one month and two years, but all were beginning to intermediate speakers. All but one reported having very limited interaction with native speakers. One of the most notable outcomes of Haught’s study was his participants’ expressed preference for working with texts rather than with improvisational drama. Haught attributed part of this to the participants’ limited vocabulary, which they felt was inadequate to the task of improvising in the L2;

he noted their positive response to working with texts that provided them with useful chunks and collocations, idiomatic expressions and cultural references. Haught also commented on the spontaneous discussions about cultural practices that arose as a result of interrogating the texts.

Cunico (2005) described a series of classroom activities with intermediate/advanced university students of Italian and with adult learners (both groups L1 English) in a continuing education course. She outlined six major trends in the use of theatre and improvisational drama in the FL classroom (full-scale play production; the implementation of bodily-kinesthetic L2 improvisational drama activities; dramatic literature as cultural artifact; drama as “language in use”, [p. 22: it was unclear whether by this Cunico meant *dramatic text* or *dramatic improvisation*; her use of the term *drama* was undifferentiated throughout the article, although she described both text-based and improvisation-based activities at different points]; a stylistic approach for literary appreciation of dramatic texts; and “global simulation,” [p. 22, defined as the elaboration of an L2 communicative situation involving information-gathering, task-completion and role play simulations]). Cunico then described her ethnographically-grounded approach to using a dramatic text to explore culture and identity. Using a short play dealing with emotional entanglements and infidelity among four friends, Cunico described activities that encouraged students to use the L2 to explore the characters’ relationships and their own reactions to the situation, to express mood and attitude through the dialogue, and to interrogate different understandings of how Italian culture is represented and enacted. Cunico’s students held in-class rehearsals and “mock auditions,” (p. 27), but no mention was made of performance before either a peer audience or the public.

#### *Theatre Performance to Peer Audiences*

Staddon (2007) reported the experience of using a one-act absurdist play with university learners (L1 English) of beginning (second semester) French. The play was adapted to an accessible level of linguistic complexity, reworked to accommodate the casting needs of the class, and rehearsed over a six-week period before performance to an audience of peers. Staddon reported that the most significant gain



was increased student confidence in their use of the L2.

Miccoli (2003) worked with Brazilian university students (L1 Portuguese) studying ESL. Her rather large group of participants (n=37) was heterogeneous in terms of English proficiency. She described a course design with a three-phase structure, beginning with improvisational drama activities, followed by an introduction to theatre techniques, and finally direct work with short plays that were performed in class for a peer audience.

Haggstrom (1992) worked with university students (L1 English) of French. Her study explicitly positioned the use of theatre at the transition point between language and literature study, as a means to facilitate students' analysis and appreciation of L2 texts. Borrowing an existing theatre-based methodology for improving spoken French, Dulong's *Art et progrès été*, Haggstrom adapted it for the purposes of developing her students' ability to analyze the relationships between characters and the function of scenes in relation to the play's plot, stating that "my goal is to create not actors but literary critics." (p. 16) The students prepared scenes which were performed in class before a peer audience.

Sosulski (2008) described a workshop course in period acting for advanced university students of German (L1 English). The students studied five plays from different time periods, became familiar with the theatrical traditions and cultural context surrounding each of the plays, and performed scenes for the peer group (peer evaluation formed part of the assessment for the course). Sosulski also included a component of ensemble dramatic improvisation to facilitate spontaneous production in the target language. An additional element of Sosulski's course design was that the students, not the instructor, directed the scenes. He credited this with helping the students to take greater responsibility for understanding and communicating the author's intention, and for initiating interactions in the target language.

Carson (2012) described Trinity College Dublin's English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program, in which postgraduate students foster their English speaking and writing skills for academic

purposes through a variety of tasks designed to provide multiple opportunities for different types of output and discourse. One of the curricular components of Trinity's EAP program is the collaborative writing, production, and performance of a drama. The scripts may be literary adaptations or original works, and participants perform before their peers and then field questions from assessors. Carson framed the learning context in terms of agency, autonomy, and identity, and cited drama- and theatre-based learning as beneficial for lowering affective barriers, providing the benefits and challenges of collaboration, and fostering students' perceptions of growth in their language proficiency.

#### *Models Integrating Performance to Wider Audiences*

Dodson (2002) described the adaptation and performance of a play as part of a Language and Pronunciation through Theatre course in a US university. Her participants were six adult advanced ESL students (L1 Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese) in an intensive English program. They benefited in terms of affect and cultural learning as well as improved English proficiency. Dodson also created an online forum as part of the course; students participated in online discussions and published their class writing assignments on the website. The performance was conducted in a readers' theatre format and was attended by other ESL students and faculty from the institution.

Within Georgetown University's literacy-oriented curriculum, Lauer (2008) undertook the dramatic adaptation and production of a novel read as part of an upper-division literature course, although participation was not limited to students in the course and Lauer worked with a mixed group in terms of proficiency levels. The play was produced as an extracurricular activity and performed for the public. The original intention was to hold a staged reading, but at the urging of the students, the project developed into a full-fledged performance. Lauer noted gains among the participants in the increasing amount of L2 metalanguage they used to discuss the play over the course of the rehearsal period and their growing mastery of L2 gesture, as well as vocabulary acquisition. Lauer also noted positive corollary effects for the German department in terms of increased enrollments for the literature course in which the dramatized

novel was taught, as well as inquiries about future plays.

Moody (2002) described a study that included two groups of learners of Spanish as a foreign language (L1 English). The first group consisted of highly motivated university undergraduates enrolled in a Golden Age Theatre course, who staged a public performance of a play. Moody reported that many of these students were Spanish majors or minors and their proficiency ranged from upper-intermediate through advanced. The second group consisted of high-school sophomores tracked into a low-level Spanish 2 course following poor performance in the first year. In collaboration with the instructor, Moody attempted to engage the high-school students in writing and performing interview dialogues and mini-dramas. He encountered resistance, and found that when both proficiency and motivation are low, dramatic activities stand little chance of success. The university group, on the other hand, demonstrated both high proficiency and high motivation and was able to successfully produce and perform a difficult seventeenth-century text.

Ryan-Scheutz and Colangelo (2004) described the Italian Theatre Workshop (ITW) they developed as a one-semester, credit-bearing course that culminated in a public performance. The participants were university students of Italian (L1 English except one student, L1 Spanish). The ITW also functioned as a pilot study into SLA research on proficiency gains through theatre-based language learning. The researchers administered (unofficial) pre- and post-workshop Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI) along with pre- and post-production tests in reading and writing, as well as surveys to assess students' impressions of their own improvement and confidence in reading, writing, listening and speaking Italian and their perception of increased cultural knowledge. The eleven participants in the study demonstrated varying levels of proficiency (intermediate-low to advanced-mid) on the first OPI; on the second administration, four of them had risen by one sub-level and the rest maintained their initial score.

Notably, of the four students whose scores rose, two were not concurrently enrolled in another Italian course (indicating that all of their exposure to the language, and thus all of their improvement, was

attributable to their participation in the ITW); additionally, three of the four were stage managers and designers rather than actors, indicating that participants derived benefit from studying the play's text and using Italian to carry out tasks associated with the production even if they were not memorizing and rehearsing spoken lines. Ryan-Scheutz and Colangelo observed significant vocabulary acquisition among the ITW participants, and they speculated that the OPI may have been too broad an instrument to reveal the more specific linguistic gains that learners may have made over a single semester in terms of grammatical structure (a finding echoed by Magnan and Back, 2007, in their investigation of gains made by learners in a semester-length study-abroad context). The authors suggested that more fine-tuned testing instruments be developed for future research.

Ryan-Scheutz (2010) addressed the question of assessment as part of course design in a follow-up to the 2004 pilot study. She advocated the use of proficiency- and performance-based evaluation criteria and a hybrid assessment model including grammar and vocabulary, reading comprehension, daily rehearsal journals, a literary analysis, an additional writing assignment that varied according to the acting or production role of each student, and an evaluation of oral proficiency. Ryan-Scheutz noted that while participants made gains in all areas of communicative competence, the ITW was especially effective at fostering strategic competence skills. Through participation in improvisations and theatre games, the students grew adept at reformulation, circumlocution, gesticulation, and finding cognates in order to attain their communicative objectives.

Savoia (2010) reported on a theatre practicum course aimed at integrating the study of language and literature with third-year university students of Italian (L1 English). She described a course that included oral reading, storytelling, role playing and improvisation, writing original dialogues and scenes, adaptation of pre-existing narrative material into dramatic scenes, and the performance of theatre texts. Participants presented scenes in a recital format to an audience of fellow students, the department faculty, and members of the local Italian-American community.

Marini-Maio (2010) discussed a blended class model (partly oriented toward dramatic improvisation and partly focused on staging a public performance of a theatre text, integrated with literary analysis and interpretation) as a transitional course between language study and literature. She also contrasted the dynamics of the course as taught to two groups of students, one more heterogeneous in terms of language proficiency and largely without prior theatre experience, the other more homogeneous, more familiar with literary studies and more experienced in theatre performance. Marini-Maio concluded that the multifaceted nature of the course allowed it to accommodate the diverse needs of the students.

Koerner (2004) explored comic metatheatre as a strategy to facilitate intermediate learners' capacity to deal with unexpected situations in the L2 by developing the ability to improvise and to communicate through exaggeration. Koerner worked with third year university learners of German (L1 English). He deliberately selected a satirical play-within-a-play about a performance plagued by hecklers and on-stage crises on the rationale that if errors occurred during performance, it would be relatively easy for the students to disguise them and play through as though the mishap were intentional. Koerner included a focus on improvisational activities in order to foster the capability to "act and react more comfortably in a fluid environment." (p. 77) He also emphasized comic exaggeration, describing it as "a key to success in a communicative language learning context" (p. 78) and noting that "a willingness to exaggerate ... can motivate students to focus on the broader aspect of communication and avoid the often detrimental search for the ideal expression." (p. 78) Koerner linked comic exaggeration to the licensing effect of metaxis, stating that it "facilitates a more playful and open use of the target language, because it provides an emotional distance from any errors or mishaps that occur." (p. 79)

Banchieri (2010) compared two different incarnations of a university-level Italian theatre course, one conducted during the academic year at a typical North American liberal arts college and the other during the summer term at Middlebury College, renowned for its language immersion programs. He taught both courses and directed both productions, and he illuminated the context-specific considerations

applicable to each situation. This course was taught at the upper level of both departments, although Banchieri noted that lower-level students did occasionally register and participate. Both courses culminated in public performances.

Del Fattore-Olson (2010) described her version of an Italian Theatre Workshop course, taught at the upper level of the university curriculum to advanced students (L1 English), with a focus on the works of playwright Dacia Maraini. Maraini's plays present women in different periods of Italian history through a feminist lens, and Del Fattore-Olson cited the fluid readability of her style and the foregrounding of social, historical and cultural elements as reasons for selecting these texts. Del Fattore-Olson described the approach to the literary as well as the linguistic elements of Maraini's work. She also discussed the issue of incorporating dialect and non-standard forms of the language. Unlike some other practitioners (notably Banchieri, 2010, also dealing with Italian), Del Fattore-Olson advocated for the judicious incorporation of dialect on the grounds of cultural authenticity and wider exposure for the students to the real-world complexities of the target language community.

Fonio (2012) described the benefits of comedic theatre as a way to facilitate mastery of the nonverbal aspects of communication among university students of Italian as a foreign language (L1 French). Fonio described how his students derived additional motivation as well as additional opportunities to engage with the target language as a result of an invitation to travel from France to Italy to attend a theatre festival and perform before a native Italian audience.

Dalziel and Pennacchi (2012) reported on a university drama group undertaking target-language performance as an extracurricular activity. The Padua University English Drama Workshop, accustomed to more contemporary plays, worked with a challenging Shakespearean text as an experiment with Brecht's alienation effect. They selected excerpts from the original text and interspersed them with adaptations and paraphrasing of their own creation, generated through improvisation. The overall endeavor was structured as an exercise in storytelling, intended to cultivate participants' abilities to distill

complex information into a comprehensible story structure that they could effectively communicate to an audience.

### *Interdisciplinary Contexts*

Shier (2002) discussed the Deutsches Theater, a unique interdisciplinary entity that forms part of the University of Michigan Residential College (RC), described by Shier as “an alternative living-learning unit. RC classes, professors’ offices, and art and music studios are in the same building where students are required to live their first two years.” (p. 185) Deutsches Theater involved university students of German (L1 English) in public theatre performances. The participants were a mixed group of new and veteran performers; Shier noted that RC residents began participating in Deutsches Theatre around the fourth or fifth semester of study and often continued to do so through their remaining time at the university. Shier described an atmosphere that cultivated interdisciplinarity and collaboration, and noted that Deutsches Theatre prioritized ensemble-building, attention to process, and awareness of their performances’ political and social implications. The company demanded high production values for their works and drew on a wide range of institutional resources as a result of the interdisciplinary structure of the Residential College. Shier also outlined the multi-year curricular components developed as a result of working with Deutsches Theater within the Residential College program.

Lys *et al.* (2002) described the interdisciplinary production of a Brecht play as a collaborative project between the German and Theater (*sic*) departments at Northwestern University. The project’s goal was to

provide foreign language instructors and students with a multidimensional academic teaching and learning environment that would not only help unfold an interest in reading drama but would encourage the use and production of language in a meaningful and culturally significant way. (p. 207)

The project involved seven different instructors, representing specialists in SLA and pedagogy, Brecht

and theatre theory, and theatre production. Students from the Theater department helped with directing, lighting and sound, scenery, and costumes. Course participants were undergraduate students of German (L1 English) with OPI scores ranging from intermediate-mid to intermediate-high. The course contained a classroom component in which the students studied the play's text and historical context, Brecht's theories, and media theory (technology was a prominent motif in the play). Students engaged with the play first through reader's theatre, then through the rehearsal and staging of the play in public performance. The authors described community outreach efforts before and during the performance; they also detailed the production's budget and noted the Theater department's contribution of resources, space and personnel.

*Perspectives From the Field of Theatre & Drama*

Banning's (2003) ethnographic case study was situated in a T&D department rather than an FL department. She studied two students (L1 Xhosa) majoring in acting at a South African university in which students could opt for a unilingual (English) or bilingual (English and Afrikaans) training program; the language of instruction, as well as of all written academic work, was English. Banning examined her participants' progress through the academic program in order to analyze their relationship to written, spoken and performed L2 English, and to uncover faculty attitudes to determine whether there existed a deficit of cultural capital for students with L1 Afrikaans or Xhosa, despite the department's expressed discourse of "a good actor is a good actor, regardless of language." (Banning, 2003, p. 195) This study examined a situation in which, rather than engaging in theatre for the purposes of fostering language learning, the participants sought to solidify their command of the L2, the majority language, as a means to larger goals of graduating from an academic program and establishing acting careers, endeavors for which minority language speaker status constituted a handicap.

In October 2004, *Theatre Journal* (56:3) published a critical forum addressing the state of theatrical performance (or the lack thereof) in Spanish in universities in the United States. (Day, 2004;



Geirola, 2004; Gladhart, 2004; Huerta, 2004; Pottlitzer, 2004; Underiner, 2004; Versényi, 2004) The contributors noted the relative absence of theatre by Latin American playwrights, apart from a very few token examples, in university theatre seasons. They commented that the shortfall was attributable, in part, to inadequate translation (in terms of both number and produceability) of plays written in other languages, except for canonical and a few other highly-publicized mainstream works. They also commented on the general lack of serious theatrical undertakings within FL departments, the often-substandard production values of those performances that do occur, and the infrequent contribution from theatre departments in an arena that holds great potential for fruitful development for language learners. Much could be gained from increased collaboration between T&D and FL departments, but the compartmentalization of the academy favors the opposite tendency.

Perhaps the most trenchant comments in the *Theatre Journal* forum came from Geirola (2004), who noted that in spite of the exponential growth of the Spanish-speaking population in the US, both T&D and FL departments in US universities seemed to have taken little notice. He sharply criticized both the paucity of departmentally-sponsored productions, resulting in little visibility for Spanish-language theatre, and the lack of professionalism in many instances where theatre productions have been undertaken. A poor-quality production, in Geirola's view, was arguably worse than no production at all:

Language departments insist that their goal is to promote language and culture, as if theatrical production and diverse performative strategies were not part of a region and its culture. They concentrate on the literary dramatic text and disregard the specific theatrical context. Language programs sponsor theatre activities as cultural decoration, but they depend upon faculty members' good will and enthusiasm or leave it to a group of students who – faced with a lack of appropriate spaces, technical resources, and schedule flexibility – can produce a show with pedagogically questionable results. Language students typically perform in a classroom, with few props and lacking suitable lighting and sound equipment, and often deficient acting training. Acting is then

reduced to the physical illustration of a memorized and recited text. Consequently, audiences attending such a production leave with a disastrous impression. When compared to the technical precision achieved by theatre and media departments, these productions can create an inappropriate lack of appreciation for Latin American theatre in particular, and for Spanish-language theatre in general. (Geirola, 2004, p. 469)

Geirola's indictment of the disappointing theatrical efforts of FL departments in general and Spanish departments in particular extended to a critique of the entire FL curriculum and the lack of language learning through bodily enactment where it would be appropriate, justified, and tremendously beneficial to students:

Ironically, despite the enormous bibliography produced by language departments in the last twenty years regarding the body (its identity, resistance, submission, and perversion), these very same departments seem curiously uninterested in promoting courses where knowledge emerges from the body itself, in all its silences, rhythms, ruptures, and pleasures. Apparently, language departments can discuss the imaginary and symbolic dimension of the body in literature, but they refuse to deal with the body itself. Language departments resolve this contradiction by installing sophisticated language labs. They think that traditional classes – centered on the instructor's body and voice – require audiovisual enhancement. Thus, they spend a substantial budgetary amount in endlessly updating technology. It is obvious that there are no real changes here, only the illusion of change. Students remain rooted to their chairs, perhaps more paralyzed in front of the computer's screen than in the bodily dynamic of traditional classes. A weird paradox: language departments promote theatre as literature, but they want their students to approach literature through an audiovisual experience. The Cartesian prejudice privileging reason over corporeal passion is exacerbated by the ideology of entertainment. (Geirola, 2004, 469-470)

*Development of Improvisational Skills*

Dalziel and Pennacchi (2012), Koerner (2004), MacDonald (2011), Ryan-Scheutz and Colangelo (2004; see p. 378 as well as Appendix A), Ryan-Scheutz (2010), Sosulski (2008), and Sukhina (2011) are among those who have cited the importance of games and improvisation activities for L2 theatre.

According to MacDonald (2011), “[i]mprovisation can be seen as training for the unknown and as a way to learn to observe communicative details, be they verbal, tonal, gestural, or spatial.” (p. 270) Sukhina (2011) states that “when allowed this freedom [to improvise], students normally come up with something they can really relate to, thus making their language use more personal and their knowledge more internal and profound,” (p. 264) and she also notes that improvisation offers a valuable complement to work with theatre texts because it “inevitably brings forth mistakes and reveals weak points which would not be visible in a memorized and rehearsed kind of interaction.” (p. 265) Dalziel and Pennacchi (2012) characterize exploratory improvisations as a means by which students are able to research their own experience, making sense of previous knowledge through social interaction. (p. 12) Sosulski (2008) notes that

the dialogic nature of drama [*theatrical text*] stages realistic discourse situations in which learners *actually must participate*, giving them room for minimal structured language play. Simulating realistic dialogue is one short step removed from creating one’s own discourse. In many ways, dramatic re-enactment of discourse situations sets the stage for students’ genuine enactments in their own lives. There is, however, a missing piece between re-enactment and authentic linguistic performance in the target language. This is why I believe it is absolutely critical to include the task of ensemble improvisation when teaching language and culture through drama [*theatre*] .... The element of improvisation helps students to bridge the imaginative gap between the play’s text and their own authentic discourse. (pp. 5-6)

Carson (2012) echoes this conviction that language skills are enhanced by the combination of rehearsed

and spontaneous language use that characterizes theatre workshops that use both text-based and improvisation-based work. Ryan-Scheutz (2010), in her discussion of the ITW participants' improved performance on the role play posttest that formed part of the project's assessment, remarked that the increased confidence and enthusiasm she observed after the project were most likely the result of the improvisational games and warm-up activities used at the beginning of the rehearsals. (p. 309)

*Summary of Theatre- and Drama-based Language Learning*

The majority of the theatre- and drama-based language learning here cited, as well as the many examples that go undocumented in the research literature, take place within the context of an academic institution, frequently a foreign language department in a college or university. While the local circumstances of FL departments differ widely across and even within institutions, certain truths are universally acknowledged: virtually all FL departments agree that their primary mission is to educate students in the target language and culture, fostering proficiency as well as appreciation. Most would agree that helping students to become conversant with the target literature is an indispensable part of that process. The resources for this herculean task are inevitably limited, and one of the persistent struggles for FL departments is to undertake wise policy decisions that will make sound use of those resources to achieve curricular objectives.

Theatre-based language learning demonstrates great potential for furthering those objectives, but departmental decision-makers rightly seek assurance that resources directed toward such an endeavor are wisely invested. To that end, the next section of this chapter will review curricular issues faced by the majority of contemporary FL departments and discuss the role theatre-based language learning might play in addressing those issues.

General Curriculum Issues Relating to Foreign Language Study

*The Curricular Breach Between Language and Literature Study*

In the 2007 MLA report "New Structures for a Changed World" and the subsequent position

paper issued by the MLA Ad Hoc Committee (2008), the authors addressed a number of interrelated issues affecting the teaching of languages and literatures in the academy: the pervasive breach between language and literature study, the students' need to continue developing communicative proficiency while transitioning to literary analysis and appreciation, and the present curriculum's failure to effectively support continued linguistic development through the upper levels of study. The report and the position paper concluded with a call for curriculum integration across all levels of instruction and deliberate steps to foster development of "translingual and transcultural competence" (MLA 2008) among students of foreign language. Byrnes (2008) commented that this will require university foreign language faculty to explicitly link the study of literature with language learning in a way not previously seen on a broad scale in university language departments. Alvstad and Castro (2009) offer a critique of the "conception of literature as a *means*" that "contrasts sharply with the ... conception of literature as the end *goal* of language studies. Interestingly, both conceptions coexist today in foreign language programs." (p. 170)

The authors warn that the integration of these two elements of the curriculum

may be achieved at the expense of the integrity of its parts. In other words, we see it as both essential and achievable that a curriculum motivate all of its components – for example, literature – on their own terms, not just as a means to achieving some other goal – for example, language proficiency. (p. 171)

Alvstad and Castro call for explicit attention to previously unexamined assumptions about language and literature study on the part of instructors and students.

*The Post-Secondary Foreign Language Curriculum Debate: A Call for Integration and Articulation  
Across Levels*

The 2007 MLA report, noting that both national defense/security agendas (such as the post-9/11 attention to the US's language deficit) and the standard university FL focus on canonical literature represent narrow models of language study (p. 2), called for the transformation of academic programs,

away from the two-tier model and toward a unified language-and-content curriculum. The report stated that

replacing the two-tiered language-literature structure with a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole, supported by alliances with other departments and expressed through interdisciplinary courses, will reinvigorate language departments as valuable academic units central to the humanities and to the missions of institutions of higher learning (MLA, 2007, p. 3)

Other points articulated by the report emphasized that “this kind of foreign language education systematically teaches differences in meaning, mentality, and worldview as expressed in American English and in the target language” (*ibid.*) and that the proposed curricular reform “will situate language study in cultural, historical, geographic, and cross-cultural frames within the context of humanistic learning.” (MLA, 2007, p. 4)

According to Byrnes (2008), among the analyses and recommendations of the report and position paper, the most prominent was “making translingual and transcultural competence (TTC) the goal of language learning ... and demanding that foreign language departments be fundamentally reconfigured with regard to how they deliver their educational work in terms of curricula” (p. 284) Given that much of the FL professoriate has little interest in language pedagogy, this represents a challenge of considerable magnitude:

The stark reality is that all faculty, those in literary cultural studies and those in language studies, will need to acquire considerable knowledge and practical expertise in the area of linking content and language learning in order to be able to contribute to an extended curriculum whose pedagogies would lead students toward the stated goal of TTC. (Byrnes, 2008, p. 284)

The MLA report’s (2007) call for attention to curricular integration was perhaps merely the most prominent contribution to an ongoing conversation within the profession about the need to better connect

the language sequence with literary and cultural topics, going back at least two decades (Bosquet, 2008; Brantmeier, 2008; Byrnes, 1998, 2002, 2008; Byrnes & Kord, 2002; Donato & Brooks, 2004; Dupuy, 2000; Frantzen, 2002; Harper, 2008; Hoecherl-Alden, 2006; Kern, 2002, 2003; Kiely, 2006; Kramsch, 1993; Mantero, 2002, 2006; Marini-Maio, 2010; Mittman, 1999; MLA, 2007; MLA Ad Hoc Committee, 2008; Noe-LeSassier & Boyd, 2010; Norris, 2005; Pfeiffer, 2008; Polio & Zyzik, 2009; Rinner & Weigart, 2005; Savoia, 2010; Schechtman & Koser, 2008; Schultz, 1995, 2002; Stinson & Freebody, 2006; Swaffar & Arens, 2005; Weiss, 2007; Yu, 2008). Rinner and Weigart (2005) declared

the need to conceptualize programs as articulated entities, rather than as an aggregation of separate courses – a need that is more pronounced if students are to attain advanced levels of FL ability along with acquiring the literary-cultural content that characterizes the educational goals of departments. (p. 136)

According to Mittman (1999), both students and instructors suffer because of the failure to integrate specific cognitive and linguistic goals in an articulated curriculum, particularly beyond the language sequence. “Once students leave the second year classroom behind, they – and their teachers – are confronted with a relative chaos of sequencing and with the negotiation of widely diverging proficiency levels among the students in a given course” (p. 483). She noted that as they become more advanced, undergraduates face expanding options among courses dealing with literature, linguistics, culture, conversation and composition; meanwhile, recommendations as to the sequencing of courses become unclear or unavailable. Furthermore, this is also a major point of attrition for language departments, as students abandon foreign language study upon fulfillment of their requirements.

The MLA Ad Hoc Committee (2008) echoed the calls for real-world relevance and curricular integration of FL study, stating that

our goal is a higher education system that embraces the distinctive educational benefits of studying foreign languages and cultures in developing the powers of the intellect and the

imagination, the ability to reflect on one's place in the world with depth and complexity, and understanding of the degree to which culture and society are created by language. (p. 288)

Regarding the present model that relegates language study to the lower levels and abruptly shifts to literature in the fifth semester with little further explicit attention to language instruction,

the kind of curricular reform we support ... integrates sociohistorical knowledge and cross-cultural reflection at every level ... We expect that more students will continue language study if courses *incorporate cultural inquiry at all levels* and if advanced courses address more subject areas *while continuing to explicitly advance language competency* ... such curricula transcend a language/content division, for language is learned as content and content as language.

Imaginative literature remains an irreplaceable source for imparting the ability to enter and powerfully experience unfamiliar worlds. (MLA Ad Hoc Committee, 2008, p. 290, emphasis in the original)

A growing body of literature has advocated that language instruction continue throughout the curricular sequence and that it take place within literature courses, using the literature itself as a source of linguistic input and a tool for analyzing linguistic forms (Berg & Martin-Berg, 2001; Frantzen, 2002, 2003; Jordan, 1999; Katz, 2002; López-Ortega, 2006; Miccoli, 2003; Paesani, 2005; Scott & Huntington, 2007; Vogely, 1997; Weist, 2004; Zyzik & Polio, 2008). Many researchers hope to foster foreign language literacy through the integration of linguistic and literary analysis (Barnes-Karol, 2003; Berg & Martin-Berg 2002; Bernhardt, 2002; Blyth, 2002; Burnett & Fonder-Solano, 2002; Byrnes & Kord, 2002; Davidheiser, 2007; Donato & Brooks, 2004; Frantzen, 2002; Katz, 2002; Kern, 2002, 2003; Kramsch, 1993; Mantero, 2002, 2006; Polio & Zyzik, 2009; Schewe, 2002; Schultz, 1995, 2002; Scott & Huntington, 2007; Weber-Fève, 2009; Weist, 2004); however, there is an acknowledged need to foster students' verbal capacities in the target language as well as their ability to read and understand literature.

Polio and Zyzik (2009) reviewed a group of studies (Donato & Brooks 2004; Mantero, 2002,



2006; Zyzik & Polio, 2008) that examined whether professor-student interaction patterns in literature courses fostered language development, specifically speaking skills, among third- and fourth-year university students. They found that the studies

have noted, with concern, that FL literature classes may not be providing learners with enough opportunities to develop their linguistic skills due to reliance on a transmission-based, teacher-centered model of subject matter presentation ... Crucially, all these researchers agree that provision of meaningful input is not at issue; content-based classes provide students with substantial exposure to the L2 through authentic spoken and written texts. However, while such input may be enough to maintain a learner's language skills, it is unlikely to push them to higher levels of proficiency or help them gain control over certain L2 forms. (p. 8)

Polio and Zyzik's conclusion focused on possible implications for curriculum design in foreign language departments. "The study leaves little doubt that students in advanced literature courses want and need instruction that will advance their language proficiency." (p. 38) The authors noted that the initiation-response-feedback (IRF) pattern that dominated most classroom interaction afforded students little opportunity to engage in extended discourse; it also sacrificed the students' goal of language learning to mastery of subject matter content, rather than finding a means to achieve both goals simultaneously. Likewise, Bueno (2002), Hoecherl-Alden (2006), López-Ortega (2006), Pica (2002) and Schleppergrell, Achugar, and Oteíza (2004) have emphasized the need to give language-focused attention to learners in content-based courses and move away from IRF sequences, allowing students to produce contributions beyond sentence-level discourse.

Amidst the struggle to bridge the longstanding curricular schism, and the search for pedagogical models that foster linguistic competence alongside literacy development and cultural understanding, Shohamy (2005) has stated that "the profession has a near-unique opportunity to begin anew to find different ways of organizing language and language development beyond hierarchies and to consider the

relation between meaning-making and formal features of language.” (p. 192) Innovative approaches to instruction are needed, particularly for undergraduates who still require attention to their linguistic development while taking upper-level literature courses. In the wake of the MLA report (2007), it is time to reevaluate a course model that holds promise for fostering rather than stifling the ability to interact in the target language, promoting a vivid experiential understanding of the target culture, raising the FL department’s profile within the institution, and inviting collaboration with other departments. Harper (2008) offered a scenario drawn from the community college context, one that universities would do well to imitate:

In the community colleges, a cooperative spirit among disciplines often produces impressive results in terms of instructional effectiveness, curriculum enhancement, student interest, and faculty development. Each department leans on its strengths in combinations of academic efforts with and for students. For example, the music department provides musicians (faculty and students), performances, and original scores specifically for functions hosted by languages. The drama faculty select the repertoire for the following year partially in response to the major themes being studied in English and history. The speech faculty and language faculty assist drama and music with pronunciation. The art department participates in graphic and set design.

Radio/television broadcast faculty assist with voiceovers and supervise set building. Costuming facilities are open to any faculty who need wardrobe assistance for productions. (p. 300)

An interdisciplinary endeavor such as a concert, a recital, a showcase, or a theatre production under the auspices of the FL department is an opportunity for bridge-building throughout the institution as well as for integration within the department itself.

Ryan (2011) articulates a vision for using target-language theatre as a catalyst for curricular reform. She describes reverse-engineering curriculum design based on desired outcomes, drawing on the concept of multiple literacies to envision language as a series of culture-based performances, and

integrating a common focus on an author, period, and theatrical work across multiple levels of a university FL curriculum. In the scenario Ryan describes, students ranging from first semester through graduate level were brought together through department-wide participation in a symposium celebrating an eighteenth-century Italian playwright. Level-appropriate activities were designed for courses across the curriculum in the days and weeks leading up to the symposium and performances of the Italian Theatre Workshop production. Ryan's account of the Goldoni Project demonstrates the benefits of L2 theatre not only for the students who directly participate in the course, but also for other students across the L2 curriculum whose learning experience is enriched by the active presence of L2 theatre in their department.

#### *The Articulated Need to Foster Greater Learner Proficiency*

Mittman (1999) offered a series of trenchant observations about the importance of integrated learning experiences allowing learners to make connections between their language studies and other areas of inquiry. Mittman polled students in a third-year German course to determine their self-reported language-learning needs and interests, noting that "they overwhelmingly name improved language skills as their primary goal." (p. 481) Donato and Brooks (2004) analyzed the opportunities for language development afforded by an advanced undergraduate literature course, and they found that while students expressed the desire to improve their language proficiency, the primary linguistic benefit they derived from the course was increased vocabulary. The researchers identified a need to incorporate advanced proficiency goals more explicitly in these courses, to utilize varied interaction patterns beyond the IRF sequence, to allow for elaborated responses and extended student turns-at-talk, and to raise consciousness among students, instructors, and researchers about the language goals and needs of students at this juncture in the curriculum.

#### *The Need to Consider Student Perspectives*

In Polio and Zyzik (2009), the researchers emphasized that any curricular modifications undertaken to remedy these failings needed to be grounded in a thorough understanding of course and

program goals *as seen by the students* as well as by the faculty and administration. The authors cited the need “to examine the perspectives of the stakeholders (i.e., students and instructors) before proposing any curricular changes suggested by the MLA report or otherwise” (p. 551) and, noting the relative lack of research into student and instructor perspectives on the curriculum, they undertook a multiple case study of the opportunities for developing language proficiency afforded by fourth-year Spanish literature courses. In doing so, they sought to attain a more complete picture of how learner and instructor perspectives (as well as the perspectives of SLA research) do or do not converge, noting that “instructional changes can be successfully implemented only when the participants’ points of view are understood” (p. 552-553).

Magnan *et al.* (2012) also noted the findings of the ACTFL project (2011) on the curriculum impact of the National Standards, signaling the absence of student perspectives in the published research literature. Magnan *et al.* (2012) called for greater explicit attention to learner perspectives on curriculum in the present era of learner-centered teaching. (pp. 171-172).

#### *Motivation for the Present Study: a Lacuna in the Research Literature*

Polio and Zyzik’s (2009) concern for multiple stakeholder perspectives and their investigation of student goals, perceptions, and beliefs is well-founded and relevant to my own interests in developing theatre-based language learning as a means of integrating the university FL curriculum. Likewise, Broner and Tarone’s (2001) observation that language teaching professionals need to understand learner perspectives, avoiding the mistaken assumption that they are identical to those of the instructor, and Magnan *et al.*’s (2012) call for greater attention in the literature to learner perspectives on curriculum must be heeded if we are to attain truly learner-centered teaching. In order to establish a research-based understanding of student perspectives on participation in theatre-based language learning, and in response to the articulated need to foster the development of advanced oral proficiency by giving students opportunities to go beyond sentence-level discourse in upper-level L2 classes, this dissertation examines

participation in target-language theatre productions by university students. Although some research into theatre-based language learning has been undertaken, further investigation of L2 theatre as a learning environment is needed. There are very few studies specifically targeting the perspective of student participants at the university level and their reflection upon their own language learning. Bang (2003) included a few qualitative questions as part of a larger quantitative study exploring the development of communicative competence through drama in an EFL classroom, Colangelo and Ryan-Scheutz (2004) included survey questions about student's self-assessment of their language learning as part of the data collection for their pilot study, Lutzker (2007) undertook case studies of secondary school students working on a foreign language play, and Carson (2012) touched on the experience of postgraduate students in an English for Academic Purposes program that used a drama-based approach, but to date there has not been any research explicitly focused on the experience of student participants in a target-language theatre production at the post-secondary level. Such research is necessary in order to better understand the position target-language theatre production should occupy within the university FL curriculum, particularly because theatre production offers such potential for the productive integration of literary content with enhanced opportunities to develop proficiency in spoken L2 in upper-level courses.

Furthermore, I am unaware of studies examining the particular affordances that this type of learning environment holds for the comparatively less-proficient language learners in the course. The most successful L2 learners seem to be able to derive benefit from almost any learning environment, and the traditional language classroom appears to serve them well. However, it benefits the language teaching profession as a whole to better understand the affordances of other learning environments for students who have not attained the same degree of proficiency from the traditional course of L2 study. Thus, the profession will be better-positioned to make sound, informed decisions about including complementary course alternatives in the L2 curriculum to more effectively attract and serve a broader range of students, with the goals of better outcomes and retention.

### Theatre's Actual and Potential Roles in the Undergraduate Foreign Language Curriculum

Van Lier (2000, 2004, 2010) proposed an ecological approach to language learning as a research stance that provides grounds for questioning the notion that controlling for variables and abstracting from real-world contexts are prerequisites for legitimate scientific inquiry into a phenomenon. Van Lier advocated for a shift from reductionism to an approach that regards language development as emergent, dynamic, and socially situated within complex environments. (2000, p. 246) Van Lier's discussion of ecology as a framework within which to study cognition, language and learning includes the premise that language is studied as a network of *relations* rather than of objects (i.e. words or rules of grammar). (2000, p. 251) He also draws on Norman's (1988) concept of affordances, the properties of an object (or, by extension, a situation) that determine how it may be used. In van Lier's ecological framework for language learning, linguistic *affordances* are an alternative to the computational model's concept of *input*; an affordance is

a particular property of the environment that is relevant ... to an active, perceiving organism in that environment ... What becomes an affordance depends on what the organism does, what it wants, and what is useful for it ... If the language learner is active and engaged, she will perceive linguistic affordances and use them for linguistic action. (2000, p. 252)

As a learning environment for foreign languages, theatre offers learners a wide range of potential affordances that can complement the learning that takes place in a more traditional grammar- or literature-focused classroom setting. These include: repeated and sustained engagement with a single text over several weeks or months; rehearsal with the goal of routinization and overlearning of L2 forms, in association with culturally and contextually appropriate gestures and other forms of nonverbal communication; an overt focus on targetlike pronunciation and prosody; the development of L2 confidence; contextualization of the target culture and participation in it through metaxis; and the opportunity to explore the target language's resources for enacting, participating in, and negotiating

situations of conflict and emotion.

*Repeated and Prolonged Engagement With a Single Text*

One of the primary advantages to language learning afforded by participation in a theatre production is repeated exposure to a single text over time as a necessary and inherent part of the course's structure and progression. In a typical literature course, students read a different text (or portion thereof) in preparation for each classroom discussion and most of the repetition occurs in the form of review for exams. By contrast, rehearsal of a dramatic text necessitates in-depth, detailed repetition to the point of memorization and beyond. Language learners undoubtedly benefit from the broad exposure to the target language that they receive by reading multiple works over the course of the semester. However, they also stand to derive considerable benefit from engaging with a single text on progressively deeper levels, analyzing it, interrogating it, experimenting with various interpretations to explore possibilities and limits, and developing a collectively constructed interpretation in which every participant understands the individual contributions and their relationship to the whole. Redmann (2005) advocated for multiple student interactions with texts within foreign language study. She observed the tendency in many literature courses for students to become passive consumers of received knowledge and to absorb the belief that there is only one possible correct interpretation, delivered by the teacher as a finished product. (p. 486) Dramatic texts, in contrast, stand as inherently unfinished products demanding that students enter into dialogue, interrogation, and experimentation in order to arrive at an interpretation which remains perpetually open to new challenges and understandings.

The repetition inherent in any theatrical endeavor is potentially a source of great pedagogical benefit. By working with a single text over an extended period of time, students are not only enabled but obliged to move past superficial understandings to explore in-depth interpretations of the text. They are also linguistically supported by the knowledge that they are working with grammatical language (i.e. language which is acceptable to the speech community, whether or not it is canonically correct) intended

for native speaker consumption; as such, they can have confidence in the words they speak. In Staddon's (2007) description of a theatre project with second-semester learners of French, she noted that "the script enabled students to concentrate on meaningful error-free communication without losing momentum and naturalness in the struggle for grammatical accuracy" (p. 30)

Theatre rehearsal also affords ample opportunities to practice speaking and refine the pronunciation of the target language with full comprehension of the text being spoken and confidence in its grammaticality. Dalziel and Pennacchi (2012) observed that often when learners in the FL classroom engage in pair or group speaking tasks, they are so consumed by the effort of their own speaking that they struggle to pay attention to peer contributions and thus miss out on some of the benefits of interaction. In a study of reading in a fifth-semester Spanish course, Weist (2004) commented that "phonological encoding of L2 texts generally requires a considerable amount of mental energy" (p. 215) and noted that participants in her study reported feeling that they benefited in terms of pronunciation but not comprehension when asked to read aloud. In a course in which different texts are read each week, intermediate learners are likely to be unable to process all the material thoroughly, especially while engaging in the demanding task of reading aloud. In a bid for quality over quantity, Redmann (2005) advocated that "foreign language courses should focus on multiple student interactions with a text," (p. 486) and Lauer (2008) discussed L2 theatre as a way to enable students to "go beyond short-term rote memorization" and foster "the assimilation of cultural and language knowledge in a way that allows for the re-application of familiar structures to related context and to novel situations." (p. 2)

A'ness (2011) also reflected on the importance of practice and repetition in the context of target-language theatre, noting that it is not merely the opportunity to repeat the encounter with the text that benefits participants; it is, perhaps primarily, the concomitant opportunity to experiment with the text and the implicit invitation to explore its limits that truly enriches the learners' experiences:



Practice is not about the repetition of skills but about being able to try out a skill, potentially fail, and receive feedback and criticism in a safe and nurturing environment. Practice ... in which interim failure is anticipated and welcomed, allows for educational growth. (p. 146)

Gregory (2001) likewise commented on the dynamic nature of practice as repetition that encompasses a trajectory of development and improvement:

Practice has to be governed not merely by a repetition of sameness but by two mental activities: first, by *criticism*, the ability to see the imperfections in the performance so far, and, second, by *imagination*, the ability to visualize the performance or skill not as it is actually being done now but as it might be done in the future, differently and better, after more practice. (p. 76)

SLA researchers within the cognitive tradition (DeKeyser, 2001; Ellis, 2001; Hulstijn, 2001; Schmidt, 2001) have described language acquisition as a sequence of phases, the first consisting of controlled processing of the L2 requiring conscious attention, followed by automatic processing in which the task has been routinized and no longer requires the same degree of attentional resources. Lauer's (2008), A'ness' (2011), and Gregory's (2001) observations situate these cognitive processes within the sociocultural context in which the learner participates – in this case, an activity that both invites and requires repetition over time, leading to memorization and automaticity as part of the realization of a group endeavor. The next section will explore this related dimension of L2 theatre productions.

#### *Memorization and Routinization*

As preparation for theatre performance, these repeated encounters with the L2 theatre text lead to the next unique affordance for learners, the opportunity for memorization and routinization of L2 forms. To speak L2 text convincingly in performance requires participants to be able to produce the forms from memory, fluidly and naturally. Lauer (2008) describes the positive contribution that memorization made to his students' language-learning experience in what was originally intended to be a staged reading of a text. He focused on the gradual development of fluency and automaticity in the use of the L2 through

rehearsal of the text. Critically, he attributes the impetus for the students' memorization to the social context of the project:

Students realized that memorizing a line helped them to better focus on the intonation and the performance aspect of the play, rather than on the line itself. This realization led to a positive group dynamic, the result being that students began to memorize their lines, allowing them as actors to independently play out their parts. The process of memorizing lines led to an increased automaticity of accurate language use in a creative setting. (p. 10)

In theatre, unlike mere rereading of a familiar text, the repetition is accompanied by the spatial and kinetic dimensions of staging. The process of scripting movement and gestures to accompany the spoken dialogue is known as *blocking*, an important early stage of the rehearsal process. Once these movements are determined and agreed upon, they are refined during subsequent rehearsals and ultimately deeply intertwined with the memorized text. In fact, the blocking is often a spur to memory and of great assistance in the process of memorization. Fauconnier and Turner (2006) refer to the "method of loci" as the use of one's place within physical space to assist with memorization and learning. In the theatre, blocking operates on exactly this principle. Through rehearsal, participants associate their target language utterances with their locations in the playing area and the physical postures of their bodies.

#### *Integration of Gesture with the Spoken Word*

In addition to memorization, other researchers have given attention to theatre's usefulness in fostering students' development of nonverbal and paralinguistic capacities such as the use of gesture, intonation and prosody appropriate to the target language and culture. (A'ness, 2011; Blankemeyer, 2004; Del Fattore-Olson, 2010; Fonio, 2012; Johnson, 2004; Kendon, 2005; Lutzker, 2007; Sosulski, 2008; Staddon, 2007) The staging of the dramatic text requires participants to suit their actions to their words and vice versa, developing and perfecting suitable gestures, movements, and accompanying actions to create a convincing portrayal of the text. Matthias (2011) cites Cole's (1992) description of acting as "a

physicalization of the act of reading” (p. 1) which our culture has lost and which we as educators would do well to reclaim for our students’ benefit:

If music goes “straight into the legs,” as a German idiom has it, and dancing is the physical manifestation of music through the human body ... acting is the logical and necessary physical response to reading ... but a response which our domesticated and passive modern life has muted or sedated. Retrieving this natural connection means reuniting the reader with his or her whole being and, in the process, restoring the “wholeness of the text” which, in this light, only ended up on the page as a practical necessity, after storytelling and drama had lost their anchor in the oral tradition.

Thus, the more pragmatic, as well as the more philosophical foundations on which my call rests to perform (dramatic) literary texts with our students, aim to help students access these works of art in the most productive manner and to become engaged and possibly also sophisticated readers and critics. (Matthias, 2011, pp. 66-67)

Gregersen, Olivares-Cuhat, and Storm (2009) advocated giving learners the opportunity to engage in dramatic language activities in order to practice culturally-appropriate gesture alongside the spoken language: “Just as linguistic output moves a learner from the semantic to the syntactic, gesture practice moves the interactant beyond visual awareness to active kinesic involvement.” (p. 206) Staddon (2007) observed that L2 theatre can be used to “give students the opportunity to focus on oral production, particularly the sounds, rhythms, and gestures of the language” (p. 30) She called for activities that “allow students time both to develop and practise oral production with familiar and realistic language, and to focus on the non-verbal as well as the verbal, encouraging them to use the synchronised non-verbal to convey or reinforce meaning.” (p. 31) Sosulski (2008) noted that in addition to the acquisition of sophisticated vocabulary and advanced grammatical structures, one of the goals of his German workshop course on period acting techniques was to help students to acquire “a nuanced appreciation for the ways

in which corporeal and verbal semiotics are intimately linked in dramatic art” (p. 2). Lutzker (2007) also observed that “dramatic activities offer a wide range of possibilities of encountering the foreign language in its fullest and richest form. This is most evidently the case with respect to non-semantic, gestural and kinesic dimensions of language.” (p. 374) This aspect of acquisition is particularly valuable within instructed SLA, and especially so in the university FL curriculum. While opportunities exist in some courses to engage in role plays and other activities that attempt to link the verbal and nonverbal components of language, these virtually disappear beyond the lower-level sequence. From the fifth semester onward, the students’ opportunities to speak the language are largely limited to classroom discussion, in which the primary gesture is raising a hand in a bid for permission to ask or answer a question.

Goldin-Meadow (2003) notes that speakers (in both their L1 and L2s) are able to express knowledge via gesture that they may not be able to articulate in speech, while

having the ability to express a notion in speech almost always does mean that the speaker is able to express that notion in gesture. This asymmetry makes sense if gesture is a learner’s entry into a domain ... The strong claim is that, in order to acquire information in speech, the learner must first process it in gesture. (p. 57)

Goldin-Meadow acknowledges that the strong form of the claim is unlikely to be true of all domains, but there is powerful evidence that gesture is closely linked to both language mastery and the assimilation of new information. She points out that gesture may be an indicator of the cognitive instability that precedes intellectual growth and change: gestures are often used to express incipient ideas that “serve as stepping-stones for progress.” (p. 67) In other words, gestures may be one of the most reliable ways to assess learners’ as-yet unspoken or unrevealed, emergent competencies, “one of the best ways that teachers have of discovering thoughts that are on the edge of a student’s competence ... the child’s ‘zone of proximal development.’” (p. 104) Furthermore, Goldin-Meadow notes that

gesture could play a role in the learning process more directly by influencing the learners themselves. Gesture and speech externalize ideas differently and therefore may draw on different resources. Conveying an idea across modalities may, in the end, require less effort than conveying the idea within speech alone. In other words, gesture may serve as a ‘cognitive prop,’ freeing up cognitive effort that can be used on other tasks. If so, using gesture may actually ease the learner’s processing burden and, in this way, function as part of the mechanism of change. (p. 70)

Goldin-Meadow speculates that gesture may function as something of an experimental “safe zone” in which speakers can express incomplete or hypothetical ideas with fairly low risk of challenge (because interlocutors generally confine their responses to the information expressed in spoken discourse; rarely does an interlocutor comment upon information expressed in gesture alone). In fact, Goldin-Meadow notes,

not only are the notions conveyed in gesture likely to go unchallenged by others, but they are also likely to go unchallenged by the self. A speaker can ‘sneak in’ an idea, perhaps an ill-formed one, in gesture that doesn’t cohere well with the set of ideas expressed in speech. Gesture may be an ideal place to try out inchoate, untamed, and innovative ideas simply because those ideas don’t have to fit. Much experimentation may take place, and remain, in gesture, never reaching the conventionally shared spoken system. (p. 186)

Goldin-Meadow and McNeill (1999) even draw an explicit parallel between the function of gesture and *mimesis*, noting that the gesture that accompanies speech captures global, imagistic information in a way that complements the segmented, linear data of the verbal channel:

Because the manual modality allows one to represent an image as a whole without breaking it into parts, gesture offers a better vehicle for encoding imagistic information than does speech. The manual modality is therefore the natural choice to encode mimetic information, leaving

information that is better captured in a discrete and segmented form to the oral modality. (p. 239-240)

Goldin-Meadow's analysis focuses primarily on the interplay of gesture and speech in spontaneous communication and, in particular, instances of what she calls "mismatch" (gesture which expresses a different idea or message from that being simultaneously produced in speech) as an indicator of readiness for intellectual progress. She also focuses primarily on L1 speakers, although she does note that, among bilinguals,

the less proficient a speaker was in his or her nondominant language, the more gestures that speaker produced when speaking that language ... The assumption is that speaking the nondominant language is more difficult for these individuals, and they respond by increasing their rate of gesturing. (p. 146-147)

There is, of course, an important difference between spontaneously generated gesture and the more scripted variety used in theatre: it is generated and refined as an artistic endeavor, in response to a pre-existing text under the direction of another individual and in collaboration with other actors. However, these "artistic" gestures can be cultivated by encouraging the students' naturalistic gestural impulses in rehearsal, highlighting and refining them. They need not be imposed from an external source and may spring from a common origin with their more naturalistic counterparts. Furthermore, by consciously cultivating the use of gesture in combination with memorized spoken text, students may be able to facilitate their own adoption of greater use of gesture as the aforementioned "stepping stone" for linguistic progress.

#### *Explicit Attention to Target-like Pronunciation and Prosody*

Although serious mispronunciations that impede the communication of meaning are generally remarked upon and corrected in the L2 classroom, most instructors understandably prioritize learning goals other than the development of a native-like accent. They may privately lament the prominence of

some students' L1 phonology, but in most language and literature classrooms, other objectives take precedence. Target-language theatre productions, however, demand explicit attention to pronunciation and prosody in order to heighten the believability of the theatrical illusion. They may also provide learners with a motivation to modify their accent that they would lack in other circumstances. Sosulski (2008) commented on the potential for theatre-based language situations to allow learners the freedom to shed inhibitions about accent and to license their experimentation with vocal inflections, intonations, and cadences, improving their pronunciation of the L2. (p. 4) Koerner (2004) recommended the use of comic theatre as a way of encouraging students to exaggerate their speech, observing that "a penchant for exaggeration is also extremely useful for learning pronunciation in a foreign language; conscious exaggeration of an accent leads to more careful enunciation." (p. 78)

#### *Development of L2 Confidence*

Confidence, or the lack thereof, is a critical factor in the success or failure of learning a second language because it underpins the ability to cope with unfamiliar and often unpredictable circumstances, and it is intertwined with sustained motivation to learn the L2. (Rubinfeld *et al.*, 2006) ACTFL names confidence as one of the hallmarks that characterizes speech at the Advanced proficiency level. Mangan and Back (2007) addressed the role of L2 confidence in the gains made by learners in study-abroad contexts, noting that increased confidence correlated with greater gains in proficiency. The role of L2 confidence in the experience of participating in L2 theatre warrants deeper investigation than what has been undertaken to date. While it would seem, on the one hand, that students who choose to participate in L2 theatre may be a self-selected group who *a priori* possess a greater degree of L2 confidence than their peers, this is not necessarily so. It may also be the case that the socially-situated and peer-supported nature of theatre productions provides unique affordances to fostering L2 confidence among learners.

The importance of cultural awareness for successful language acquisition has been noted by Scott and Huntington (2007) and Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004), among others. Additionally, a link has been

noted between openness to other cultures and one's own confidence with regard to engaging in L2 interactions. Rubinfeld *et al.* (2006) stated that

L2 confidence is the key construct underlying L2 behavior as well as its social psychological correlates. L2 confidence corresponds to a relative lack of anxiety when using an L2 coupled with the belief in being able to cope linguistically with the L2 situation at hand. It is specifically derived from relatively frequent and pleasant contacts with the members of the L2 community whether through face-to-face interactions or L2 media (p. 610)

This study drew connections between L2 confidence and sustained motivation to learn the L2, identification with L2 speakers, and better L2 production. Gohard-Radenkovic *et al.* (2004) noted that “the teaching/learning of modern languages seems to us to be the discipline *par excellence* for intensifying the openness to other cultures and the contact with otherness in the development of positive cultural representations” (p. 53). Through the deep engagement that results from rehearsal and performance of a target-language theatre text, students are afforded the opportunity for “relatively frequent and pleasant contacts” (Rubinfeld *et al.*, 2006, p. 610) with the L2. These contacts are with the representations of fictional characters within the L2 speech community rather than face-to-face interactions or L2 media, but this context affords the students greater control over the interactions. The text provides linguistic scaffolding, and when the participants wish to slow down or repeat an interaction, in the rehearsal setting they have license to assert their need to do so in a way that they are seldom able to in real-time, real-world interactions with live L2 speakers or L2 media. Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) identified confidence as a fundamental component of lifelong learning, citing the support of mentors and the peer group as essential for learners to be able to confidently engage in creative risk-taking. One of the main findings of Lutzker's (2007) case study of secondary school participants in an L2 theatre production was the increased confidence they reported in their use of the language.



### *Contextualized Presentation of the Target Culture*

By assuming the roles of members of the target culture and exploring the text in an embodied way, participants have the opportunity to interact with one another as members of the target culture would, exploring the circumstances and reactions surrounding the actions scripted in the text. The specificity of the manifest content of any dramatic text necessarily limits it, but this is also the source of its richness. Its particularity endows it with a depth that glossy, sanitized textbook presentations of culture necessarily lack. By connecting to the familiar aspects of the characters' circumstances as well as exploring and interrogating the unfamiliar elements, learners are afforded the opportunity to experience how the target culture is created and sustained through interpersonal relationships operating within a commonly-held framework of beliefs, behaviors, traditions, and assumptions, relative to the context and content of the dramatic work.

L2 theatre offers a means by which language learning can take place in a contextualized way, connecting the linguistic features of the target language to its literature and culture. The presentation of the culture in any given dramatic work is necessarily specific, and, while this limits it, it also endows it with a richness of particularity that the aforementioned normative, sanitized language of the textbook-based class often lacks, as noted by Cunico (2005). Del Fattore-Olson (2010), Fleming (1998), Greenwood (2005), Heathcote and Bolton (1998), and Noé-LeSassier and Boyd (2010) all commented on the potential for theatre and drama activities (in the L1 and the L2) to bring students to a deeper engagement with and understanding of another culture. The language of dramatic texts also offers the possibility of exposing learners to L2 varieties beyond the academic norm and allowing them to make connections between an individual's use of language and his or her social identity. Shohamy (2005) critiqued "the powerful connection between language-based notions of the nation-state and certain views of language and language instruction" (p. 194) that reinforces the transmission of a single (usually the prestige) variety of the language. She pointed out that this model of proficiency is based on the

(inherently unattainable) monolingual native speaker ideal and, in the attempt to eliminate ambiguity and provide clear parameters for language learners, it allows no room to acknowledge that

there is no single correct way of using language in terms of grammar, lexicon, accent, and all other dimensions of language ... Thus, to know French meant to know the very standard of France, including ignoring its varieties and disregarding the fact that features such as accent or grammar are socially constructed. (p. 194)

A well-chosen theatre text, developed in performance, gives learners the opportunity to explore that social construction and interrogate the varieties contained therein during the rehearsal process. Furthermore, Jones (2011) observes that when a group of students collaborates to produce an L2 play, they form a community of hybridity that reflects the world of the living, spoken target language:

[A]s characters in a drama interact with each other to form a group of speakers with emotion-inflected voices, they together become the living representation of a community. The plurality of accents that can be heard from the same stage when nonnative speakers act out dramatic literature, in fact, recreates realistic social hybridity. While there is a standard grammar, no one person can be said to embody *le français standard*. (p. 116)

Sosulski (2008) included “discussion in the target language of the cultural contexts in which each drama was originally written and performed” (p. 2) as a key component of his German acting workshop course. Del Fattore-Olson (2010) also placed the understanding of how to enact the target culture (in her case, Italian) at the forefront of her workshop course.

#### *The Opportunity to Engage in Metaxis*

*Metaxis* is the absorption of the self into the imaginary identity of the fictitious context co-created by the participants in a drama or theatre event. In other words, it is the process by which an actor temporarily suspends his or her own identity in order to assume the imaginary identity of a character. This suspension distances and protects participants from their own actions while simultaneously allowing them

the liberty to encounter, test, and transcend boundaries that would constrain them under normal circumstances. In the target-language theatre context, this liberation from the self enables greater emotional engagement with the L2. Through metaxis, it is claimed, learners are able to achieve sufficient distance from their L1 identities that they are able to find the freedom to play, explore, and take risks in the target language that they would ordinarily be reluctant to undertake.

Plato introduced the concept of metaxis in the *Symposium* (trans. 2001) to describe the “in-betweenness” of existence, a way of living in tension between opposing polarities, that is a structural characteristic of the human condition. Boal’s (1995) definition of *metaxis* is “the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different autonomous worlds.” (p. 43) The metaxis undergone by the performer is analogous to the willing suspension of disbelief undertaken by audience members witnessing a theatre event, which allows them to sit silently and appreciate the artistic reverberations of events that would provoke a very different response if they were to happen outside the theater in a real-life context. Wilshire (1982) described the phenomenon elegantly when he stated that

actors ... participate in the world from the side of the ‘world’ [the fictional world of the play], and just because of the fictionality of their setting can initiate activity more daring, volatile, and free than the constraints and dangers of the world ordinarily allow. (p. 24)

The willing suspension of disbelief is what allows the audience member to refrain from intervening when Othello strangles Desdemona; metaxis is what allows the actors playing Othello and Desdemona to convincingly strangle and be strangled. The importance of entering this collaboratively fictional space repeatedly over time during the rehearsal process cannot be overstated; it is through the repeated suspension of the actor’s self to assume the character’s identity that boundaries are encountered, tested, and transcended. Wilshire (1982) described the process thus:

It is because the characters are fictional that we can push to limits and involvements which we would not ordinarily dare to approach. In rehearsal particularly, limits and involvements are

sensed, flushed out, and approached because the art itself must prevent one from ‘going too far.’ Inhibitions and defenses can come down and greater disclosure can be achieved than in comparable situations in the offstage world. The theatrical situation is structured in such a way that all the parties, actors and audience, can let things escape them that add up dialectically to revelation concerning the limits and conditions of their common ways of being together in the world. (p. 25)

In an L2 theatre production, metaxis serves the function of liberating the participants from their L1 identity and licensing fuller immersion into the L2 context. A number of researchers in the areas of improvisational drama and theatre in educational settings (Aita, 2009; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Even, 2004; O’Toole, 1992; Sosulski, 2008; Weiss, 2007) have attributed the uniquely powerful pedagogic affordances of L2 theatre to the liberating function of metaxis. Byram and Fleming (1998) stated that the paradox of the art form is that “it brings participants closer to the subject because they are emotionally engaged in the activity, but at the same time a distance is being established because everybody agrees that it is a fictional context.” (p. 143) Even (2004) remarked that “fictional contexts inspire fantasy and creativity; students are relieved of their usual roles and responsibilities and can enjoy the ‘freedom of being somebody else.’” (p. 35) Improvements in participants’ L2 accent and pronunciation as well as increased L2 confidence may result from metaxis. Sosulski (2008) commented that

the performative nature of drama [*theatre*] provides the advanced learner an ideal space for language acquisition. Psychologically, the adoption of a dramatic character’s persona ... has the potential to relieve common student inhibitions about speaking a second language .... Students with less native-like ability, especially in terms of pronunciation and accent, have *license* in dramatic play to experiment with things like vocal inflection, intonation, accents, and cadence when their own personalities are allowed to recede into the background. (p. 4)

Koerner (2004) explored the effect of metaxis combined with comic exaggeration for one of his students.

Early in the project, one of his participants proved to be a shy, inexperienced and reluctant actor.

Hypothesizing that it would be easier for him to exaggerate a role very different from himself than to play a character he identified with, Koerner changed his part and had this male student play “the Princess”.

The student quickly excelled at finding and exploiting the humor in this situation, and Koerner remarked that he became

one of the comic highlights of the play ... The performance of our male Princess exemplifies the principle behind the emphasis of exaggeration; the assumption of a role that clearly differs from what the student considers to be his or her own identity facilitates a more playful and open use of the target language, because it provides an emotional distance from any errors or mishaps that occur. (p. 79)

Lutzker’s (2007, p. 324) description of the student who reached a point where she no longer noticed that she was interacting in her L2 because she was able to free herself from constant self-evaluation is another example of metaxis at work in the L2 theatre context. Simpson (2011) mentions the pedagogical strategy of employing the traditional masked characters of *commedia dell’arte* as a way to facilitate students’ comfort with L2 dialogue, noting that “the masks, in practice, protected them from embarrassment and allowed them to take greater linguistic risks than they might have otherwise permitted themselves.” (p. 385-386) In this scenario, the mask becomes a tangible artifact through which the suspension of identity is achieved: donning the mask facilitates the process of metaxis.

From a curricular standpoint, metaxis is what sets the L2 theatre course apart from other literature courses, including those focused on L2 dramatic texts. One can argue that students are exposed to highly emotionally charged language or examples of nonstandard dialects, for example, through the study of target language novels or poetry. However, the classroom-based study of literature does nothing to affect the social roles of the students and the professor, and the text remains an object of study discussed in the discourse modes identified by Donato and Brooks (2004), Mantero (2002, 2006), Polio and Zyzik (2009),

and Zyzik and Polio (2008) as narrow and limited. When the focus becomes *enactment* of texts rather than discussion, the imaginary world of the L2 community is created and students suspend their social identity of “L2 student” to assume the fictitious identities of their roles within the text. This brings about a qualitatively different encounter with the text. Metaxis also occurs in the non-text-based, imaginative improvisational activities that characterize the warm-up phase of a typical theatre rehearsal. When students and the professor participate in these “theatre games,” their regular identities are again suspended, they interact as peers and the classroom relationship becomes more horizontal.

*Greater Breadth of Linguistic Resources for Situations of Conflict and Emotion*

Theatre and improvisational drama are predicated on interaction (nonverbal as well as verbal), conflict, and the use of strategy to overcome obstacles. Dramatic texts put their characters in high-stakes situations in which the communicative resources of the language are marshaled to the most urgent of purposes. Dramatic texts are constructed of the very words members of the target language community use to enact their identities, to negotiate conflicts, and to establish, modify and break relationships. In short, they represent the kind of language our learners need in order to navigate the target language community in the real world, language they may fail to acquire in the academic environs of the classroom. Researchers such as Redfield (1988), Schulz (1990), Cunico (2005), and D. Smith *et al.* (2007) have commented on the narrowness and the highly normative nature of the cross-section of language represented in textbooks, and the lack of language forms particular to multiple social identities or suited to emotionally-charged situations. Rarely do language textbooks provide learners with anything approaching a satisfyingly thorough grounding in the type of language native speakers use in impassioned circumstances. It is with precisely such circumstances, furthermore, that learners are likely to experience pervasive disfluencies, hesitations, and breakdowns. By their nature, dramatic texts incorporate conflict, high emotion, subaltern characters, and interactions between and among a wide range of persons representative of varied ages, genders, social classes, and levels of relative prestige. Through studying

these texts, learners have access to the linguistic components of such interactions. They analyze how relationships are established and managed through the target language. By inhabiting the roles of these characters and bringing them to life on stage, learners are afforded the opportunity to appropriate the linguistic forms into their own vocabularies.

Schulz (1990) noted that the dry and highly normative discourse of the FL classroom equips students with a miserably inadequate repertoire of linguistic resources. She criticized the limitations imposed on low-level learners by the inclusions and omissions inherent in FL textbooks. D. Smith *et al.* (2007) echoed a similar observation about basic language textbook narratives:

Common to most such stories is not only their contrived nature (a brief episode containing, say, twelve irregular verbs) but their human unreality. By this we mean not so much their implausibility ... as the way they skate across the surface of human experience, leaving questions of identity and the self's relation to the other submerged in a show of banality. In these stories, for the most part, no one really hopes or despairs, believes or doubts, suffers or heals, faces injustice or seeks justice, laments or worships, prays or holds silence, excludes or practices compassion.  
(p. 110)

Cunico (2005) echoed a similar complaint in her remark that

textbooks and class material tend not to address explicitly the issue of how social identity is expressed through language and tend to present the foreign language speakers as a monolithic ageless, classless, genderless, (*sic*) entity speaking in a single voice. Students, therefore, not only can only express themselves in one synthetic social identity in the FL but, more crucially, are also unable to recognise the polyphony of identities speaking to them. (p. 24)

Any text is selective by necessity, and as a result of authors' and publishers' attempts to provide texts that are as broadly relevant as possible to their intended consumer, the prototypical North American college student, the pressures of marketability tend to yield so many variations on the same narrow cross-section

of topics and themes. (P. Smith, 1997) Schulz cited Redfield's (1988) objection to the "language-textbook representation of life" in which

all the characters ... are middle-class, and most of them are young. They have various adventures out in the world, eating in a restaurant, going to the theater, traveling, shopping, everywhere making conversation. The most threatening thing that ever seems to happen in these books is that someone gets lost and has to ask directions. We do not encounter here the language of terror or mourning, nor do they use language to persuade or seduce, to wheedle or denounce. The world of these people centers on objects, not persons; even in relation to objects, they consume but they do not produce. We never hear them talking while they work, or dealing with any problem of critical importance. They talk about the weather or their schoolwork, not politics or religion or terrorism or the fate of the earth .... Conflict is attenuated, and the relationships of the textbook characters are relatively superficial. They tease each other, but they never get angry; they go out on dates, but they never make love. (pp. 14-15)

The language of dramatic texts, in comparison, is emotionally laden, fraught with conflict, and richly evocative. Dramatic texts confront taboo topics and place their characters in extreme situations. Here we find the language of terror and mourning, as well as seduction, denunciation, naked aggression, bleeding heartbreak, and the like, in the mouths of old and young, princes and paupers, heroes and villains, ingénues and crones, and fools, wise and otherwise. No single text can encompass every character and situation, but by entering into deep and detailed analysis of what Wilshire (1982) termed the "manifest content" (p. 23) of a text, learners can appropriate the target language forms and structures through which the particular situations of a given play are created, negotiated and resolved. As Cunico (2005) remarked,

drama [*dramatic text*] tends to present problematic situations rich with tension and conflict amongst the characters. As such, drama exposes students to 'difficult' situations often absent from textbook material and classroom activities and presents them with dilemmas expressed,



constructed, and resolved *through* language. (p. 24)

The degree to which the language of a dramatic text mirrors the real world speech of the target language community varies widely according to the style of the play; the time period in which it was written as well as that in which it is set; the skill of the playwright; the types of characters that appear in terms of age, gender, social class, level of education and dialectal variation; and the manifest content of the play. Simpson (1998) stated that “it is a truism to say that drama [*dramatic text*] dialogue differs from everyday speech. Drama dialogue clearly is fabricated interaction between fictional characters, mediated and controlled by playwrights.” (p. 41) However, Piazza (1999) contended that

notwithstanding obvious differences, dramatic discourse – especially in the case of modern theatrical works – expresses a close relation with real-life talk and is forged from life itself.

Hence the interaction portrayed in a drama [*dramatic text*] reflects the way its author envisages the mechanisms of interpersonal exchange in real life. (p. 1002)

She also noted the great rhetorical power that imbues many dramatic texts as a result of the compositional refinement they undergo. Cunico (2005) stated her belief that dramatic text represents fertile territory for exploring the construction of culture through language because of the tension between its similarities and departures from everyday speech:

dramatic dialogue is like natural conversation because it builds upon the same mechanisms as real conversation ... The language of drama [*dramatic text*] is largely stripped of those linguistic features which characterise naturally occurring conversation, such as deictic expressions ... marked thematic patterns, semantically empty fillers, tag questions, repetitions and tautologies, error, false starts, hesitations, pauses and silences .... Since dramatic dialogues build upon the same ‘mechanisms’ of everyday conversation, they offer pedagogical advantages to the language learner since they show more clearly those underlying conversational principles which are normally not accessible in authentic texts due to features of natural talk such as assumed shared

knowledge and a shared history of previous interactions which is not available to ‘overhearers’. In addition, dramatic dialogues are ‘condensed’ meaningful interactions in a way in which normally occurring exchanges are not. In drama, anything said by the characters is relevant and loaded with meaning: it contributes to our understanding of the characters’ personality and of their conversational goals. (pp. 23-24)

Cunico noted a further advantage to the use of dramatic texts in the language course: “unlike real life conflict situations, drama [*dramatic text*] offers the opportunity of slowing down and re-playing the dialogue to focus on the characters’ strategies to manage them.” (p. 24) Although the texts are deliberately constructed interactions with an artistic motive rather than naturally occurring exchanges, they lend themselves to exploration and experimentation. Part of working with a dramatic text is the process of testing out different interpretations of the lines, shaping the interaction through the many possible variations in pace, the use of pauses, and vocal inflection. Engaging in this process helps students to understand how small differences on the micro-levels of discourse can influence the communication and reception of the overall message.

#### The Social Dimensions of Participation in L2 Theatre

Martin and Dowson (2009) conceptualized interpersonal relationships as integral to effective functioning and educational success. They mentioned, among other factors, the importance of cooperative learning contexts in which “students strive to reach their goals through the support and joint focus of others in their group or class.” (p. 342) The social aspects of participation in a target-language theatre production often receive passing mention in research reports, but they are rarely accorded centrality in the investigation. However, Broner and Tarone (2001) rightly pointed out that the social dimensions of language learning are never absent from participants’ experience, and van Lier (2010) noted that learners function as agents in a world of other agents that interact and exert mutual influence. An investigation that invites participants to explore their perceptions of the entire undertaking of a target-language theatre

production holds the potential to substantially increase our understanding of the social dimensions of this learning environment.

#### *Group Dynamics and Language Learning*

Ehrman and Dörnyei (1998) and Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) studied the impact of intermember relationships on classroom language learning. Ehrman and Dörnyei traced the development and dissolution of groups and the reciprocal effects of group dynamics and the classroom environment. Dörnyei and Murphey identified a variety of roles that group members exercised, circumstances that contributed to or detracted from group cohesiveness, and ways that theoretical insights from group dynamics can be applied to the language classroom.

Target-language theatre courses are a unique learning environment. They share some of the classic features of classroom-based language learning, but in other respects they depart from them in significant ways. This investigation will contribute to the literature on how participants in mixed-level target language theatre courses experience the group dynamics of language learning through intermember relationships in a learning environment with important differences from the traditional L2 classroom.

#### *Theatre and L2 Learners' Self-Perceptions of Comparatively Lower Proficiency*

Lutzker (2007) described a context in which participation in an L2 theatre production was an obligatory part of the secondary school curriculum for his cohort of Grade 10 students. From his position as the classroom teacher, he identified a number of participants in his multiple case study of secondary school L2 (English; L1 German) theatre participants who demonstrated a lower level of proficiency as compared to their classroom peers. He found that the theatre experience allowed two students he described as particularly weak in English to excel in that subject for the first time. Another of his case studies was a student who managed barely-passing grades through constant hard work. She, too, was able to make great strides in her L2 development over the course of Lutzker's project. Lutzker described a variety of academic and social dimensions of his participants' experience related to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade class

play.

In North American university settings, the context is somewhat different in that students are able to self-select into the L2 theatre course, and to drop it if it is not to their liking. In the institution where this investigation took place, the courses were offered at the 500-level and included both undergraduate and graduate students. Although exceptions are certainly possible, there is a strong tendency for GSs to enjoy greater language proficiency than UGs. Furthermore, the *perception* of GSs as more proficient is almost universal, and participants' perceptions of their learning environment and themselves as agents interacting with other agents are critically important in van Lier's (2000, 2004, 2010) perspective. Although it has been demonstrated that the learning environment of a theatre production can afford participants extended turns at talk, varied interaction patterns, repetition, elaboration, opportunities for spontaneous discourse, and a cooperative learning situation, research is needed to elucidate whether and how these affordances are available and useful to learners who perceive their own proficiency as lower than that of their classmates. This investigation will contribute to the literature on how UG participants perceive their own proficiency in relation to their GS classmates, and it will seek to understand why they choose to remain in the course and what they derive from their participation in it.

#### Theoretical Lens on L2 Theatre: Bakhtin

Bakhtin (1981, 1986) understood speech as a complex, embedded, socially situated and contextualized phenomenon. He developed a number of concepts in the four essays that make up *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) and the collection of writings published as *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays* (1986) that can be used to understand the complex relationships that emerge as language learners interact with dramatic texts, their classmates, and their professors in the context of target-language theatre productions.

#### *Dialogized Heteroglossia*

Alongside the recent groundswell of research interest in improvisational drama and theatre

approaches to the learning of second and foreign languages, a number of scholars within SLA (most famously Firth & Wagner, 1997) have announced a “sociocultural turn” in the field. Subsequent scholarship (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Johnson, 2004) has called for a paradigm shift in the driving metaphor of the field, replacing *acquisition* with *participation*. Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) theory of language as dialogic heteroglossia lends itself to framing language learning as a participatory act. Recent publications (notably Ball & Freedman, 2004; Hall *et al.*, 2005; and D. Smith, 2007) draw explicit connections between Bakhtin and language learning.

The Bakhtinian view of language, described by Hall *et al.* as comprised of “dynamic constellations of sociocultural resources that are fundamentally tied to their social and historical contexts,” (p. 2) and characterized less by its formal grammar than by the notions of *utterances* and *speech genres*, is crucial for understanding how learners are able to conceptualize the target language as a medium through which to understand and communicate with the surrounding world. How, in other words, do learners move from a granular understanding of discrete words and structures to being able to infuse the target language with their own meanings and intentions? And how can instructors better facilitate this process? In addition to influencing the research agenda of SLA, the application of Bakhtinian theory holds promise for helping to achieve the goal of curriculum integration.

Bakhtin’s (1986) theoretical contribution of the notion of dialogized heteroglossia framed language as contextualized utterances that exist in an embedded relationship with previous and subsequent utterances. All language is derived from the social sphere, and retains the quality of addressivity, of existing in a dialogic relationship between speaker and addressee. Utterances are not generated originally by individuals, but rather appropriated from pre-existing speech genres, and any and every word is

half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and

expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language ... but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293-294)

Rinner and Weigart (2005) applied these insights to questions of curriculum design when they examined in detail how the analysis of target language interviews in their course

enhances students' abilities to notice and reflect on nuances in meaning-making by, for instance, focusing on implications of specific word choices, recognizing the metaphoric or ironic use of language, and tracing the often significant difference between explicit wording and inferable meaning. (p. 141)

A Bakhtinian perspective on theatre in the target language adds a layer of intercultural nuance to the concept of dialogized heteroglossia, as participants speak the already heteroglossic words of the playwright, thus entering an existing network of dialogic relationships between and among the play's characters, the playwright, and the culture that produced the work. They then appropriate the words and populate them with their own intentions and accent within the metaxis of the play world; simultaneously, they appropriate the L2 dialogically as they participate in learning to use it to accomplish the various tasks required to mount a theatrical production. They are obliged to consider the lines of the text as *utterances* exchanged between characters, and to analyze the purposes and motives behind those utterances. They are also required to consider the implications of *addressivity* for the text and for themselves: the utterances are positioned between characters, but they are also positioned between the playwright (as superaddressor) and the public (as superaddressee), and the students become the mouthpieces for transmitting those utterances as they rehearse and perform them amongst themselves, interrogating and exploring their associations and resonances. This leads to the consequence that

[t]he living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a

socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it - it does not approach the object from the sidelines. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 276-277)

With regard to target-language theatre productions, a further implication of Bakhtin's conceptualization of language is that learning happens in social interaction rather than within individuals. Using language allows us to appropriate histories and associations and to create *intersubjectivity* with our interlocutors. Dramatic texts provide a ready source of association-laden language for learners to explore and appropriate within a context of social interaction, creating a fictionalized intersubjectivity between characters that overlays the first-order intersubjectivity that comes about among participants engaged in a common creative endeavor. As noted by Orr (2005),

students who read utterances dialogically; who hear utterances; who speak rhetorically to texts; who communicate textual salience to others within and outside the academic community, articulating agreement, disagreement, empathy, compassion, and outrage; create additional ways of knowing and ways of being. (p. 74)

Students involved in target-language theatre production, whether as actors rehearsing their lines or as non-speaking backstage crew members, cannot escape the dialogic and rhetorical interrogation of the texts with which they work. As they explore the addressivity of the utterances, they are drawn further into the community of target language users engaged in the exchange and interpretation of meaning.

A further Bakhtinian concept that may illuminate the learning environment of target-language theatre is that of *authoritative vs. internally persuasive discourse*. Authoritative discourses are imposed on one from an external source - society, the government, one's parents, one's professors, to name but a few examples. Internally persuasive discourses are those that an individual accepts and claims as one's

own, assimilating them to one's worldview. Bakhtin acknowledges that the two types of discourse may coincide, but they are frequently characterized by some degree of separation and perhaps incompatibility or conflict. In a target-language theatre production, the director/instructor and the text itself represent authoritative discourses which must, to a large extent, be obeyed. When individuals adopt, hybridize, and appropriate discourses and endow them with their own meanings and intentions, the discourses become internally persuasive. Discourses can, furthermore, be *double-voiced*, in which one party deliberately adopts the words of another and, in the process, re-accentuates them with one's own purposes, intentions, and evaluation.

Through mimesis and metaxis, a participant in a theatre production takes on a character's persona. The authoritative discourses imposed by the text (i.e. the lines intended to be spoken by that character) are assumed by the actor as though they were internally persuasive - when "in role," the actor speaks the words as though they "belonged" to him or her. Thus, the participant begins to populate the words with the intentions that make up his or her interpretation of the role. Bakhtin states that "the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's," (1981, p. 345) noting that we express what we think, feel, and believe by borrowing and reclaiming language that already exists in use by others. In the case of mimesis, one "borrows" the discourse as one borrows the language, temporarily assuming it for the length of the performance. In the case of metaxis, one's own discourse, along with one's identity, is temporarily suspended while the adopted discourse temporarily becomes internally persuasive.

Regarding classroom FL instruction, Lin and Luk (2005) note that the aim is to create heteroglossia in the classroom and to heteroglossize [the target language]... to change [the target language] from an authoritative discourse to an internally persuasive discourse to the students, to allow them the space to make [the target language] ... their own by populating it with their own meanings and voices. (p. 95)



They recommend systematic, teacher-guided but student-autonomous work aimed at achieving this goal. A target-language theatre production would seem to be eminently suited toward assisting students with the appropriation and hybridization of discourses in the target language. The “raw material” of the L2 is provided in the form of text, and the meanings, voices, and intentions with which it is to be populated are provided by the participants.

### *Dialogism*

Dialogism is the term used for Bakhtin’s (1981) theory of the relational quality of language and of literary works. He regarded an individual work of literature not as a free-standing and definitive entity, but rather as existing in a continual dialogue with previous as well as subsequent works. Dialogic literature continually informs and is informed by other works with which it stands in communion. Likewise, all language exists in relationship to previously generated language as well as to language that will be produced in response to it, and to the surrounding circumstances of its production. “[A]ny communication ... addressed to someone or evoking something, has a particular purpose, that is, it is a real link in the chain of speech communion in a particular sphere of human activity or everyday life.” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 83) Thus, Bakhtin’s view of language emphasized its use in interaction over its properties as an abstract system. This view of language is consistent with the epistemological assumptions of phenomenology, that an object of study will be poorly understood if abstracted from its circumstances, and that context must be taken into consideration in order to fully appreciate it. As Holquist (1990) notes, every manifestation of language is situated within a time, a place, and a point of view, and the aggregate of these provides the context for its evaluation. Furthermore, this context is always open-ended, mindful of the possibility of future responses that may continue to shape the understanding of the present.

In his seminal study of Bakhtin’s dialogism, Holquist (1990) rightly points out that, when one takes a Bakhtinian perspective on language as a dialogic process, then consequently the study of language falls not under the category of *linguistics* (i.e. the system of language abstracted from its real world

function) but rather of *communication* (i.e. the contextualized use of language between/among interlocutors), which

differs from the study of language as such ... in a number of ways, the most fundamental of which is that in communication there is no point at which the speaker may be thought of as an isolated entity. In the sphere of communication the individuality of the speaker is always and everywhere *relative*. (p. 59, emphasis in the original)

Using a Bakhtinian lens on the learning environment of target-language theatre and the experience of the participants in the present study allows (and indeed obliges) a focus on target language use in the context of social interactions, rather than on discrete properties of the target language that participants may have negotiated, struggled with, or mastered.

#### *Heteroglossia and double-voiced discourse*

In *Discourse In the Novel*, Bakhtin defines *heteroglossia* as *another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of *double-voiced discourse*. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. (1981, p. 324, italics in the original)

This quote provides two definitions for two related concepts, which will be considered individually in this section, beginning with heteroglossia. From the Greek for “different language/tongue”, heteroglossia refers to the multiplicity of idiolects present in a complex work of literature such as a novel (or, by extension, a dramatic text) through the voices of the various characters, the narrator, and embedded texts. Heteroglossia is the special property of literary discourse to simultaneously contain distinct varieties of a single language. For Bakhtin, the diversity of voices is the hallmark of novelistic discourse:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases) - this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [*raznorecie*] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [*raznorecie*] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (pp. 262-263)

Within the sphere of target-language theatre, heteroglossia describes the property of a dramatic text whereby its various characters each speak with a unique voice that contributes to the social diversity of speech types represented in the whole work: a multiplicity of voices created by the author and populated by individual participants as each plays his or her role. Combined with the aforementioned dialogism, it yields *dialogic heteroglossia*, the multiplicity of voices that exists in a dynamic, ongoing relationship with prior as well as subsequent statements.

The second concept introduced in the quote that begins this section is *double-voiced discourse*, the property whereby the author speaks through his or her work, through the voices of the narrator, characters, and embedded texts that s/he positions within the novel or dramatic text. Double-voicedness is

one of the properties that gives literature its complexity. Within a novel or dramatic text, the characters speak to one another; through it, the author speaks to his or her reader(s). When this double-voicedness is considered alongside the dialogism that sets the literary work in mutual dialogue with previous and subsequent works, we can begin to appreciate the framework of complex, interconnected relationships within which any given literary work is embedded, and the context within which it is most properly understood.

A dramatic text possesses many of the same heteroglossic and double-voiced qualities as a novel, but there are a few key differences to consider. Dramatic texts are inherently incomplete: they are written with the intent that they be performed as plays, rather than read as self-sufficient texts. They consist primarily of first-person dialogue between the characters, and they lack the same type of narrative voice found in a novel (although some dramatic texts include a narrator character who serves to advance the plot). Dramatic texts also contain a certain amount of *paratext* or *didascaliae* in the form of stage directions (also including such things as the list of *dramatis personae* and production notes about scenery, prop and costume requirements, lighting cues, sound effects, and the like) which are directly available to the reader but would not be directly available to a spectator attending a production. Rather, the realizations of the stage directions would be perceptible through the *mise-en-scène* of the production. The stage directions supplant the descriptive passages typically found in novels.

A dramatic text becomes a *theatre text* when it is put into production, eventually to be realized as a *play* (i.e. the enacted performance of the written theatre text). The double-voiced quality of a dramatic text multiplies when flesh-and-blood actors begin to interpret the roles and find themselves in dialogue with the playwright, their own characters, the other characters, the other actors, the director, and the spectators, through the mediation of the text.

### *Utterance*

For Bakhtin (1981, 1986) the basic unit of communication is not the word or the sentence but the *utterance*. An utterance is an expression within a living context of exchange - in other words, language produced in response to something and directed toward an interlocutor. It presupposes earlier statements and anticipates subsequent responses in a dialogic exchange. Utterances are communicative and contextualized, and they possess the qualities of *addressivity*, or “directedness” toward someone, and *answerability*, the expectation of generating a response in extension of the dialogue. Utterances are thus dialogic and heteroglossic, existing in context with other utterances generated by other speakers and created with words derived from a language system made up of other’s utterances. In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, (1986) Bakhtin states that understanding is actively responsive, that speakers orient themselves toward it, and that, moreover,

any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe. And he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances - his own and others’ - with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another (builds on them, polemicizes with them, or simply presumes that they are already known to the listener). Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances. (p. 69)

Bakhtin (1986) also describes how utterances are reflective of one another, how they respond to one another, and how they are perpetually open to further interpretation when subsequent speakers repeat them with different inflections and expressions:

Any concrete utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication of a particular sphere. The very boundaries of the utterance are determined by a change of speech subjects. Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another. These mutual reflections determine their character. Each utterance is filled with

echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication. Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a *response* to preceding utterances of the given sphere (we understand the word “response” here in the broadest sense). Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account ... each utterance is filled with various kinds of responsive reactions to other utterances ... Both whole utterances and individual words can retain their alien expression, but they can also be re-accentuated (ironically, indignantly, reverently, and so forth). Others’ utterances can be repeated with varying degrees of reinterpretation. (p. 91)

Utterances, notes Holquist, always take place between/among speakers and are “therefore drenched in social factors,” (1990, p. 61) and they are characterized not only by the words that are spoken but by the shared, unspoken assumptions held by speaker and hearer(s), linked in the quality of intonation: “The simultaneity of the said and unsaid is most apparent in the area of intonation, which is where the repeatable, merely linguistic stuff of the utterance is stitched to the unrepeatable social situation in which it is spoken.” (Holquist, 1990, p. 61) Holquist bases this on Bakhtin’s (1986) description of the speaker’s positioning within a referentially semantic sphere and the emotional expression with which s/he infuses the utterance as key features of its characterization:

Any utterance is a link in the chain of speech communion. It is the active position of the speaker in one referentially semantic sphere or another. Therefore, each utterance is characterized primarily by a particular referentially semantic content. The choice of linguistic means and speech genre is determined primarily by the referentially semantic assignments (plan) of the speech subject (or author). This is the first aspect of the utterance that determines its compositional and stylistic features.

The second aspect of the utterance that determines its composition and style is the *expressive* aspect, that is, the speaker’s subjective emotional evaluation of the referentially

semantic content of his utterance. The expressive aspect has varying significance and varying degrees of force in various spheres of speech communication, but it exists everywhere. There can be no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance. The speaker's evaluative attitude toward the subject of his speech (regardless of what his subject may be) also determines the choice of lexical, grammatical, and compositional means of the utterance. The individual style of the utterance is determined primarily by its expressive aspect. (p. 84)

In literature, the reader must supply the intonation by transforming the written word into utterances spoken by the mind's voice. Dramatic text "freezes" utterances on the page in a skeletal and incomplete form; they become more fully realized when the dramatic text is transformed into a theatre text and they begin to be rehearsed by actors who give them voice and intonation. The repetition inherent in the rehearsal process allows them to be analyzed and explored. They are first studied outside of rehearsal time while the actors complete their individual preparatory work; then the actors come together in rehearsal and collaboratively experiment with various interpretations and intonations. Eventually a comparatively fixed interpretation is agreed upon and reenacted in performance. Even this "final" version, however, is an active and dynamic entity that changes with each iteration, responding to previous readings and to new intonations that arise, because each repetition of the words of the utterance is surrounded by an unrepeatable social situation, formed by the accretion of previous repetitions and their surrounding circumstances.

### *Carnival*

In addition to his work on dialogized heteroglossia, Bakhtin also made a significant theoretical contribution to our understanding of the function of carnival and the carnivalesque in *Rabelais and His World* (1968). The sense of upheaval occasioned by carnival and the destruction of the old order to make way for the new, the cycle of renewal and rebirth, are key for understanding the function of theatre. Bakhtin discusses the effect of upending authority and hierarchical structures. He notes that during

carnival, “rank is suspended” (p. 10) and the various members of society can intermingle in “free and familiar contact ... this temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life.” (p. 10)

This insight illuminates one of the most distinctive aspects of the learning experience in target-language theatre. When the course moves from the classroom setting into the theater and the focus changes from literary analysis to theatrical production, the established order and classroom rituals are disrupted, and a space is created in which new types of communication are made possible. Seedhouse (2004) demonstrated the comparative rigidity of classroom-based interaction, which inevitably occurs embedded within a framework of existing power relationships between and among students and the instructor. These relationships are culturally entrenched and exceedingly difficult to change, let alone escape. However, Lin and Luk (2005) noted Bakhtin’s “immense passion for and belief in the potential liberative power of human agency and local creativity” (p. 78) in the face of governing social structures, and the impulse for creative destruction that flourishes in the presence of parody and carnival laughter.

In the context of target-language theatre productions, moving from the classroom to the theater while simultaneously changing the objective of the interaction from “studying dramatic texts” to “doing theatre” disrupts the framework enough to permit a space within which new interaction patterns may take hold. Parody enters the framework through the actors’ use of humor and exaggeration to interpret texts, to participate in theatre games and improvisation activities, and to transmit mischievous, playfully transgressive messages through deliberate subversions of the text. Carnival laughter is a natural outgrowth of both parodic and other interactions within the theater space, as professor and students become collaborators in a complex creative endeavor. Vitanova (2005) notes that in carnivalized discourse, laughter can become an act of resistance: in the theatrical context, when students and the professor laugh together, it transforms their relationship and subverts the power structure. In Bakhtinian terms, the old order is upended, the classroom hierarchy is displaced, and it becomes possible for students and the



professor to relate to one another in new and different ways.

An additional aspect of Bakhtin's concept of carnival that merits discussion with respect to theatre is the centrality of the body and embodiment. Bakhtin discusses the importance, indeed the glorification, of the bodily functions of eating, drinking, excretion and sex in *Rabelais and His World*. (1968) The ordinary educational environment of the classroom is a space largely devoid of explicit attention to the body, except in cases of borderline transgression (teachers may, for instance, object to students eating and drinking in the classroom. If food and/or beverages are permitted, it is a marked demonstration of the instructor's benevolence and is usually explicitly mentioned at the beginning of the course, precisely because it is a deviation from the assumed norm). The body may be discussed as an object of intellectual inquiry, but the classroom is the domain of the mind, and rarely are students permitted or encouraged to use their bodies *as* bodies: to get up, move around, call and pay explicit attention to the actions of the body.

The theater is a space apart, governed by very different norms of bodily behavior. Participants engage in activities that require movement, contact, and noisemaking. The body is very explicitly in focus throughout the entire process of producing a play: Auditions require that hopeful actors demonstrate their ability to embody a role, not merely to understand and discuss it. Rehearsal begins with blocking, sketching out the positions the actors' bodies will occupy in space over the course of the play, and as the actors refine their interpretations, ever more fine-grained attention is paid to how they use their voices, gestures, and facial expressions. Indeed, one of the most iconic theatre rituals is explicitly focused on the body and bodily functions: right before the curtain rises on a performance, the cast and crew gather in a huddle backstage and engage in a gesture of teamwork that marks the culmination of their efforts. In the English-speaking world, the superstition is to wish one another "Good luck" by saying "Break a leg!" In the Romance languages the ritual is decidedly more Rabelaisian: in the Spanish-speaking world the *refrán* of choice is "¡Mucha mierda!" while the expression *de rigueur* for Francophones is "Merde!"

## Theoretical Lens on L2 Theatre: van Lier

### *Ecological Framework*

Van Lier (2000, 2004, 2010) suggests that the work of Bakhtin (together with others including Vygotsky, Peirce, Mead, and Dewey) illustrates what he terms an ecological approach to language learning that questions the reductionist, Cartesian assumptions and predominant focus on learner-internal cognitive processes of mainstream scientific approaches and replaces them with a holistic focus on the complex relationships between language learners and their environments. Van Lier posits an outward-looking definition of learning as “the development of increasingly effective ways of dealing with the world and its meanings” (2000, p. 246) and states that the ecological approach to language learning

shifts the emphasis from scientific reductionism to the notion of emergence. Instead of assuming that every phenomenon can be explained in terms of simpler phenomena or components, it says that at every level of development properties emerge that cannot be reduced to those of prior levels. Second, ecology says that not all of cognition and learning can be explained in terms of processes that go on inside the head. Finally, an ecological approach asserts that the perceptual and social activity of the learner, and particularly the verbal and nonverbal interaction in which the learner engages, are central to an understanding of learning. In other words, they do not just facilitate learning, they *are* learning in a fundamental way. (2000, p. 246)

He points out that cognition, learning, and language itself are both representational and ecological - they have both an inward and an outward focus. The dominant research trend in all three areas is inward-focused, but van Lier contends that there is much to be gained by developing an outward-focused, ecological approach to understanding the perceptual, emergent, and action-based aspects and processes of language learning.

Similar to Bakhtin’s (1981) emphasis on a dialogic understanding of language as relational, contextualized communication rather than as an abstract linguistic system, van Lier (2000) describes

ecological linguistics as “a study of language as relations (of thought, action, power), rather than as objects (words, sentences, rules). It also relates verbal utterances to other aspects of meaning making, such as gestures, drawings, artifacts” (p. 251). This view of language is eminently well-suited to studying the learning environment of target-language theatre, in which meaning-making through gestures, artifacts, scenery, costumes, lighting, sound effects, and other semiotic channels is explicitly and collaboratively developed in order to complement verbal utterances. Van Lier notes that

[i]n terms of learning, language emerges out of semiotic activity. The context is not just there to provide input (linguistic models or objects) to a passive recipient. The environment provides a ‘semiotic budget’ (analogous to the energy budget of an ecosystem) within which the active learner engages in meaning-making activities together with others, who may be more, equally, or less competent in linguistic terms. The semiotic budget does not refer to the amount of ‘input’ available, or the amount of input that is enhanced for comprehension, but to the opportunities for meaningful action that the situation affords. (2000, p. 252)

The ecological view of language learning lends itself to studying situated, relatively uncontrolled communicative situations (such as free conversations) rather than structured tasks. Van Lier notes that although it may become more difficult to elicit specific controlled interactions (such as negotiation for meaning and repair sequences) in conversational exchanges, considerable linguistic work takes place nonetheless as participants negotiate their identities, their social relationships, and their intersubjective, collaborative construction of the conversational exchange. In the ecological learning environment van Lier envisions, the role of the instructor is “to provide a rich ‘semiotic budget’ ... and to structure the learner’s activities and participation so that access is available and engagement encouraged.” (p. 253)

Van Lier describes the debate between cognitivist and situative, social-constructivist perspectives on language learning research and notes that “Bakhtin’s dialogical view of language ... and the various manifestations of ecological theory are at the contextual or situative end of the spectrum, even though

they do not necessarily deny a central role to cognitive processes.” (p. 254) He also cites Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1993; Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994) bioecological model of hierarchically nested ecosystems, in which learning contexts are considered effective if they encourage the realization of six categories of goals and outcomes: differentiated perception and response, directing and controlling one’s own behavior, successfully coping with stress, acquiring skills and knowledge, establishing and maintaining mutually rewarding relationships, and modifying and constructing one’s own environment (social and symbolic as well as physical). This approach defines “learning” much more broadly than mere mastery of facts and figures; in linguistic terms, successful learning entails the ability to participate in Bakhtinian communicative transactions, not mastery of the abstract linguistic system. It is a deeper view of learning than a Cartesian cognitivist model.

Alvstad and Castro (2009) quotes Marton, Dall’Alba & Beaty’s (1993, p. 172) description of six qualitatively different conceptions of learning, on a continuum from superficial to deep: learning can encompass increase of knowledge, memorization, application, understanding, seeing something in a different way, and changing as a person. These latter three, the instantiations of deep learning, are related to meaning-making in the L2, and can be brought about through participation in target-language theatre by placing students in a learning environment rich with linguistic affordances of many varieties. Although theatre obviously relies on learning through memorization and application, these are far from the only forms of learning that take place during the experience. Rather, memorization and application can open the doors to the deeper and more transformative forms of learning. Students achieve an understanding of the text and learn to see the culture in a different way by “playing” it: playing with it, inhabiting it through metaxis, and exploring possible interpretations through the rehearsal process. The experience of acting in the target language and assuming the role of a character in a dramatic text has the potential to change the learner as a person.

The challenge to the researcher in investigating this aspect of target-language theatre participation is that it resists quantification and clear operationalization, and instead requires a paradigm that embraces the messy complexity of context rather than seeking to control it. The learners themselves are in the best position to identify their own changes, tracing their initiation and progression. Their self-reports are unavoidably subjective, but this same subjectivity is an omnipresent part of human experience and merits inclusion in the ecological research context. It is useful for educators to know what aspects of their learning environments our students credit with initiating learning experiences they regard as transformative. Van Lier (2000) quotes Wittgenstein's (1980) apothegm, "there are remarks that sow and remarks that reap", (p. 78) and notes that

In our language learning research we have traditionally tended to look for evidence of the 'reaping' kind, tangible and countable linguistic objects of some kind. However, it seems to me that we need to learn to identify 'sowing' events, which lead to the emergence of complex language as a result of activity in proximal contexts. (van Lier, 2000, p. 255)

It is much more difficult, of course, to pinpoint the initiation of a linguistic development than it is to identify its emergence, but by expanding the focus from the cognitive black box of the learner's mind to include the wider learning environment, we can begin to identify contexts that offer propitious conditions for learners to engage in deep, transformative learning and develop a more complete understanding of the phenomenon of language acquisition. As van Lier notes,

Ecological educators see language and learning as relationships among learners and between learners and the environment. This does not deny cognitive processes, but it connects those cognitive processes with social processes. Language is also connected with kinesic, prosodic, and other visual and auditory sources of meaning, and as a result of this contextualized and process-oriented thinking, new ways of practicing and theorizing language education will emerge.

The ecological perspective thus places a strong emphasis on contextualizing language into other semiotic systems, and into the contextual world as a whole. It also calls for a reexamination of assessment practices that attempt to locate success in the solitary performance of a learner, and of teaching practices that are cast in the form of ‘instructional delivery systems’.

(2000, pp. 258-259)

### *Affordances*

Norman (1988) introduced the concept of *affordances* to describe the characteristics of objects and, particularly, the design features of created artifacts that lend themselves to certain manners of use and preclude others. A basic example of an affordance from everyday life is the design of a door handle. There are a number of types of door handles in common use, and the design of each offers clues as to how the user is meant to interact with it. Knobs invite twisting, push-bar door handles cannot be twisted and must be pushed, and U-shaped handles can be either pushed or pulled depending on a further affordance, the orientation of the hinges on the door in question. To some degree, all affordances impose limits on interactions, but in some instances they may change over time and different users may interact with them in different ways. A clear example is the telephone: since its invention, it has always afforded speaking with remote interlocutors. However, recent iterations of the telephone now afford many more types of interactions using new interfaces, and individual users vary widely in *how* they make use of the many affordances now available via the telephone. Depending on the generation of the phone, there may or may not be capabilities such as sending text messages, taking photographs, navigating the Internet, and using all manner of applications. Depending on the individual user, there may or may not be an inclination to avail oneself of all the affordances a given phone may offer.

The concept of affordances in the linguistic environment is one of the keys to applying the ecological framework to theatre-based language learning. Van Lier defines *affordance* as

a particular property of the environment that is relevant - for good or ill - to an active perceiving organism in that environment. An affordance affords further action (but does not cause or trigger it). What becomes an affordance depends on what the organism does, what it wants, and what is useful for it ... If the language learner is active and engaged, she will perceive linguistic affordances and use them for linguistic action ... an affordance is a property of neither the actor nor of an object: it is a relationship between the two. (p. 252)

In his emphasis on the relational view of language learning, van Lier points out that it is “not a process of representing linguistic objects in the brain on the basis of input received ... we do not ‘have’ or ‘possess’ language, ... we learn to use it and to ‘live in it’.” (p. 253) Rather than regarding the language a learner is exposed to as *input*, which invokes a container metaphor in which the learner is seen as a passive receptacle, the ecological perspective sees the learner situated within an environment full of language opportunities. The learner perceives and is able to make use of these opportunities in various ways depending upon multiple factors including perceptual salience, developmental level of the learner, motivation, communicative need, and other social and affective factors. It is the learner’s engagement with the linguistic opportunities through his or her activity that turns them into affordances. For example, instructors frequently make use of film clips, songs, newspaper and magazine articles or excerpts thereof, advertisements and other realia in the classroom, often with the intention of highlighting a particular grammar point featured in the selected material. The learners, when given the opportunity to interact with the authentic L2 materials, may indeed orient to the salient grammatical feature chosen by the instructor; however, they may also derive other affordances from the language they are exposed to. A film clip of a dialogue richly laden with the imperative form, for example, will also contain pragmatic features that may become affordances for developmentally-ready learners: attention-getting and –keeping devices, pragmatic discourse features (such as the use of formal or informal address), relevant colloquialisms, paralinguistic information about proxemics, to name just a few examples. Anything a learner is able to

derive from the exchange becomes an affordance; the affordances learners derive may or may not coincide with what the instructor anticipates.

#### Approach to Situating the Present Study

The previous sections of this chapter have outlined the ways in which L2 theatre affords the possibility to address language and content integration needs at the critical juncture between language and literature study in the FL curriculum. It provides a course format that allows participants to focus on the language of a text in a targeted way, in depth and for an extended period of time. Mastery of the linguistic system is tremendously important, yet it serves the larger purpose of communicating the literary text in a contextualized and socially-embedded way. Participants gain direct experience with the dialogic and heteroglossic qualities of double-voiced discourse, and they interact in an environment rich with potential affordances for language learning. Target-language theatre also introduces participants to the literary conventions of the genre and gives them an opportunity to see and experience through enactment how symbols and themes help to convey the meaning of the text. Such an experience may be particularly well-suited to the needs of students whose proficiency is below that of their peers. Lutzker (2007) stated, regarding the language-learning experience of the students in his study, that

the one generalization that can be made is that *all* the weaker students who had large roles wrote the most positively about the changes in their English abilities, whereas those pupils who were more reserved or just referred to improvement in pronunciation had roles with much less text. In this respect, it appears that learning and speaking large amounts of text may have offered more possibilities of experiencing significant progress in a wider range of areas. (p. 300)

This is how theatre *could* be used in foreign language departments. As previously noted, however, in practice the largest speaking roles are likely to be given to the most proficient students, including GSs, possibly denying the less-proficient students an opportunity for significant linguistic enrichment. Furthermore, theatre productions may be extracurricular activities rather than academic



courses. As Dalziel and Pennacchi (2012) noted, intrinsic motivation is the primary reason for participation in extracurricular target-language theatre productions; however, we do not yet know if the same holds true for credit-bearing L2 theatre courses. In order to best understand the potential, as well as the potential limitations, of theatre within FL departments, it is necessary to fully explore the role it currently occupies and the perspectives of the participating students.

As a natural consequence of L2 theatre's peripheral position in the FL curriculum, it is somewhat marginal in SLA research as well. A problem of circularity complicates the proposal to reposition L2 theatre in a more central way: FL departments are unlikely (and rightfully so) to embrace the idea of implementing L2 theatre courses in the curriculum as a way of transitioning learners to higher proficiency without research evidence to demonstrate its effectiveness. However, in order to obtain research evidence, we must have L2 theatre productions that can serve as research sites. For the time being, in order to determine whether there are sound arguments for making theatre a more central component of the curriculum, the logical approach is to study it in its present form.

Most research into theatre and improvisational drama for language learning purposes takes for granted that the participants experience the activity as a language learning endeavor, but to date there has been no explicit research into that question. In a critique of SLA research trends that treat learners as representative of variables rather than as entities unto themselves, Ushioda (2009) made the argument that

we should not position the central participants in our research simply as language learners, since this is just one aspect of their identity ... we need to understand second language learners as people, and as people who are necessarily located in particular cultural and historical contexts. (p. 216)

Those features of participation in L2 theatre regarded as salient by instructors and researchers may or may not coincide with those experienced as most meaningful to the participants. Therefore, a necessary starting point, before making any specific recommendations about curricular implementation of L2

theatre, is an interrogation of how participants experience it. In their multiple case study of learners in literature classrooms, Polio and Zyzik (2009) emphasized that “it is essential to examine the perspectives of the stakeholders (i.e., the students and instructors) before proposing any curricular changes suggested by the MLA report or otherwise” (p.5) In justifying their decision to conduct a multiple case study on learners in Spanish literature courses, they noted that while there has been some research on learner beliefs vis-à-vis the literature and culture of the target language,

what is missing is a more complete picture of how the perspectives of the instructors, the students, and the second language acquisition research do or do not converge. Instructional changes can be successfully implemented only when the participants’ points of view are understood. (p. 9)

In an effort to address this gap in the research literature, I have elected to investigate participants’ experience in L2 theatre productions through a phenomenological, interview-based approach. The next section of this chapter will describe the conceptual framework of phenomenology and how it informs the present study. Theatre phenomenologist Stanton B. Garner defined the aims of the phenomenological approach as

to redirect attention from the world as it is conceived by the abstracting, ‘scientific’ gaze (the objective world) to the world as it appears or discloses itself to the perceiving subject (the phenomenal world); to pursue the thing as it is given to consciousness in direct experience; to return perception to the fullness of its encounter with its environment. (1994, p. 2)

The abstracting, scientific gaze of mainstream SLA research is prone to lose sight of the individuality and complexity of socially situated activity in the target language, and of the dimensionality of participants seen not as research subjects but as people with rich and contextualized experiences to share. In selecting a phenomenological approach to analyze the experience of participating in target-language theatre, I seek to unmask the learner experience in order to supplant assumptions held by teachers and researchers about

what transpires (and, perhaps, what does not transpire) among target-language theatre participants.

#### Conceptual Framework: Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a research approach that describes the meaning of lived experience. It originated in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1931/1977; 1950/1964; 1970), and is rooted in his assertion that conscious perception is active, not a passive taking-in of the object of perception. Husserl laid the foundations of phenomenology in a series of lectures given in the early 1900's at the University of Göttingen and published posthumously (1950/1964). A later series of lectures given at the Sorbonne was eventually published as *Cartesian Meditations* (1931/1977), which articulated a rejection of Cartesian mind-body dualism. Husserl objected to the idea that "reality" exists "out there" somewhere, and that our consciousness is somehow separate and distinguishable from that external reality: "The attempt to conceive the universe of true being as something lying outside the universe of possible consciousness, possible knowledge, possible evidence, the two being related merely externally by a rigid law, is nonsensical." (Husserl 1931/1977, p. 84)

Husserl believed that it was impossible to conceive of an external reality as separate from consciousness because the one inevitably constitutes the other. All reality exists as "reality-for-someone," reality perceived and experienced by consciousness. Husserl described it as the *noema*, or "intentional object of consciousness." By the same token, he described consciousness itself as *noesis*, "acts of thought," because it has the property of *intentionality*, "aboutness." In other words, there is no such thing as "pure" consciousness; rather, consciousness is always conscious *of* some given reality. Furthermore, although the experience of consciousness of an object is particular and specific to that object, it also contains within it the possibility of all other experiences of that object: it is *transcendent*. Hammond *et al.* (1991) describe it thus:

One has experiences of something 'out-there'. This 'out-there' is an aspect of the experience ...

One has a sense of what is beyond particular experiences; but it is a sense which is explicated by

describing all the other possible experiences which are implicit in the actual one. It is seen as transcendent because one can never have all possible experiences of it. That is the sense in which the transcendent world 'goes beyond' experience. One has this *sense* of the transcendent; and for Husserl this is all we need. But in this sense a transcendent object is always an object-for-a-subject. (Hammond *et al.*, 1991, p. 85)

Husserl (1970) also developed arguments against the positivist limitations of empiricism, which reduced science to that which is measurable and explicitly excluded value questions from the domain of rational inquiry. Husserl's phenomenology placed primary importance on understanding the world as it is experienced in action and perception, rather than through describing it in terms of what is measurable. As Holstein and Gubrium (2008) expressed it,

although the term 'construction' came into fashion much later, we might say that consciousness constructs as much as it perceives the world. Husserl's project is to investigate the structures of consciousness that make it possible to apprehend an empirical world. (p. 175)

Merleau-Ponty (1945/1981) further developed phenomenological thought by focusing on the centrality of embodied experience: emphasizing that knowledge is acquired not only through the action of consciousness, but through bodily experience. Merleau-Ponty expands upon Husserl's two-way relationship between *noesis* and *noema*, consciousness and the world, to include a third foundational element, the human body, in an intertwined mutual engagement. For Merleau-Ponty, the *noesis-noema* relationship was insufficient when considering the phenomena of the body, which is simultaneously a perceiving subject and an object of perception. In Merleau-Ponty's view, all consciousness is perceptual consciousness, and he argued that positivist science without a phenomenological awareness of the subjective depth of phenomena was doomed to insufficiency. It would never be able to give a complete account of the natural world because it failed to recognize the very subjectivity of the positivist scientist's

perceptions and, consequently, lacked transcendence. Spurling's (1977) articulation of the objection is that

theorizing for positivism becomes *un-reflective*; the theorist has no interest in the grounds of his own theorizing, in the process of theorizing itself in so far as it serves to disclose something about the theorist and the kind of world he lives in. Positivism is not concerned with how a theory is generated, but only with how it is empirically validated, and worthy to be considered as valid knowledge. The positivist theorizer is debarred from exploring the phenomenological roots of his own theorizing. (pp. 79-80, emphasis in the original)

Alfred Schütz (1932/1972) adopted Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy into a means of sociological investigation. Schütz' project was to build a philosophical foundation for the social sciences, and to do this he drew on Husserl and Max Weber. Schütz devoted much attention to intersubjectivity and the social nature of knowledge, or how people within their own streams of consciousness are able to grasp the consciousness of others. Schütz also explored the dialectical nature of social reality: people exist within a *Lebenswelt*, a "life world," a social reality which is partly created by them, and partly constrained by pre-existing social and cultural factors: other people, institutions, traditions, values, and the like. Ritzer (2011) describes Schütz' interest in the

dialectical relationship between the way people construct social reality and the obdurate social and cultural reality that they inherit from those who preceded them in the social world ... people both create social reality and are constrained by the preexisting social and cultural structures created by their predecessors. (p. 219)

Schütz also explored the ways that social experience takes place within various, intertwined planes: that of direct perception and experience, and the past, the future, and the present which falls outside of one's realm of direct experience.

I have chosen phenomenology as a framework suited to the study of complex, socially-embedded

experience. Much good and important work in mainstream SLA rests on positivist assumptions and focuses on ways to operationalize and measure language learning by controlling variables and contexts. Isolating individual factors in experimental studies allows us to understand them in greater depth and yields valuable insights into how they contribute to language learning. This investigation in no way seeks to diminish that research. What it does seek, rather, is to supplement it by giving voice to the non-quantifiable, experiential aspects of L2 learning, and to include the subjectivity and complexity inherent in naturally-occurring learning environments. Most language learning happens outside of controlled experimental conditions; countless factors interact constantly, often in unpredictable ways. A positivist approach reveals certain details to the observer while concealing others. I offer this phenomenological investigation as a complementary perspective. Spurling (1977) notes that phenomenology “provides that frame, or series of frames, through which we can view our experience and being-in-the-world in order to begin to comprehend it in all its ambiguity, profundity and essential interconnectedness.” (p. 5)

Creswell (2007) described the basic purpose of phenomenology as the distillation of the “universal essence” (p. 58) of a phenomenon by interrogating the experience of a number of individuals and identifying common themes in an attempt to uncover the deeper meaning of lived experience. Wilshire (1982) stated it thus: “Phenomenology is the systematic attempt to unmask the obvious.” (p. 11) The main approaches to phenomenology in contemporary social science research are hermeneutic phenomenology, as described by van Manen (1990), and Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenology (also known as empirical or psychological phenomenology). Hermeneutic phenomenology takes a more interpretive stance toward lived experience, while transcendental phenomenology deliberately refrains, to the extent possible, from interpretation.

I have selected phenomenology from the other options for qualitative research precisely because it demands that the researcher set aside her own preconceptions about the topic under study, in a process known as *epoché* or *bracketing*, so as to be able to approach the experience without preconceptions or

judgment. Creswell (2007) suggested that transcendental phenomenology is suitable for situations in which one wishes to understand a number of individuals' experiences in order to develop policy recommendations. (p. 60) Precisely because I have an interest in the potential curricular implications for repositioning L2 theatre, I recognize the need to undertake my proposed investigation from within a framework that exposes that interest and requires that it be deliberately set aside. However, I also recognize the importance of contextualizing my findings within an interpretive framework, and I am conscious of the near impossibility of a truly transcendental and interpretation-free approach: even the mere act of organizing participants' statements into categories is, in a sense, an interpretive act. Therefore, while my approach to handling the data in *Chapter 4: Findings* is transcendental, in the final phase of analysis I adopt an interpretive stance, framing my findings with Bakhtin and van Lier's theories, and my approach must therefore be characterized as hermeneutic phenomenology.

A further rationale for the use of phenomenology to investigate L2 theatre is that a number of scholars (Fortier, 2006; Garner, 1994; Rayner, 1994; Wilshire, 1982; Zarrilli, 2004, 2007) have identified it as a particularly suitable approach for studying the experience of theatre. Fortier (2006) stated that in a manner different from literary or pictorial arts, theatre has a special relationship with the presentation of lived experience to the spectator. Theatre appears to the spectator's senses as something to be seen and heard ... The sensory effects of theatre are central to phenomenological concerns. (p. 39)

A number of theatre scholars (among them Garner, 1982 and Wilshire, 1982) have pursued phenomenology as an appropriate framework for analyzing the experience of the theatre spectator; Zarrilli (2004, 2007) used it with actors; I now propose to use it to understand the lived experience of the participant, whether actor or crew member, in the theatre-based language course.

Furthermore, A'ness (2011) discusses theatre as a form of embodied pedagogy and a way of transcending Cartesian dualism and the mind/body split that pervades modern education. She argues that

“to adhere to the mind/body split in the classroom is to ignore the fact that the classroom is full of bodies. It is thus an embodied space that is highly charged and, by nature, performative” (p. 139) and she advocates “using the body as a medium through which to think, feel, and creatively explore the course material,” (p. 139) because “all learning is primarily mediated through the body.” (p. 139) Her view reflects a phenomenological understanding of embodied experience in the tradition of Merleau-Ponty (1945/1981), and she acknowledges the importance of bringing together abstract analysis with somatic, kinetic, and emotional embodied experience in theatre-based learning environments:

Those committed to resisting the mind/body split in the classroom ... are not seeking to replace reason with emotion but instead to create a space in which a productive relationship, even a tension between the two can be maintained. Since the body is the mediator and locator of knowledge “it brings together both reason and sensuality, intellect and perception, mind and body.” And since reason and emotion represent two different modes of thinking and engaging with the course material, they can each ultimately complement the other. (A’ness, 2011, p. 140, citing Shapiro, 1999, p. 41)

#### Compatibility of Bakhtin and Phenomenology

A Bakhtinian approach to a phenomenological research investigation is logical, compatible, and motivated because the two frameworks share critical assumptions. Husserl’s view that consciousness takes an active role in constructing individual experience aligns with the Bakhtinian concept of language as a dialogic phenomenon. In other words, in the phenomenologist’s view experience is not given by one’s external circumstances (i.e. experience does not simply “happen to” the one who experiences); it is always being created through one’s interactions. Likewise, in a Bakhtinian framework language is better viewed as medium and outcome of communicative interactions, rather than as something that exists “out there” independently of its users. Holquist (1990) describes dialogism as a multiplicity in human perception, and an awareness of the situatedness of lived experience: “dialogism’s master assumption is



that there is no figure without a ground. The mind is structured so that the world is always perceived according to this contrast.” (p. 22) Dialogism takes into account the distinctions and categories appropriate to multiple individuals’ perspectives and experiences. “For the perceivers, their own time is forever open and unfinished; their own space is always the center of perception, the point around which things arrange themselves as a horizon whose meaning is determined by wherever they have their place in it.” (p. 22)

There is, furthermore, an obvious compatibility between Bakhtin’s dialogic heteroglossia and addressivity of language, and Schütz’ understanding of social relations and the dialectic relationship between the pre-existing surrounding culture and individual actors’ agency. As Bakhtin states,

Any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe. And he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances - his own and others’ - with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another (builds on them, polemicizes with them, or simply presumes that they are already known to the listener). Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances. (1986, p. 69)

Schütz offers the same view of actions: like Bakhtinian utterances, every action responds to the pre-existing matrix of all the actions that have gone before, and through their actions “people both create social reality and are constrained by the preexisting social and cultural structures created by their predecessors.” (Ritzer, 2011, p. 219)

There is also a clear analogue between Bakhtin’s dialogic heteroglossia and Schütz’ understanding of the intertwining sublevels of the lifeworld and the interplay between direct and indirect relations. For Bakhtin, “language ... lies on the borderline between oneself and the other,” and words are “half someone else’s” (1981, p. 293) until a speaker appropriates them and populates them with his or her

own intentions. The speaker thus forms a connection to words that already exist within a(n ever-expanding) matrix of connections to others. Schütz, likewise, understands the network of relations between social entities as subject to constant expansion via direct interactions that bring about connections to indirect, second-order actors in other sublevels of the lifeworld:

[I]f in a face-to-face relationship with a friend I discuss a magazine article dealing with the attitude of the President and Congress toward...China...I am in a relationship not only with the perhaps anonymous contemporary writer of the article but also with the contemporary individual or collective actors on the social scene designated by the terms "President", "Congress", "China". (1973, p. 352)

Bakhtin and Schütz would both see clear implications of their theories for the phenomenon of target-language theatre. For Bakhtin, dialogized heteroglossia comes about on multiple levels: first, the playwright appropriates existing language and populates it with his or her own intentions in the creation of the dramatic text. Later, a new cycle of appropriation and population takes place as students learn their lines and begin to act through them. Furthermore, the language of the play is made available to students on a wider plane, as they are able to appropriate words and phrases for spontaneous use outside of the play itself. Participants also encounter and appropriate new language in the course of the interactions and conversations that take place around the practical, problem-solving aspects of mounting a production. In Schütz' view, participants have direct, firsthand encounters with their classmates, the instructor, and the text; through these encounters, they will establish second-order connections with aspects of the target culture and literature.

#### Compatibility of van Lier and Phenomenology

The ecological framework for language learning that van Lier (2000, 2004, 2010) proposed is likewise compatible with the assumptions of phenomenology. Husserl's insistence that experience is not merely given by external circumstances and that consciousness plays an active role in shaping experience

is consistent with van Lier's view of the language learner as an agent interacting in a world full of other agents (2010) and as an active participant in the learning environment, finding and using affordances based on their availability and the learner's own developmental level, needs, and readiness to make use of them (2000, 2004, 2010). The phenomenologist's understanding of experience as being created through one's interactions rather than given by one's external circumstances accords with van Lier's understanding that language learning does not merely "happen to" a learner in an environment, rather it is brought about through the learner's active identification of, selection of, and engagement with affordances.

Schütz, likewise, understood the relationship between the pre-existing surrounding culture and an individual actors' agency as a dialectic of mutually exerted influence. In Schütz' view, actions are responses to other pre-existing actions, and people are agents who both create social reality and are constrained by existing sociocultural structures. Van Lier's view of language learners' agency in relation to their environments and to other social actors reflects the same dialectic of mutual influence and balance of free action within situational constraint.

#### Summary of Literature Review

A review of the available literature demonstrates that much work has been done regarding the various affordances potentially available to participants in target-language theatre productions. However, there is as yet no published investigation of the experience from the participants' point of view that focuses on the experience of undergraduate university students of comparatively lower proficiency than their classmates, who may include graduate students and native speakers.

This overview of the curricular issues related to university FL study, the place theatre currently occupies relative to the wider FL curriculum, the social dimensions of participation in FL theatre, and the particular affordances it may hold for learners who perceive themselves as less proficient than their peers demonstrates that target-language theatre is a complex entity that cannot easily be abstracted from its

wider institutional setting, nor from the perspectives and unique contributions of its individual participants. In order to better understand this multifaceted, socially-situated phenomenon of which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, I have elected to frame my research questions within the phenomenological tradition of interrogating experience to understand its essence. What is the experience of an undergraduate L2 learner participating in a mixed-level target-language theatre production with peers, some of whom (s)he perceives to be more proficient? What affordances do participants notice and avail themselves of? What, according to their self-reports, do they derive from these affordances? Are these self-reports triangulated and corroborated by observations of the experience by the participant-observer researcher?

The next chapter details the methodology used to investigate these questions, and describes the design of the study and the process of data collection.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

As the profession comes to terms with the challenge of addressing curricular fragmentation and providing students with a more coherent learning experience, Polio and Zyzik (2009) have issued the call to investigate the perspectives of all the stakeholders, especially students, ahead of implementing curricular changes. Because I believe theatre-based language learning can integrate the acquisition of speaking skills, grammatical knowledge, and literary understanding, I propose a phenomenological investigation of the theatre-based language learning experience to ascertain what it means to participants and how they understand its possibilities and limitations.

My study explores the experience of eight undergraduate students (L1 English) who are learners of either L2 French or Spanish and who participated in a target-language theatre production. The productions were undertaken as part of two existing, credit-bearing courses: *Theory and Practice of French/Francophone Drama* and *Theory and Practice of Hispanic Theatre* offered by the French & Italian and Spanish & Portuguese departments, respectively, of a large Midwestern public research university. The courses were situated at the upper end of the curriculum and included graduate students and advanced undergraduates, as well as native speakers and L2 learners. Prerequisites for both courses included (at least) intermediate proficiency in the spoken language and reading proficiency sufficient to understand primary texts, theory and criticism. I refer to the courses as French 555 and Spanish 555, respectively, using a fictitious course number which nonetheless accurately indicates their position at the juncture of the undergraduate and graduate curricula.

All of the participants I interviewed for this study regarded themselves (as evidenced by their own statements) as less proficient than their graduate student and native speaker classmates. I sought to understand how they perceived and made sense of the many facets of their individual experiences over the course of the semester. To that end, I conducted reflective interviews with them, attempting to set aside

my own preconceptions about theatre-based language learning and asking them to describe, in their own words, what the experience meant to them.

### Phenomenological Research Methodology

In the previous chapter, I discussed my choice of phenomenology as a conceptual framework, based on Husserl (1931/1977, 1950/1964, 1970) and Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1981) philosophical stance on the importance of perception and embodied experience, and Schütz' (1972) application of their work to research in the social sciences. For my approach to study design, participant recruitment, and data collection, I drew primarily on Moustakas (1994), van Manen (1997), and Seidman (2006).

Moustakas (1994) gives a detailed account of the *epoché*, or bracketing, that the researcher undertakes in order to approach the phenomenon free of preconceptions. It requires the researcher to set aside his or her ordinary, everyday way of looking at things, along with the attendant assumptions that perspective entails. This approach to investigating target-language theatre holds an intuitive appeal to a theatre practitioner for whom "the illusion of the first time" is a familiar goal. "The illusion of the first time" describes the actor's objective: to approach thoroughly familiar, exhaustively rehearsed material with a freshness of perspective and energy that enables one to discover new insights with each performance and to live the moment as though it were, in fact, happening for the very first time. The phenomenological researcher has an analogous task: to approach a topic of interest and, in spite of thorough background research about it, approach the participants' accounts with fresh eyes in order to discover new insights and attain a better, more direct understanding of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) emphasizes that the researcher must recognize the distance between him- or herself and the research participants, and to set aside his or her own assumptions and preconceptions in order to fully acknowledge and explore the perceptions and experiences described by the participants. It is important, furthermore, for the research to take into account the unique positioning of the various participants, consider how their accounts differ and what they hold in common, and distill from this a clearer

understanding of the essential features of the experience.

Van Manen (1997) echoes this call to *epoché* when he emphasizes that a phenomenological investigation focuses on its subject “as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it.” (p. 9) Van Manen also emphasizes the importance of allowing participants to make their experiences intelligible and understandable through language, storytelling, and anecdote. In contrast with positivist research paradigms that dismiss anecdotal evidence in favor of statistically significant and generalizable data, van Manen emphasizes that for the phenomenologist, stories *are* data: storytelling is how people make sense of their lived experiences.

Anecdotes, in the sense that they occur in ... phenomenological writings ... are not to be understood as *mere* illustrations to ‘butter up’ or ‘make more easily digestible’ a difficult or boring text. Anecdote can be understood as a methodological device in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us. (p. 116)

It is often said in research contexts that “the plural of anecdote is not data.” Why, then, might a researcher choose a methodology based on participants telling their stories - on what many would consider to be anecdotal evidence? As it happens, this oft-quoted aphorism is actually a misquote. (Smith, D., 2011) It originated during the 1969-1970 academic year at Stanford University, during a graduate seminar taught by Dr. Raymond Wolfinger. When one student dismissed a statement as a “mere anecdote,” Dr. Wolfinger’s rejoinder was, “the plural of anecdote *is* data” (emphasis mine). The decisive factor, of course, is what kind of research one is doing and what kind of conclusions one seeks. For statistically-based research that seeks to establish general trends, correlations, and cause-effect relationships, anecdotal evidence is obviously not useful. In such contexts, anecdotes often represent the salient exception, while statisticians seek the rule. Anecdotes are also by definition infused with individual perspective, which constitutes unacceptable bias in a positivist research framework that prizes neutrality, detachment, and abstraction.

However, for research that focuses on human experiences and does not prioritize generalizability, data typically consists of people's stories, and anecdotes are valuable. In some cases they may be selected for study because they represent typical cases, but unique or exceptional cases may also be chosen for research precisely because of the unusual insight they offer. Narrative-based forms of inquiry such as phenomenology and its fellow qualitative research approaches, ethnography, case study, grounded theory, and narrative study rest on the epistemological assumption that humans instinctively use stories as a way to give structure to their lives and to make sense of their experiences, and that we can derive valuable insights by understanding how these stories are structured. (Bell, 2002) Bell also points out that these approaches "allow researchers to present experience holistically in all its complexity and richness" and "to understand experience. People's lives matter, but much research looks at outcomes and disregards the impact of the experience itself." This type of research also "illuminates the temporal notion of experience, recognizing that one's understanding of people and events changes." (p. 209) Canagarajah (1996) points out that

[i]n opposition to grand theories and global knowledge structures, narratives represent knowledge from the bottom up; in opposition to explicit forms of theorization, they offer implicit forms of reasoning and logic; in opposition to positivistic scholarly discourses which are elitist in their specialized and abstract nature, narratives represent concrete forms of knowledge that are open to further interpretation. Narratives, then, represent the research process in all its concreteness and complexity, remaining open-ended for creative theorization. (p. 327)

He also notes that narrative forms of research represent an opportunity for marginalized groups to participate in knowledge creation, usually reserved to privileged members of the academy. Pavlenko (2002) also points out that research approaches based on narrative and story have a democratizing function within the world of education, "as they allow for both teachers' and learners' voices to be heard on a par with those of the researchers." (pp. 213-214)



For all of the aforementioned reasons, I have selected a narrative-based qualitative approach to studying student participation in target-language theatre productions. I want to gain a rich understanding of a complex phenomenon as experienced by a particular group of individuals. I also want to understand the perspective of the students as stakeholders in their own education, and publicize their underrepresented voice in the research literature. Of the available options, I considered narrative research, case study, and phenomenology as possible approaches. I have selected phenomenology because, according to Creswell (2006),

Whereas a narrative study reports the life of a *single individual*, a ***phenomenological study*** describes the meaning for several individuals of their ***lived experiences*** of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (e.g., grief is universally experienced). The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence. (pp. 57-58, emphasis in the original)

Case study research “involves the study of an issue through one or more cases within a bounded system” (Creswell, 2006, p. 73) and usually focuses on developmental factors in relation to context.

Any of these approaches could have yielded a useful theoretical lens for investigating target-language theatre; the choice of one over the others depends on the goal of the research and what type of information I seek to reveal. If I had wanted to investigate the story of one participant in depth and analyze *how* that person structured the retelling of his or her participation as my primary focus, then a narrative study would have been the appropriate choice. If, on the other hand, I had elected case study, I would have looked at French 555 and Spanish 555 as unique entities, and gone into greater detail about the specific individuals involved in each production, their unique personality characteristics, the specific factors of each text, and the specific circumstances surrounding each production, to consider them as bounded systems.

In comparison to the aforementioned scenarios, my focus in this study is on the *experience* of being an undergraduate participant in a mixed-level target-language theatre production. I care about the individual participants and the specific productions, but my primary goal is to better understand the *phenomenon* all of them shared, and to learn what, amidst all the differences caused by their unique personality characteristics and the specific texts and circumstances of the productions, they all experienced in common as the essence of this phenomenon. For that reason, phenomenology is the approach best suited to the present investigation.

Phenomenological research is conducted through interviewing; the data consist of the participants' stories of their experiences and their responses to questions. Interviewers need to remain mindful of the *epoché* when formulating questions, because tacit assumptions can shape how they are framed. In order to minimize the opportunity for inadvertently building assumptions into my interviews, and in order to allow participants the freedom to tell their stories and select the anecdotes that best captured their experiences, I conducted non-directed interviews, described in greater detail below in the "Data Collection" section of this chapter. However, after conducting my pilot study I realized that I needed a framework within which the non-directed interviews would nevertheless have some structure, and which would allow me to revisit previously-mentioned topics and ask participants to expand on their responses. To that end, I drew upon Seidman's (2006) recommendations to employ a three-interview series, as well as his suggestions for maintaining impartiality throughout the interview process and for analysis and interpretation of interview material.

### Research Questions

The present investigation attempts to answer the following three questions:

- 1) What is it like to be a participant in a mixed-level target-language theatre course that includes both undergraduate and graduate students, native speakers and non-native speakers?
- 2) What benefits and limitations do learners experience when engaged in theatre productions alongside

peers whom they perceive to be more proficient than themselves in the target language?

3) What do undergraduate L2 learners (L1 English) experience as a result of taking French 555 or Spanish 555 alongside graduate student and native speaker classmates?

These questions progress from a general inquiry about the experience as a whole to a specific focus on the particularities of experience for the subset of participants who constitute my population of interest. By articulating my research questions in this way, I hope to be able to offer broadly-applicable insights about the impact of target-language theatre across the board, for all participants, as well as more specialized comments about its effect on those who perceive themselves as less proficient than their peers.

#### Reasons for Undertaking a Pilot Study

A phenomenological investigation is, by its very nature, particular and not generalizable in the traditional sense: it usually involves a small number of participants and privileges depth and richness of individual details rather than control of external factors and comparability across contexts. In order to be considered “good research” a phenomenology should be rigorous, but rigor has a different meaning for phenomenology than it does for other research designs. Seidman (2006) raised the question: How, in a phenomenological study, does one establish that the experience of one’s participants ought not to be “easily dismissed as idiosyncratic to them and irrelevant to a larger population?” (p. 51) Seidman noted that interview protocols, which inherently involve an element of self-selection, are incompatible with random sampling, the preferred way of establishing generalizability in statistical terms. To offset this criticism, Seidman recommends that

the job of an in-depth interviewer is to go to such depth in the interviews that surface considerations of representativeness and generalizability are replaced by a compelling evocation of an individual’s experience. When this experience can be captured in depth, then two possibilities for making connections develop. They are the interview researcher’s alternative to generalizability ... First, the researcher may find connections among the experiences of the

individuals he or she interviews .... Second, by presenting the stories of participants' experience, interviewers open up for readers the possibility of connecting their own stories to those presented in the study. (p. 52)

Finding connections between the stories of various participants allows the researcher to elucidate patterns and identify the "common structural and social forces" (Seidman, 2006, p. 52) that affect the phenomenon experienced by diverse individuals. Presenting these patterns in a way that allows readers to recognize elements of their own experience enables them to have greater confidence in the trustworthiness of the study and its findings.

In order to refine my interviewing skills and ability to compellingly evoke my participants' experiences, I undertook a pilot study prior to my main investigation. Seidman (2006) recommended incorporating a pilot study in phenomenological research design, particularly for novice interviewers:

Although it may not seem ahead of time that the world of interviewing research takes one along strange paths or through dangerous places, the unanticipated twists and turns of the interviewing process and the complexities of the interviewing relationship deserve exploration before the researchers plunge headlong into the thick of their project.

I urge all interviewing researchers to build into their proposal a pilot venture in which they try out their interviewing design with a small number of participants. They will learn whether their research structure is appropriate for the study they envision. They will come to grips with some of the practical aspects of ... conducting the interview. The pilot can alert them to elements of their own interview techniques that support the objectives of the study and to those that detract from those objectives. After completing the pilot, researchers can step back, reflect on their experience, discuss it with their doctoral committee, and revise their research approach based on what they have learned from their pilot experience. (p. 39)

My pilot study with the French 555 course did indeed cause me to come to grips with some of the

practical challenges of conducting interview-based research, which led to important refinements in my main data collection protocols. In the first place, I encountered logistical difficulties with participant recruitment. The play was performed near the end of the spring semester. The last week or so before the production of any play is inordinately busy, and the professor of French 555 had stipulated that I not schedule my interviews during the week of the show. My goal was to interview participants as soon as possible after it was finished, but student actors often temporarily set aside some of their studying for other courses during the time of a show's final rehearsals and performances. As soon as the performance is over, they feel pressured to catch up on their other course work as well as prepare for their upcoming final exams. Only two of the undergraduate participants of French 555 agreed to be interviewed for my pilot study; the others, feeling the pressure of their academic backlog (and perhaps feeling that a "pilot study" was less important than a regular investigation) declined to participate. This taught me an important lesson for my main data collection about framing the invitation to participate in research, and about timing the interviews within the demands of the academic calendar.

The other important refinement to my research protocol that resulted from the pilot study was the decision to switch from a single interview to a three-interview series. I had conducted only one interview with the French 555 participants as a concession to the academic demands on their time between the performance and the end of the semester. As I transcribed the data, I realized that I had further questions for them, and that I would have liked to ask them to expand upon some of their statements. However, I hadn't left myself much opportunity to do so. I followed up with a few questions via email and got brief responses, but I could see that a three-interview series would have left much more room for reflection and follow-up questions. Therefore, I formulated a revised protocol for the main data collection, using Seidman's (2006) schematic in which the first interview is a Focused Life History, the second describes the Details of Experience, and the third encompasses a Reflection on the Meaning. (pp. 17-19)

## My Study

### *Courses and Instructors*

My pilot study focused on two undergraduate participants of French 555. The professor (who shall be referred to herein as “Prof”) had been a working professional actor prior to becoming a professor. The course had no teaching assistant, but one of the native speaker graduate students volunteered to work with the non-native speakers as a dialect coach. In this course model, Prof chose the text to be performed *a priori* and designed a syllabus of related criticism and selected theory organized around it. Thus, the participants of French 555 spent an entire semester making an in-depth study of a single text, herein referred to as *L’oeuvre absurde*. The class meetings prior to spring break (Phase I) were devoted to reading, discussion and student presentations. Students completed a written midterm exam and then volunteered to read excerpts of the play to audition for roles. *L’oeuvre absurde* was selected in part for its large number of characters and healthy mix of major and minor roles. Every student in the class was assigned at least a small acting role in addition to production responsibilities. The second half of the semester (Phase II) was dedicated to rehearsing and producing *L’oeuvre absurde*. The participants were given an oral “second midterm exam” to assess their success at memorizing their lines, and they also wrote a final paper for the course.

I conducted my main investigation with the Spanish 555 course, which followed a broadly similar structure to French 555, with a few key differences. The professor (here referred to as “Profe”) included six plays in the Phase I syllabus, one of which the students would select for the production. She taught the course with the help of one of her graduate student advisees, who served as a teaching assistant. As a veteran of Spanish 555, I also volunteered to be an unofficial teaching assistant in my capacity as a participant-observer. During Phase I, reading and discussion of the six plays alternated with theory and criticism, culminating in a written mid-semester exam. Following spring break, the class began meeting in a theater on campus. The first session of Phase II was spent reviewing the six plays, weighing the

advantages and disadvantages of staging each one, and voting. The students selected a text I will refer to as *La obra absurda*, and auditions were held during the second class session of Phase II. The rest of Phase II was dedicated to the production of the play. Most of the students in Spanish 555 took either a single, larger acting role or a handful of smaller roles, but a few students chose to work in exclusively off-stage capacities. Students also wrote a final paper for the course.

#### *Role of the Researcher*

My role throughout the research process was that of participant observer. In a phenomenological investigation, the setting aside of biases is a critical component of the study, and situating oneself as a participant may facilitate that process. Wiest (2004) conducted a case study investigating the experience of three student informants in an intermediate-level introductory literature course in a university Spanish department. Her study contained a classroom observation component, which she commented on as a possible corrective against hidden bias. She noted that

the observational aspect of the data collection procedure proved to be extremely helpful. It is important to note that the researcher was also a Spanish instructor. While this may have been useful ... it also may have caused a certain amount of hidden bias ... The classroom observations were beneficial in helping to minimize that bias ... By being in the classroom, the researcher was better able to see the instructor from the perspective of a student and could more easily diminish her own role as an instructor, although not entirely dismiss its effect on the interpretation of the observed events. (p. 210)

Being a participant-observer in French 555 and Spanish 555 afforded me new possibilities in comparison with my previous L2 theatre experiences. Although, as Wiest (2004) observes, my prior experience in that domain could conceivably have been a source of hidden bias, being a participant-observer allowed me to experience the French 555 production from the standpoint of a student (described in greater detail below) and, for both productions, to better grasp the meaning my participants sought to convey through their

anecdotes because I was directly familiar with the referents.

During the pilot study, I audited the French 555 course as a student and participated in the production of *L'oeuvre absurde* as an actor and crew member in charge of sound effects. I was also the least proficient speaker of French with the least formal study of the language. This was, for me, a radical departure from my prior L2 theatre experiences in Spanish, which I already spoke proficiently.

During Spanish 555, I observed by participating as an unofficial teaching assistant. As a veteran of the previous production and a doctoral student working on language pedagogy through theatre, I offered to assist the instructor in exchange for the opportunity to observe and to recruit research participants. I collaborated with the instructor and the other teaching assistant on conducting the audition and casting roles. I prepared and led a few warm-up activities and improvisation games during the rehearsal phase, and I helped individual students with blocking and interpretation of some scenes. I also assisted a group of actors in arranging and rehearsing a musical number for the opening scene. During the final week of rehearsals, the instructor asked me to perform in a non-speaking, musical capacity, and so I appeared on stage in the Spanish 555 production as well.

On the first day of class in French 555 and Spanish 555, I explained the research process and goals to students. Later in the semester, I identified the undergraduate L1 English speakers and approached them individually to ask whether they would be willing to be interviewed for the study. For the pilot study with French 555, I conducted a single interview with each participant after the end of the semester. For my main investigation with Spanish 555, I refined my technique following Seidman (2006) and conducted a three-interview series. All interviews (for both French 555 and Spanish 555) were conducted individually in English, the participants' L1. The interviews were held in quiet public spaces in the library and student union of the university where the study was conducted. The interviews were audio recorded on a digital voice recorder and later transcribed for analysis.

In participant-observer research, the researcher must constantly balance the necessary critical



distance of the research stance with the proximity and knowledge afforded by participation. While critical distance is necessary to clearly assess the environment and contextualize the information participants share, it is important to earn participants' trust by being a contributing member of the community. It may be worthwhile to here describe a few of the differences between how I was positioned in the two courses, and how that may have influenced the study.

In French 555 I had the status of "special student." The undergraduates were aware that I was different from the other graduate students because I was not highly proficient in French and because I was conducting pedagogically-focused research. I contributed to the course and acted in the production, and my French proficiency improved appreciably over the course of the semester, but I was always conscious of myself as a peripheral member of the class. I believe that this, as well as the logistical difficulties of the timing and the fact that I was doing my pilot study rather than my main investigation, was a factor in the lower rate of participation I achieved with the French 555 students compared with the Spanish 555 students.

During Spanish 555 I was still a participant-observer researcher and still needed to balance distance and proximity. However, I felt that I had a much greater capacity to function as an insider due to my language proficiency and my credentials as a veteran of the course and an unofficial teaching assistant. As such, I was also better-positioned to make contributions to the production by filling leadership roles such as helping participants interpret their line readings, generate ideas for blocking and stage business, and contribute to the musical aspects of the performance. I suspect that my comparatively higher social status as well as the greater perceived importance of my research contributed to greater willingness on the part of participants to dedicate their time to my project.

### *Participants*

All my interviewees were undergraduate speakers of L1 English (one participant was an early bilingual for whom English was one of her two L1s.). All of them were studying either French or Spanish

as their first or second major at a large Midwestern public research university in the United States. They were between 18 and 27 years of age and had studied their target languages for varying lengths of time. Some of the participants had no study abroad experience while others had participated in short-term or semester-long study abroad. During the interviews, all of them repeatedly described themselves as, in their own estimation, considerably less proficient than their peers. They were very conscious of being undergraduates and non-native speakers in courses that also contained graduate students and native speakers. (Although in many cases the native speakers *were* the graduate students, the two categories did not always overlap: there were a number of non-native speaker graduate students in both courses, and one of the native speakers in the Spanish course was an undergraduate. Also, the graduate students were not unilaterally more proficient than the undergraduates, and no formal assessment was administered to establish relative proficiency. However, the participants' clearly- and repeatedly-stated perception was that they were considerably less proficient, particularly in speaking, when compared with many of their peers, and they specifically named the graduate students and the native speakers as their standard of comparison.)

#### *Pilot Study Participants*

I interviewed two undergraduate participants in the French 555 play, one female and one male.

##### *Anne.*

Anne is a US-born native speaker of English who majored in French in college. She was in her final semester when she participated in the French 555 play. Her interest in learning French goes back to her childhood, when her uncle married a French woman and Anne began to speak French with her. She began to study it formally in middle school and continued through high school. After high school, she pursued professional goals and interrupted her French studies for six years. During part of this time she lived in Spain and began to learn Spanish. Her French suffered some attrition as a result. She resumed studying French when she returned to the US to attend college, and was conscious of being much better

able to understand French than to speak it. Prior to the French play, Anne had virtually no previous experience with theatre, and relatively little interest in it. She took the class because she needed the credits and it was the only option that fit into her schedule. She reported that initially she was unhappy with the course and intimidated by the presence of the graduate students and native speakers, but eventually she came to really enjoy working on the play.

*Brad.*

Brad is a US-born native speaker of English who majored in French and Linguistics in college. He was a second-semester senior at the time of the French play, but he planned to take one more year at the university in order to complete his double major. He had begun to study French as a freshman in college after having taken two years of Spanish in high school. He stated that he took Spanish because he is of Hispanic heritage and his family encouraged it, but he had always been drawn to French and pursued it in college because it interested him in a way that Spanish did not. Brad had never been abroad at the time of our interview, although he had interacted with native speaker instructors for some of his French courses. He also had the experience of living in a dedicated French-language residence hall on the university's campus, as an alternative to study abroad. He described it as somewhat intimidating, but a challenge that he was confident in embracing. He also described the residence as an imperfect immersion environment: some English was spoken on the premises, but the residents did a good job of adhering to the standard of conducting their interactions in French in the common areas.

Brad had previous theatre experience as well as performing experience from high school forensics and a college comedy improvisation club. He had been highly enthusiastic about the prospect of taking a theatre course in French, and he viewed it as one of the culminating experiences of his senior year.

*Participants of the Main Investigation*

I interviewed six undergraduate participants from the Spanish play, five females and one male.

*Cassie.*

Cassie is a US-born native speaker of English. At the time of the Spanish 555 play, she was in her final semester of college and was graduating with a double major in Spanish and Theatre. She had been taking Spanish since the sixth grade, with a one-year hiatus in the seventh grade when she was required to study Latin. She had always done well in her middle school and high school Spanish classes, and when she started at the university she knew that she wanted to major in it. She had previous experience studying abroad and was completing her major at the time of the play. She had also taken a number of literature courses and had particularly enjoyed a class on Spanish Culture Through Film. She had not been overly interested in the Spanish linguistics courses that she had taken.

Cassie reported being extremely intimidated during the early part of the semester because she was conscious of how much her speaking skills had deteriorated in the months since she had returned from studying abroad. She had known about the Spanish theatre course for several years and had been very excited to take it because it combined aspects of both of her majors, but she did not realize ahead of time that it was a mixed course of both undergraduates and graduate students. When she learned this on the first day of the semester, it intensified her anxiety about speaking. Indeed, Cassie did not speak a single word in the Spanish 555 classroom during whole-class discussions; any speaking she did during Phase I was limited to small group conversations. The professor, the other teaching assistant, and I all remarked upon how impressed we were with her beautiful and arresting speaking voice when we heard it, literally for the first time, halfway through the semester on the day the students auditioned for their roles.

*David.*

David is a US-born native speaker of English. He was a junior during the semester he took Spanish 555, and he had recently switched to a Spanish major after having studied theatre. Even though he had been a theatre major, David had never acted prior to *La obra absurda*. He had gotten involved in his high school theatre program by doing lighting and sound, and had continued to study lighting and

work on the technical crews of the university theatre department productions. Recently, however, he had become disillusioned with the theatre department's offerings and had decided to change his focus. He also had immediate family members with theatre connections, and he knew that getting a job in theatre depends more on networking than on having a degree. He had always enjoyed Spanish ever since he began studying it as a freshman in high school. When he heard about Spanish 555 he was attracted to the class because he thought it would be challenging, and therefore interesting. David is a student who seems to become bored with his classes at times; challenge seems to be an especially important component for him. *La obra absurda* represented a significant challenge to David because, although his roles did not involve much speaking, he discovered that he was required to be on stage for more than half the play, and over the course of the rehearsals he realized the importance (and the difficulty) of continuous nonverbal acting. He was also one of the key technical crew members, and needed to deal with the challenge of orchestrating the lighting while spending relatively little time in the lighting booth during the performance.

*Emily.*

Emily is a US-born native speaker of English and a foreign language. An early bilingual, she is the only participant in this study to possess two L1s. According to Skutnabb-Kangas' (2000) definition, which offers four criteria (origin, identification, competence, and function) for determining L1 (p. 106), English can be considered Emily's L1 based on the latter three. She began to learn Spanish the summer before she started the seventh grade, when she accompanied her mother, a teacher, on a study abroad program and received private tutoring. When Emily started taking Spanish in school that fall, the private tutoring she had received over the summer placed her well ahead of her classmates, and so she was moved into a more advanced class. Since that time, Emily had grown accustomed to being the youngest person in her class, but also one of the strongest students. As a high school senior, she had taken a Spanish literature course at the local university. At the time she took Spanish 555 she was a senior, but

she was planning to study an additional year in order to complete a double major in Spanish literature and area studies.

Emily had limited previous experience with theatre performance, but she had always been an enthusiastic theatregoer, both at home and while traveling overseas with her mother, where she had the opportunity to attend plays in Spanish. She had also very much enjoyed two previous courses she had taken from the Spanish 555 professor, in which she had read a number of dramatic works from Latin America. Emily reported that her initial reason for taking the class was because she liked Profe so much, although she was hesitant about the decision because she did not want to act. However, she had a lot of curiosity about the backstage aspects of putting on a play, and she decided to enroll in the course. Emily ended up doing some acting in addition to her work backstage and on costumes. Her speaking roles were very small, but she echoed David's comments about realizing for the first time the importance of nonverbal acting.

*Felicia.*

Felicia is a US-born native speaker of English. She was a junior studying pre-medicine and psychology during the semester she participated in Spanish 555, and she was preparing to study abroad over the coming summer. She had begun studying Spanish in the seventh grade, and had taken it more or less continuously since then, completing six semesters at the university. In addition to Spanish, Felicia had studied some French and two years of Japanese in middle school, and she had also taken a semester of college Arabic. Her greatest progress with Spanish had come about as a result of working in a restaurant with a number of Spanish-speaking employees. She relied on her Spanish to interact with the kitchen staff, and noticed a benefit from the regular practice. She had some previous theatre experience from participating in a musical in middle school and doing lighting for a play when she was a freshman in high school. Felicia was not very interested in acting, saying that the idea of memorizing a lot of lines made her nervous, but she opted to take Spanish 555 because it was something outside of her comfort

zone. She was pushed further outside of her comfort zone on the first day of class when she realized how many graduate students were taking the class. She had known that it was a mixed-level course, but she was expecting there to be just a few graduate students and a majority of undergraduates; in fact, the mix was approximately 50%-50%.

*Gail.*

Gail is a US-born native speaker of English. She was majoring in Spanish and film studies, and she was in her final semester when she took Spanish 555. Gail had studied Spanish beginning in the eighth grade. In addition to her school classes she had attended a weekend immersion camp and two study abroad programs in Mexico over two different winter breaks. She had also taken a six-credit Chinese course during her first semester of college. Gail had previous performance experience from middle school and high school. She was in a number of plays and musicals, and described herself as “a fairly strong chorus singer.” She had also participated in forensics, giving demonstration speeches and dramatic readings. In college, Gail had taken a couple of acting courses in the theatre department and was glad to be able to apply what she learned in those classes to her roles in *La obra absurda*. She had a number of supporting character roles with relatively few spoken lines, but one of her parts required her to sing a song that served as the prologue for the play.

Gail is a self-described shy person, and she was very intimidated by all of the graduate students in Spanish 555, saying that she felt like “the runt of the litter.” (G1) When she initially enrolled in the course she did not realize that it involved a theatrical production. She took it as a literature course, and thought that the students might be asked to perform scenes for one another. She was very happy to learn that she would be able to be part of a play, and she regarded the experience as a nice way to finish off her time in college.

*Heidi.*

Heidi is a US-born native speaker of English and was majoring in nursing. She had taken four

years of high school Spanish and continued to study it in college. When Heidi initially applied to nursing programs, she was turned down by her top choice and accepted into a program that she decided she didn't want to attend. She opted to wait a year and reapply, and in the meantime she decided to revisit Spanish and complete a double major. Along with Gail, she had also spent three weeks on a study abroad program in Mexico during a winter break. Many of Heidi's previous Spanish courses had focused on indigenous groups in Latin America, and especially the Aztecs, so for her *La obra absurda* overlapped with somewhat familiar territory.

Heidi has always enjoyed theatre, attending performances regularly with her family. She participated in three musicals while in high school; she stated that the acting was her least-favorite part, and she preferred the singing and dancing. She welcomed the Spanish 555 course as an opportunity to indulge her artistic side again after having spent the past several years heavily immersed in the sciences while she was focused on her nursing. She did report that, early on in the semester, she was "super intimidated" by her more advanced classmates and "really overwhelmed" by the challenging material.



Table of Participants' Relevant Characteristics

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Years of study of target language</b> | <b>Year at university</b> | <b>Production role</b>              | <b>Study abroad?</b>                | <b>Other languages studied?</b> |
|-------------|---------------|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Anne        | F             | 10+                                      | Graduating Senior         | Costuming, Actor                    | Lived briefly in Spain              | Spanish                         |
| Brad        | M             | 4  | Senior – Non-Graduating   | Actor                               | No. Lived in French residence hall. | Spanish                         |
| Cassie      | F             | 9  | Graduating Senior         | Actor                               | Spain                               | Latin                           |
| David       | M             | 7  | Junior                    | Lighting, Actor                     | No                                  | No                              |
| Emily       | F             | 9  | Junior                    | Costuming, Actor                    | Mexico                              | L1 Serbian                      |
| Felicia     | F             | 8  | Junior                    | Sound Designer, Actor               | Preparing for summer in Spain       | French, Japanese, Arabic        |
| Gail        | F             | 7  | Graduating Senior         | Actor, Musician                     | Mexico                              | Chinese                         |
| Heidi       | F             | 8  | Senior – Non-Graduating   | Actor, Publicity, Video/Photography | Mexico                              | No                              |

### *Ethical Considerations*

There are two main criteria that research studies involving human participants must satisfy, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2003, p. 48): first, that participation is granted voluntarily and with a full understanding of the study's purpose, its obligations and any risks it entails; and second, that the participants are not exposed to dangers that outweigh the study's potential benefits.

For the present investigation, both criteria are amply satisfied. My participants had self-selected into French 555 and Spanish 555 as elective courses, and they opted into this research project after I described it to the class on the first day of the semester. I was not the instructor of record for either course, nor did I have any responsibilities related to assigning grades. In both courses there were undergraduate participants who elected not to participate for various reasons, primarily scheduling difficulties, and they experienced no negative consequences whatsoever. For participants, the fact of their participation and the content of their interviews had no bearing on their grade for the course or the role they received in the play.

The potential risks to the participants were few. In qualitative research, participants form a relationship with the researcher and they have the capacity to choose whether and how much of their experience they wish to reveal. This relationship is collaborative and develops over time, and part of the researcher's responsibility is to demonstrate trustworthiness to participants, thus inspiring them to reveal their inner thought processes. In scheduling the interviews, I took care to accommodate participants' schedules and respect their time. We met in public locations on campus that suited the convenience and preference of the participants. In order to respect participants' privacy, I have given them pseudonyms. I also gave them the opportunity to review their interview transcripts and clarify, elaborate, or redact anything that they felt they needed to. Participants also had the freedom at all times to refuse to answer questions, or to refuse to elaborate on an answer they had given.

One potential risk to participants is the possibility that they might express a criticism or a

negative opinion of something related to the experience and that, despite the anonymization, the professor might someday read this dissertation and be able to identify their statements. However, this risk is mitigated by several factors. More than a year elapsed between the data collection and the completion, defense, and publication of the dissertation. Neither Prof nor Profe served on the doctoral committee; this avoided placing them in the position of evaluating a dissertation wherein they figured as part of the study. The participants had the option of redacting any statements they did not want included in the interview transcripts. Ultimately, however, none of them chose to do so after reviewing their interviews. Clearly, the participants felt free to express a range of both positive and negative responses.

The greatest risk to participants in a qualitative, interview-based study may be the possibility that their experience and point of view could be distorted when the researcher reports it: quotes can be taken out of context and edited to convey something subtly or blatantly different than the speaker's original intent, and interviewers can impose biases or limit participant responses through the way they frame their questions. Recognizing and deliberately setting aside one's biases is part of the researcher's responsibility in conducting a phenomenological investigation. Consistent with these principles, I framed very open-ended questions during the interviews and avoided leading participants or influencing their responses.

Some examples of the way I framed my questions include:

- Tell me a little bit about ...
- I was interested in what you just said about ... Can you tell me more about that?
- Tell me your story about what it was like to be a part of this project.
- If you had to describe this course to somebody who was thinking of taking it, who knew nothing about what it entailed, how would you describe it to them? What do you think it would be important for them to know about the experience?
- What was it like for you to ... ?
- Talk a little more about that.

I also limited the amount of talking I did, striving to have my participants' words account for the bulk of the interview. This was more successful with some participants than with others; a few were naturally more reticent and required a little more drawing out. Seidman (2006) emphasizes that the key to phenomenological interviewing is to "listen more, talk less, and ask real questions" (p. 84), which he defines as asking open-ended questions while avoiding leading questions. He further emphasizes that interviewers should limit their own interactions with interviewees; while occasionally sharing one's own experiences can help a reticent participant open up, this technique must be used sparingly to avoid distorting the interview. (p. 89) He further cautions against the overuse of backchanneling (utterances such as "yes," "okay," "uh-huh," typically accompanied by nodding, smiling, and other nonverbal communicative cues) that reinforces participants' statements. While some backchanneling is necessary to maintain a natural and comfortable conversational interaction, Seidman notes that "a short affirmative response to almost every statement from the participant ... is a relatively benign controlling mechanism" (pp. 89-90) that should be avoided. He further counsels that a skilled interviewer needs to develop a tolerance for silence during interviews:

Thoughtfulness takes time; if interviewers can learn to tolerate either the silence that sometimes follows a question or a pause within a participant's reconstruction, they may hear things they would never have heard if they had leapt in with another question to break the silence ...

As in other aspects of interviewing, there is a delicate balance between jumping in too soon with a question and waiting too long in silence ... It is important to give your participant space to think, reflect, and add to what he or she has said. (p. 93)

In most of my interviews, my contributions accounted for less than 5% of the words spoken therein, and in a few I spoke between 5% and 10% of the time.

A final ethical consideration relates to the anonymization of the final write-up. The value of qualitative research such as phenomenology is based on its trustworthiness, which rests in turn on the

specificity and richness of detail included in the descriptions of the findings. Therefore, I include as much specific detail as possible related to what my participants did in and for the productions and how they interacted with the various affordances of the environment. However, to preserve anonymity, certain details such as the titles of the plays and the names of characters have been masked, and in some cases revealing details about the content of the play have been subtly altered so that the spirit of the original comment is retained but the surface detail avoids giving too many identifiers.

### *Biases and Assumptions*

As a first step to conducting a phenomenological study, the researcher must identify his or her own biases and assumptions, in order to then consciously set them aside. First and foremost among mine was the notion that, because I had previously taught a target-language theatre workshop course, I thought I knew the “right” or the “best” way to conduct one. Rather than comparing Prof and Profe’s choices to what I would have done, though, I had to approach French 555 and Spanish 555 on their own terms. I also needed to recognize that my prior theatre workshop courses had no bearing whatsoever on the participants’ experiences. Each of them brought a unique background and history to the project, none of which included prior target-language theatre of any sort, much less one of my courses.

I also had to set aside biases about the presence of graduate students in the course. This ultimately turned out to be very important for my findings. My initial assumption was that one of the primary goals of the target-language theatre workshop course ought to be improving participants’ language proficiency, and that it was important to give less-proficient students roles sizable enough to stretch their capacities. I thought including GSs in the course would rob theUGs of the opportunity to play lead roles. In a mixed course, in all likelihood GSs would be given the major roles, leaving the smaller supporting roles to UGs. In subsequent chapters, I will discuss at length how the participants’ reflections on their experience have led me to a new appreciation of the value of UG-GS interactions in this setting, and I have significantly revised my views on teaching a target-language theatre workshop as a mixed-level course.

In addition, I had to confront my biases about what type and scope of text(s) were best suited to the course. Both French 555 and Spanish 555 included significantly more and more sophisticated theoretical readings than I had ever included in my undergraduate theatre workshop courses. Additionally, while Prof had pre-selected the play that would be performed in French 555 and it would be studied in-depth for the first half of the semester, Profe had chosen half a dozen plays to read, and nobody would know which one would be performed until the students voted at mid-semester. I was initially skeptical of this approach because it meant the production would have to be much more condensed, as many preparations could not be undertaken until the text was chosen.

An additional aspect of my personal biases that bears scrutiny in French 555 and Spanish 555 is the use of texts with an explicit focus on absurdist drama. I needed to set aside my initial preference for realist drama and my worries that absurdism would somehow be less pedagogically useful. As I will discuss in the results chapter, after witnessing the productions I have revised my prior opinion about the appropriateness of absurdism for target-language theatre productions. Staddon (2007) successfully used an absurdist text with beginning (second semester) students of French (L1 English), noting that the fragmentary nature of the dialogue reflects the language learner's experience of impeded communication. She remarked that "exchanges are often short and simple" (p. 33) and the specific text selected for her project "offered the advantage of dealing with an extreme version of the sort of bureaucratic frustrations students might encounter" (*ibid.*) during travels in the country where the target language is spoken. Simpson (1998) pointed out that the absurdist strategy of

foregrounding odd talk implicitly draws attention to the canonical and the everyday in interaction ... to the extent that this fracture in cultural code is engendered by a fracture in discourse strategies, the sketch becomes language *about* language – a kind of 'meta-discourse'. It constitutes a form of humour where language itself forms the subject matter and which relies for its decoding on the communicative competence and cultural attitudes of the interpreter. (p. 47)

He further noted that

the concept of communicative competence becomes a valuable interpretative tool for accounting for any mismatches that occur between what a speaker says and what is anticipated by personal, physical and cognitive dimensions of context. Much of the dialogue found in absurd drama and in certain comic genres offers an excellent opportunity for studying this form of linguistic incongruity. (p. 48)

In order to investigate the experience of undergraduate participants in French 555 and Spanish 555 through a phenomenological lens, I needed to recognize and suspend these biases and set aside everything I thought I “knew” about target-language theatre production courses. By recognizing that the participants were experiencing French 555 and Spanish 555 as their first encounter with this learning environment, and by opening myself to hear their reflections and impressions, I gained a much richer appreciation for the variety of possibilities this type of course offers.

#### *Data Collection Methods*

For the pilot study with French 555, I conducted a single interview with each participant at the end of the semester, following the production of *L'oeuvre absurde*. The interviews were between 30 and 45 minutes in length and were recorded. I transcribed the interviews, identified important themes, and wrote a report of my findings.

In preparation for my main data collection with the Spanish 555 students, I reviewed the method I had used in the pilot study and identified a number of opportunities for improvement, grounded in my readings of Creswell (2007), Seidman (2006), Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (1997). I thought of a number of questions I failed to ask and some ways I could have framed certain questions differently. I also noticed points at which I missed an opportunity to ask a follow-up question in order to spark further reflection by the participants. In order to allow for greater depth of introspection and provide time for reflection, I decided to replace the single-interview approach with an interview series. Multiple interviews

would allow participants to focus more deeply on certain aspects of the experience during each encounter, and would enable an iterative approach, revisiting topics from multiple perspectives over the course of the interviews. I also determined that I could accommodate a greater number of participants, and that doing so would afford a more complete picture of the essential experience of participating in target-language theatre.

The interview series I used for the Spanish 555 investigation consisted of 1) a Focused Life History, 2) a discussion of the Details of Experience, and 3) a Reflection on the Meaning (the names follow from the designations employed by Seidman, 2006, pp. 17-19). In this study, each participant has been given a pseudonym with a distinct initial (A and B for the participants of French 555 and C-H for Spanish 555). Quotes from their interviews will be identified by initial and number, i.e. C1, C2, C3, etc., to designate which participant and which interview the quote came from. (Quotes from the pilot study will be cited by the participant's initial only, because they are drawn from a single interview.)

After describing my research project to the whole class on the first day of French 555 and Spanish 555, I waited several weeks to solicit individual participants. A number of students who attended on the first day ended up dropping the course, and so I waited to approach participants until the add-drop period had passed. By observing the class, I was able to learn students' names and identify which ones were graduate students and which were undergraduates. I then spoke to the UG participants individually, reminding them of my study, asking them if they would be willing to participate, and answering their questions about the time commitment it would involve. Some students chose not to participate, citing a busy work schedule or a heavy class load that semester, but the majority agreed to be interviewed. I obtained their signature on consent forms and provided them with a copy, and we made individual plans to meet for the interviews. The interviews were conducted at times chosen by the individual participants for their convenience. For some of the interviews I reserved a study room in the university library, while others were conducted in one of the study areas of the student union, according to individual participants'



preferences. I used a digital voice recorder to capture audio files of the interviews, which I then transcribed. After completing the transcription of each interview, I submitted it to the participant and asked him or her to review it for accuracy and to clarify any questions I had. I also offered them the opportunity to elaborate on anything they felt needed to be expanded upon, to correct anything they perceived as inaccurate or to redact anything they felt uncomfortable about including. None of the participants chose to make changes or additions to the text of their interviews upon reviewing them.

### *Interview I*

For the first interview of the series, the Focused Life History, I asked the participants of Spanish 555 to reflect on their past experiences with language learning, in both formal and informal contexts. I also asked participants about any prior involvement in theatre productions or other performing arts of any sort (and in any language). This first interview took place early in Phase II of the semester, shortly after the class had selected a performance text, the participants had auditioned for and been assigned roles, and rehearsals were underway. Examples of the types of questions I used for the first interview include:

- What is your language-learning background?
- Tell me about your previous French/Spanish classes, in high school and/or college.
- Have you ever traveled or studied abroad in a French/Spanish-speaking country? Where did you go? What was it like? Tell me what you remember about it.
- Talk a little bit about your background in theatre.
- When you heard that this class was being offered, what made you decide to take it? What were you expecting?

As the interviews progressed, I included more detailed, participant-specific questions in response to what each person told me, in order to draw out fuller responses. For example, after Felicia told me that she felt much more comfortable using her Spanish with the cooks at her restaurant job than she did when

speaking in class, I followed up with,

*Maybe get into a little more depth ... talk about that compared with the other ... classroom courses you've taken in Spanish, the amount of speaking you've had to do, and maybe contrast that a little bit more with working in the restaurant and talking with ... the cooks in Spanish. (F1, researcher speaking)*

### *Interview 2*

In the second interview, the Details of the Experience, participants were asked to reflect on the present experience with the Spanish play and discuss in detail any and all aspects of it that they deemed significant to them, for whatever reason and however they defined “significant.” This interview took place near the end of the rehearsal period, as close to the date of the performance as was reasonably possible. For this interview, I framed my basic questions as follows:

- Tell me your story about what it was like to be a part of this production.
- Tell me what it's been like, from your perspective, to work on this show.
- Give me some examples of things that stood out to you during the process of working on this show.
- Could you tell me in some detail what you did/what happened with (X)?
- What was it like for you to (X)?
- What effect did (X) have on you?
- One thing that caught my attention was (X). Talk a little bit more about that.
- You mentioned in your first interview that (X). What has that been like for you in the meantime?
- How has your understanding of this play changed over the course of the rehearsals?
- Tell me what this class was like for you during the first half of the semester and during the second half.

- Imagine you were going to describe this course to a prospective student. What would you tell them?
- What has/have been your favorite thing(s) you've done so far?
- What has been most difficult for you about this class?
- Has anything about this class surprised you or changed your expectations?

The second interviews also contained many participant-specific follow-up questions related to details of their roles or particular anecdotes they described in their individual interviews.

### *Interview 3*

The third interview, the Reflection on the Meaning, set participants the task of reflecting on the overall meaning of the experience to them: the intellectual and emotional connection between their participation in the theatre production and the rest of the participant's life. It also undertook to explore what, if any, lasting impact the experience would have on the remainder of their studies and other aspects of their lives, both within and beyond the university. This interview was held after the completion of the course, between a few days and a number of weeks after the performance, as individual participants' schedules permitted. Some examples of how I framed questions for this interview include:

- Do you see this experience as being related to the rest of your studies? If so, how?
- Do you see any other connections to the rest of your life that you derived from this experience? If so, what?
- Do you feel that you have changed as a result of this experience? If so, how?
- How do you think you will remember this experience several years down the road?
- If you had the chance to repeat this experience, would you want to do so? Would you change anything about it, or about how you approached it?
- Did the performances turn out the way that you imagined they would? If you can remember

back to a few weeks before the performance, how were you expecting things to turn out?

Were those expectations met, or were you surprised by anything?

- Did you ever feel like you reached a point where you had really “become” the character you were playing?

Once the interview recordings were transcribed, the participants were asked to review the transcripts to clarify any points of confusion. Once these were resolved, the researcher analyzed the transcripts to identify key themes.

### *Analysis*

As I began the analysis of my interview data, I gathered all twenty interview transcripts into a single document and did a preliminary reading, taking notes about topics that surfaced in multiple interviews. I then undertook a second reading, this time reading all participants' first interviews together and noting salient topics, then reading all of the second interviews together, then reading all of the third interviews.

These initial readings afforded me a preliminary list of themes, which I then began to refine by organizing them into categories and subtopics. I first grouped them into clusters based on similarities they shared, and I developed operational definitions for each theme in order to distinguish them from the other topics in their clusters. I then sorted each cluster into a main category heading and, where relevant, a number of subtopics. After developing my framework of themes and subtopics, I returned to the interview data and identified participant statements that pertained to each theme. I used a color-coding scheme to mark the text of the interviews according to its relevant categories, and I then copied-and-pasted participant quotes under each heading. I then read through my participants' statements again, this time as clusters of quotes related to a single theme. Through these iterative readings of the data (within-participant, within-interview, and within-theme) I was able to deepen my understanding of the participants' experiences.

My first main category was “Comparisons to Previous Experiences,” which was a major theme of Interview 1 with occasional relevance in subsequent interviews. This category included participants’ reflections on their previous L2 study as well as their prior encounters with theatre and, especially, theatre performance. They drew comparisons between those prior experiences and the French 555/Spanish 555 course and production.

The second main category was “Social Aspects of Participation,” and it included several subtopics. “Intimidation and Relative Proficiency” was especially prominent in Interview 1, although it occurred throughout the interview series. It contained participants’ remarks on how they perceived their own levels of L2 proficiency relative to that of their classmates, particularly the GSs and NSs. “Suspension of Hierarchy” grew in importance across Interviews 2 and 3, as participants reflected on the change in classroom relationships between Phase I and Phase 2 of the semester. “Freedom of Communication” was a closely related subtopic, as was “Comfort with Interactions.” Participant comments that related to their *internal* feelings regarding interactions with their classmates were categorized under “Freedom of Communication,” while statements that focused *externally* on the actual interactions were categorized under “Comfort with Interactions.”

The next main category of analysis was “New Understandings and Meaning-Making,” in which participants reflected on their own learning processes and the advances they made through participating in the course and production. The bulk of participant statements related to this category occurred during Interviews 2 and 3. Many of their comments clustered around the subcategory “Problems and Problem-Solving.” Encountering problems and exploring possible solutions to them was one of the primary drivers of learning in the theatre production experience, according to participants’ descriptions.

The next major thematic category was “Interdependence.” Participants described perceiving the L2 theatre experience as one of connection. This took a number of forms: “Interdependence of participants” was the subtopic in which I organized participants’ reflections on how the production’s

overall success relied on everyone's individual contributions. I also designated a subtopic for "Curriculum Integration" to organize remarks about how something related to the play resonated with something else that participants had learned at another point in their L2 studies. A third subtopic was "Connections to other domains," under which I organized participants' comments about relationships they had noted between the play and another field of study or an area of interest outside of their academics. These statements occurred across all three interviews, but were especially prominent in the second and third ones as participants reflected on Phase II.

"Embodiment/Metaxis" was the thematic category within which I organized participants' statements about their attempts to immerse themselves in their roles and interpret their characters. I created two subtopics, one for organizing statements about ways that successful metaxis was facilitated, and another for participants' remarks about experiencing difficulties and hindrances to embodying their role. This theme was found primarily in interviews 2 and 3, after participants had been assigned their roles and Phase II was underway.

Another major thematic category concerned participants' reflections on specifically language-related details of the experience. "Linguistic Aspects" contained three subtopics: "Pronunciation" contains their reflections on how the experience highlighted specifically phonological aspects of the L2 in ways that their previous language studies had not. "Motivation to Continue Improving" contained participants' comments about how working with GSs and NSs spurred them to further develop their L2 abilities. The largest subtopic within "Linguistic Aspects," however, was "The Liberating Effects of Preformed Utterances." Many of the participants commented on the experience of memorizing lines in the L2 and moving past the preoccupation with grammatical accuracy to concentrate on expressivity. The majority of comments in these categories came from Interviews 2 and 3.

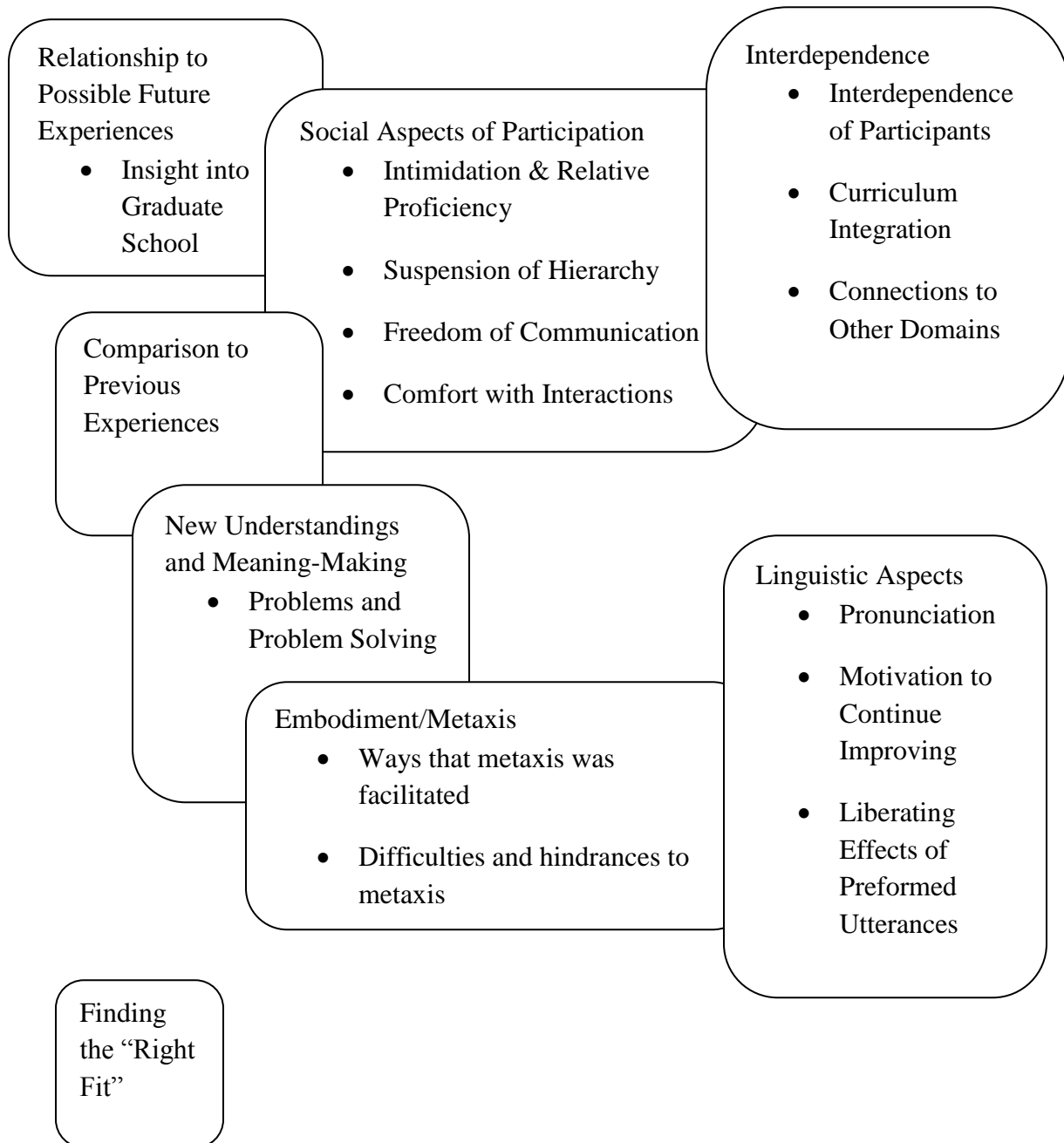
"Relationship to (Possible) Future Experiences" was another thematic category, with statements principally drawn from Interview 3 in which I asked participants to reflect on the place of the L2 theatre

experience within the context of the rest of their lives. A significant subtopic of this theme was “Insight into the World of Graduate Students and Graduate Studies,” which I used to organize a number of comments from participants about getting to know graduate students as peers and, as a result, envisioning graduate school as a possibility for themselves.

The final thematic category, “Finding the ‘Right Fit’”, contained participants’ observations about how well the chosen texts suited each class and how well individual participants were suited to their roles (production roles as well as character roles). These remarks, drawn primarily from Interview 3, highlighted the way participants rose to the demands of the projects and grew into their roles over the course of the semester.

Figure 1

## Concept Map of Categories and Subtopics





### *Interpretation*

The last stage in the phenomenological process is interpretation. The researcher reflects upon the themes and uses them to make sense of the experience as a whole and understand more deeply what it means for participants. Through organizing my interview data into the aforementioned categories and subtopics, and engaging in iterative readings of the material, I developed an understanding of how my participants experienced the French 555 and Spanish 555 courses and productions, and I contextualized my interpretation by relating their comments to topics in the L2 research literature. These findings are detailed in the next chapter of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss my interview and observational data that contribute to formulating answers to my research questions. The research questions guiding this investigation were:

- What is it like to be a participant in a mixed-level target language theatre course that includes undergraduates, graduate students, and native speakers?
- What benefits and limitations do learners experience when engaged in theatre production with more advanced peers?
- What do undergraduate second language learners experience as a result of taking this course alongside graduate student and native speaker classmates?

I will cite quotes from the student participants that describe what it was like, in their experience, to be a participant in French 555 or Spanish 555. I will report what they told me about the benefits and limitations they experienced from their interactions with the professor and their classmates. I will focus in particular on their reflections about working with more advanced members of their peer group. Many of the participants' comments discussed in this chapter describe, vividly and in their own words, what their individual experiences were like. Although there were important differences in the experiences reported by various participants, the aggregate description helps us to understand a bit better the essence of the target language theatre experience for undergraduate students participating in a peer group alongside graduate students and native speakers.

Anthropologist Victor Turner has studied the transformative potential of theatre and other forms of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, and carnival, and he comments on how performance itself can produce new understandings and cultural meanings for its participants as “the ‘flow’ of action and interaction ... may conduce to hitherto unprecedented insights and even generate new symbols and meanings, which may be incorporated into subsequent performances.” (1982, p. 14) Radulescu (2011)

offers the observation that for non-native speakers, L2 communication is itself “a performative act in which we have to constantly negotiate between the knowledge of the new role ... and mimic, as closely as we can, the ideal model of what is commonly referred to as ‘native fluency’.” (p. 36) These two perspectives, taken together, illuminate the data for this investigation: throughout the rehearsal period as well as during the actual performances, my participants were ‘performing’ in their L2, deriving insights, and generating new symbols and cultural meanings from the texts as well as from their interactions with their classmates and the instructor. The remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to demonstrating and explicating these insights and meanings as the participants described them to me.

Several themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data. This chapter will discuss the following themes in detail: social aspects of participation in the course, including the modification of the class hierarchy during Phase II, ways in which participants experienced either freedom or constraints in communicating with their peers, and the ways in which participants described their comfort or discomfort with interactions; similarities and differences between what students experienced in French 555 or Spanish 555 and their previous language courses and/or theatre productions; new understandings and ways of making meaning that participants experienced; problems that were faced and solved and the solutions that emerged; an awareness of the interdependence inherent in the project, including participants relying on one another, ways in which the project integrated diverse aspects of the curriculum, and connections that participants made between the play and other domains; what it meant to participants to embody a character; specifically linguistic aspects of the experience, such as how participants felt it changed their pronunciation, their motivation to improve their L2, or the way that memorized utterances derived from the play text found their way into participants’ speech; and insight into the experience of being a graduate student, which undergraduate participants remarked upon as relevant to their own possible futures. In this chapter I also talk about the theme of “finding the right fit” that emerged from many participants’ reflective retrospection on the experience.

## Data Analysis

Much of this chapter will consist of quotes from participant interviews. When interview data is cited it will be identified by the participant's initial and the number of the interview the quote was drawn from (for example, a statement made by Cassie in her first interview will be designated C1, a quote from Emily's third interview will be identified as E3, and so on. Quotes drawn from Anne and Brad's statements will simply be marked "A" and "B," respectively, because the pilot study consisted of a single interview with each participant.) In many cases, I have quoted participants at some length when their comments touched on multiple topics within a given section of an interview. In selecting and organizing the quoted interview material, I have made a conscious effort to strike a balance between editing the quotes for readability and preserving, as intact as possible, the participants' voices and style of speaking.

Conversational data, it should be noted here, is messy. It is characterized by hesitations, digressions, false starts, repetitions, dysfluencies, lexical access problems, verbal tics, interruptions, and interjections. The grammar and syntax of conversation do not always follow conventional notions of correctness. Interviewees do not have the luxury of revising themselves during conversation, so the task falls to the researcher during the process of transcription, analysis, and editing, to interpret the raw data, select the most illuminating pieces and present them in a coherent manner. When transcribing conversational data, punctuation is necessarily subjective, and the borders of individual sentences are not always clearly defined. I have done my best to select and edit quotes such that they reflect the speaking style of the participants, including such features as the use of "like" and "you know" as discourse markers, while still conveying the relevant information in as efficient and grammatically acceptable manner as possible.

Despite my best efforts, it was not always possible to construct syntactically correct sentences from the pieces of conversational data without radically altering my participants' words. In those instances, I have done my best to provide sufficient context to convey their intended meaning clearly, but

I have preserved the idiosyncratic grammar of the original to reflect the participants' in-the-moment thought processes and remain faithful to how they chose to express themselves. I have removed those instances of "like," "um," and "you know" that impeded comprehension, but I have retained them in cases where they functioned as verbal quotation marks or where they helped to convey the informal conversational flavor of the participant's speaking style or the bubbling up of emotion that resulted in mild linguistic imperfection.

I have adopted a few transcription conventions across the participant interviews. While the participants did the majority of the speaking (which is as it should be in phenomenological interviewing) and some parts of the interviews were monologues, other portions involved conversational exchanges with back-and-forth questions and answers, latching, and backchanneling. For the most part, the researcher's words are not included in the quotes used in this chapter, but in the handful of instances that do include them, they appear in italics. Laughter was a frequent feature of the interviews; where relevant, it has been indicated in parentheses, in plain text to indicate that the participant laughed and in italics to indicate the researcher. There are instances in which participants seemed to be groping for a different word or figure of speech than the one they produced, or made an evident slip of the tongue. I have marked a few of these with [*sic*] when it seemed absolutely necessary for the sake of clarity, but as a general rule I have left their quotes to speak for themselves. Points of ellipsis have been used where digressions, verbal tics, and the like were eliminated for the sake of clearer syntax. They sometimes connect comments that were separated from one another in the original interview by several sentences. However, I have avoided using points of ellipsis to cobble together fragments taken from widely separated sections. The progression of the interviews can generally be divided fairly clearly into topic-focused sections, and I made a practice of respecting these section boundaries when selecting and editing quotations.

Finally, a word about the thematic organization of this chapter: Several of my thematic categories cluster together, and there is considerable overlap in the quotes that pertain to each one. For example, a

quote about the change in the classroom hierarchy contains an inherent comparison to previous experiences and often reflects, implicitly or explicitly, on the participants' degree of comfort with the interaction. I have placed each quote in the category in which it seemed to fit best or to offer the most germane illustration of a theme, keeping in mind that it also "counts toward" and reinforces the related themes. With a few exceptions, I have avoided repeating quotes across multiple sections or patchworking individual phrases or sentences from a single piece of discourse into multiple categories. I have preferred instead to let long quotes remain intact and speak to the interconnectedness of multiple themes. In Spurling's (1977) analysis of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in relation to social science research, she notes that any given phenomenon can be seen within different frames of reference "and hence be meaningful on different levels and in different ways" (p. xi) to the person who experiences it. My approach to the data preserves this awareness by coding quotes into multiple categories where relevant, while simultaneously striving to maintain the readability of the report by limiting most quotes to a single appearance in this text.

Table 2  
Summary of Transcription Conventions

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Quoted material in plain text             | Participant's words                                    |
| <i>Quoted material in italicized text</i> | Researcher's words                                     |
| (X#) Letter and number in parentheses     | Identifies participant, interview (by initial, number) |
| (laughter) in plain text                  | Indicates that participant laughed                     |
| <i>(laughter)</i> in italicized text      | Indicates that researcher laughed                      |

## Themes

### *Social Aspects of Participation*

Broner and Tarone (2001) noted that the social dimensions of language learning are never absent from the learner's experience. According to van Lier (2000, 2004, 2010), social interactions are an ineluctable and inextricable component of the environment within which language learning takes place, and are the source of many affordances for learners. Lutzker (2007) observed that the social growth experienced by the target-language theatre participants in his study was as important an outcome as (if not more so than) their improvement in the L2. The experience of working collaboratively with their peers on a common project, and of making a unique contribution rooted in their particular individual skills, characteristics, and expertise, allowed them to flourish in ways they had not experienced in the traditional classroom.

Prior to his study, Lutzker's participants were already peers in the same cohort, a 10<sup>th</sup>-grade class in a Waldorf school in Germany. French 555 and Spanish 555 differed from the class Lutzker studied in important respects: the students were not a pre-existing cohort of peers, but a mixed-level group of undergraduate and graduate students who came together for the first time at the beginning of the semester. They were also not required to take French or Spanish 555, as Lutzker's students had been required to participate in the 10<sup>th</sup>-grade play; my participants took French 555 and Spanish 555 as electives. Thus, the initial social dynamics were rather different; however, many of the experiences my participants reported were consistent with Lutzker's findings about the importance and the transformative nature of the social aspects of participating in target-language theatre.

Perhaps foremost among participants' comments about their experiences in French 555 and Spanish 555 was the overwhelming importance of the social aspects of participation. They did note improvements in their linguistic mastery, but they talked much more about the intimidation they felt during Phase I and their astonishment at the transformation that took place when the focus shifted to



production. They talked extensively, as well, about the opportunities to get to know their classmates as individuals and to spend time with them outside of the classroom environment while working on projects related to the plays, or while socializing and unwinding from rehearsals.

The French 555 and Spanish 555 courses were unique in that use of the target language often continued relatively seamlessly when students transitioned from “class time” to “free time.” Several participants noted that in typical academic courses, once class begins students feel bombarded by a nearly constant stream of information, and they devote nearly all their attention to the course material. There is little or no time for getting to know one’s classmates while class is going on. Any socialization that does take place is often done furtively, and if it occurs in the L2 it is usually because students feel guilty about using class time to discuss non-class-related topics (or about being overheard doing so), so they employ the target language as a way of mitigating the transgression. Once class ends, there may indeed be socialization - but students usually revert to the L1 automatically as they drop the role of “student” to take up the mantle of regular existence. Cassie, in fact, recounted an anecdote from her time studying abroad that language pedagogues will recognize with wry amusement:

the whole school was people from the United States, so it wasn’t like we were mixed in, or even - our classes were all in Spanish, but, like, hanging out ... it’s just, like, all in English. Yeah, and even, like, you know, before class starts ... our teacher comes in and she’s, like, “Stop speaking English!”, but we’re all just like, “No! Class isn’t started yet, we’re gonna speak English!” So, and I think that’s how it is, kind of ... at [name of university] too. (C3)

In contrast, several participants remarked that the socialization took place in the target language beyond class time among the French 555 and Spanish 555 participants. Carson (2012) remarked on the same phenomenon in the drama phase of the English for Academic Purposes program she reported on:

Learners become co-agents, visibly interdependent both in the dramatic process and product. This creates a vital living bridge between the individual and the social. This bridge (which can be

understood as real-life or authentic communication) is mostly artificial in a language classroom context: accepted by all to be a necessary ill, and lessened somewhat by the group's decision to pretend to engage in the 'social' and to present an acceptable 'individual' face for the sake of the classroom dynamic; authentic interaction only takes place outside the classroom door and after class, rarely in the target language. (p. 58)

Carson remarked that, through their engagement in the drama activities, her participants began to develop L2 identities as spontaneous language users who demonstrated growing comfort with the use of the target language for socialization. This also occurred in French 555 and Spanish 555: during Phase I, the UGs primarily socialized with each other and in English, but during Phase II, as the participants began to develop peer relationships with their GS and NS classmates, it became more natural for them to interact socially in the target language.

#### *Social Aspects: Subcategories*

Participants commented on a number of social dimensions related to their interactions with their classmates and the professor. They discussed their intimidation vis-à-vis others' comparatively greater linguistic proficiency, their awareness of the social hierarchy in the class and its gradual suspension, their growing sense of freedom to communicate with their peers and a correspondingly greater comfort with class interactions. Although all of these aspects are intricately related and, at times, can be difficult to parse, they can be distinguished along three gradients: early/late, external/internal, and status-directed/language-directed.

On the early/late axis, remarks about "intimidation and relative language proficiency" primarily focused on or made comparisons to Phase I of the project, while remarks in the "hierarchy," "freedom," and "comfort" categories were directed more towards the events of Phase II. "Hierarchy" can be distinguished from the other categories in that it entails an externally-directed focus: participants' comments indicated their awareness of how they believed others perceived them in terms of status and

language proficiency. The comments in the other three categories are all more internally-focused on the participants' own self-perceptions. Finally, while comments in the "intimidation" category include references to both social status and language proficiency, this axis can be used to distinguish the other three. "Hierarchy" and "freedom" contain comments related more to status-consciousness, while "comfort" contains comments that relate more to participants' self-consciousness about their language proficiency.

Table 3

Categorization of Participant Comments within  
*Social Aspects of Participation*

| <b>Category</b>                                | <b>Early (primarily Phase I) or Late (primarily Phase II) focus</b> | <b>Focused Internally (feelings about self) or Externally (feelings about others)</b> | <b>Focused on Social Status or Language Proficiency</b> |
|--|---|---|---|
| Intimidation and Relative Language Proficiency | Early   | Internal  | Social Status And Language Proficiency                  |
| Hierarchy of Participants                      | Late  | External  | Social Status   |
| Freedom to Communicate                         | Late  | Internal  | Social Status   |
| Comfort with Class Interactions                | Late  | Internal  | Language Proficiency                                    |

*Intimidation and Relative Language Proficiency*

Every single participant reported feeling intimidated by a number of factors at the beginning of the semester: for some, the idea of having to act in a play was a source of anxiety, and all of them commented that they had qualms about being in a class with NSs and GSs. Above and beyond the usual beginning-of-the-semester jitters about speaking a foreign language in front of classmates and feeling out of practice, these students reported measuring their own capacities against those of the GSs and NSs in the group, and feeling inadequate by comparison. Felicia noted that "I mean, obviously the graduate

students are pretty much fluent, and, um, I guess I haven't had so much practice in speaking Spanish.”

(F1) Gail described it as “an awkward situation ... a lot of pressure ... sort of annoying, sort of stressful.”

(G2) Gail also remarked that

the whole undergrad-graduate mix, especially with the native speakers, was a little awkward ... Sometimes [I] feel a little intimidated, just because I'm, you know, not a native speaker, I was trying to do this as a minor [course of study] ... I sort of feel like the, sort of the runt of [the] litter ... it is obviously intimidating standing next to someone who is a native speaker who's much older than you. (G1)

Cassie noted that

it is a little overwhelming, with, like, grad students and native speakers, and, I have this really terrible fear of speaking Spanish even though I love it, just because I don't want to sound like an idiot ... I got really good at it when I was in Spain, but I haven't been there for like two years, so it's gotten way worse, um, so that scares me a lot, and that's why I don't talk in class, usually ... I just feel like my vocabulary's like, really terrible, and it's kind of intimidating to be in there with everybody. (C1)

Prior to the beginning of the semester, Cassie had not realized that Spanish 555 was a mixed-level course, and she was surprised to discover on the first day of class that she was among graduate students.

That was ... one thing that, like, really freaked me out. Especially in the beginning of the course. Because I don't know why I didn't know that, but I didn't. I mean, it is ... an upper level class. But for some reason I didn't expect to be with, like, a bunch of grad students and Ph.D. students and stuff like that ... and I think, had it not been that way, had it been undergraduates, I probably would have spoken more in, um, the class time when we would discuss plays and stuff like that ... but it was very intimidating from my perspective. So, I don't know. Some of the other undergraduates seemed to be, you know, fine with it. But, um, for me, it was intimidating just

because I feel like my Spanish is really, really crappy and, so, I didn't want to talk, and then have all these other people who were talking, like, fluently. (C2)

Although all the participants commented on the presence of graduate students and native speakers in the course, they reacted to the situation in different ways. For a few students, the presence of *non*-native speaking graduate students was a source of as much inspiration as intimidation. David remarked that it was

really kind of amazing how easy it is to tell who is a grad student and who is not, and just like how well they can speak Spanish. And so it's nice to be around people that actually - I mean, beyond native speakers, like, just people that have been doing this for a while ... I got here and I was like, 'Ah, I'm going to be so rusty and, you know, they actually know how to speak Spanish!' (*laughter*) ... and just sort of float by. But it's sort of been turning out okay. (D1)

Heidi talked about the trajectory of her feelings regarding the presence of GSs in the course. She was initially highly intimidated, to the point that she considered dropping the course altogether, but her interest in the opportunity to perform a play, as well as a sense of challenge, persuaded her to stay in Spanish 555. She eventually came to regard the GSs as peers and collaborators.

I'm really glad I stuck with it. I was going to drop the class, originally, when I was like, "Oh, my gosh, you have to put on a performance, and do all this work, and there's grad students" ... It definitely didn't turn to enthusiasm until we were on the stage, and everyone was kind of going through their lines, but, um, before then, originally sitting down the first day of class, I had scheduled myself three different classes that I could choose one between, um, so my whole time, like, the first day was really focused on, "Okay, what do I see myself doing in this class, like how much is the work?", all that kind of stuff. And, hearing that there was going to be the performance aspect really actually swayed me towards doing it, because it hadn't been something that I've been able to do in college, and I haven't been on stage since high school, so it was really

the opportunity, knowing that I got to do that, kind of transcended the fact that I was super intimidated of having a class with grad students. That was also, I think, a stubborn power thing with me, too, was, “there’s grad students in this class, I can take this class.” ... It’s like, “whatever, they’re not that much better than me, like, I should be able to handle this,” kind of thing. So I think it was the challenge and, and the theatre aspect that both made me really want to stick with it and keep up. ... I think when they started, like when we would start having actual conversations, where they, I realized that they valued what I was saying just as much as I valued what they were saying. So we would be in a conversation ... like about La Coreografia, and I’d be talking to Karen about “Oh, hey, like, we should do this.” “Yeah, that’s a good idea,” like, “Oh, yeah, what do you think?” At that point, it was kind of like, “Oh, we both ... have a say in things, like, we both have the same, same idea.” (H3)

Most of the participants, although initially highly intimidated by the presence of GSs and NSs, eventually overcame some of their hangups, and by the end of the semester they had become comfortable interacting with the group as a whole. This was not the case for everyone, however. Cassie reported that even by the end, although she genuinely liked all of her classmates and enjoyed spending time with them, she still felt inhibited about speaking Spanish with them.

I ... was so timid in the first part of class, and I think I, it just carried on through the second part of class. I ... still didn’t feel super comfortable with the language, or, like, talking to the people who spoke it better than me, and stuff like that. ... I feel like it’s a different experience than I’ve had with most shows. ‘Cause, like, during the - you know, if it’s in English ... I make a lot of friends, like, and make really, really close friendships ... throughout rehearsals and stuff like that, ‘cause I think that happens, just being around people all the time. And, I didn’t feel like that happened, because I was just, like, “Oh, these people are older than me, and they know more than me, and I should just get on my backpack and leave.” And, like, not socialize and, um, do

anything like that. So, that was kind of upsetting ... 'Cause everyone was super nice, and ... going to the party at Profe's was fun, and, you know, everyone, everyone was cool, but I was just, like, weird about it because, I don't know, I have this whole, like, "I'm not as good as you so I can't, like, talk to you about it." ... I would definitely do [the course] over again ... 'cause I feel like it was a really unique experience, and it was something that I'd wanted to do, like, since I saw that class in the ... course book. ... Um, I don't know. I'd like to say that ... if I did it again, I'd like to, you know, not be, like, a big weirdo and scared of everything, but that's just kind of how I am. So, I don't think that would change. Um, but that's not like it would deter me from doing it again, at all. (C3)

### *Suspension of Hierarchy*

During Phase I of the semester, both courses met in a classroom, where they established and followed fairly conventional norms of class interaction patterns. These changed notably after the transition into the theater space in Phase II. The participants responded to both the new physical environment and the substantially different tasks they now needed to achieve by altering their behavior in significant ways. Many of them remarked upon the changed classroom dynamic in their interviews, and they particularly mentioned the way that the former hierarchy that had reigned during Phase I was upended. As participants found opportunities to reveal their diverse areas of expertise, UG members of the class found ways of claiming authority. The social bonds among the participants also grew considerably stronger, with a corresponding leveling of hierarchy. UGs and GSs began to regard one another on much more equal footing, and the professor became much less of a centralized locus of authority. Both Prof and Profe demonstrated openness to suggestions from students about how to interpret a line, block a bit of movement, or solve a challenge that arose during the production. Once Phase II began, the members of the class organized themselves into a network of distributed expertise rather than a hierarchical pecking order. Crucially, the UG members of the course began to feel mutually respected as

peers in the eyes of the GSs and professor. (This is not to say that they had felt *disrespected* during Phase I; rather, they had been very conscious of the limitations of what they could contribute to the class, and they now felt themselves able to make much more valuable contributions than they previously could.)

Murphy (2011) describes in detail how this suspension of hierarchy creates fertile terrain for engaged learning through target language theatre:

[S]tudents have creative control and authority. Their ideas and opinions are crucial to its success ... this is a project in engaged learning and the institutionalized role of the instructor as a source of all information is radically changed. The students have much more authority and responsibility ... not only are they preparing to be actors on the stage, they are also commenting on the progress of others, discussing set design and lighting, and making group decisions on wardrobe. They contribute artistically, intellectually, and physically to the production and at all times must take into consideration the deeper meaning of the action and how to convey it. (p. 168)

During Phase II, the UG members of the course began to draw on their individual theatre experience and expertise and became braver about offering contributions and commenting on the progress of their classmates, including the GSs.

David expressed it as a fundamental change in the nature of the endeavor. In his view, Spanish 555 as an academic course effectively ended with the move into the theater, when Spanish 555 became something else entirely, a creative project.

The second half is not like a class at all. Because once the second half becomes, uh, just about creating this play. And once that happens, Profe stops really being a professor, and starts being a director. And it, it sort of becomes more of a collaborative project, rather than the typical sort of dynamic. (D2)

This was particularly visible to David in his production role as lighting designer. Thanks to his prior experience in high school and his coursework in the theatre department, David possessed a



familiarity and an expertise with lighting far beyond that of anyone else involved in the project, including the director and both graduate assistants. In theoretical terms, David possessed a valence which caused a specific role to be assigned to him. (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998) David noted that

the lights, I did because I was the de facto only person who knew anything about lights ... that's how it always happens! ... it's sort of a strange skill to have, as an ex-theatre major. ... And people don't even know what a lighting designer is. ... So the lighting - eh, ah, well, it's kind of funny, 'cause I'm used to ... well, not professional, but the bigger shows here at the university, where there's real planning involved, where I just sort of - you know? I think that - she told me what she wanted, and I took notes, and I think I might have looked at them once. But, so mostly I just made Profe nervous! (D2)

David's greater knowledge base in the area of stage lighting occasioned a profound shift in the power balance between him and Profe, which required her to trust that he would be able to successfully take charge of this area of the production.

Felicia also observed that the professor was not necessarily the expert when it came to some of the linguistic aspects of *La obra absurda* - which was a little surprising to her as a student in a Spanish class, accustomed to relying on the professor as the ultimate authority and locus of knowledge about the target language. Set in precolonial Latin America, the play contained a number of indigenous words, expressions, and names for characters and places that Profe found as difficult to pronounce as many of the students did. There were also a number of scenes that relied on specific *modismos* and colloquialisms which were somewhat opaque to even the native Spanish speakers who were from countries other than where *La obra absurda* was set. Additionally, a number of the comedic moments in the play relied on national popular cultural references. The class' authoritative expert on all of these was Lucas, an undergraduate student with heritage from the country in question whose first language was that variety of Spanish. Felicia remarked that "even, like, with the ... Indian names, everyone has to remember ... and

no one really knows how to pronounce anything! (laughter) Even, you know, like, Profe's not really sure ...” (F2) On multiple occasions during rehearsal Profe directed questions to Lucas and deferred to his expertise. On one occasion she also invited a graduate student from the same country (who was not part of the course) to come and assist her with interpreting the dialogue in a challenging scene. In this way, Profe explicitly relinquished the mantle of authority. In doing so, she demonstrated both the willingness to ask for assistance when needed and the intellectual humility to admit her own limitations. This was illuminating and liberating for many of the UGs to witness. During Phase I they had been very concerned with hiding their own lack of expertise, and generally very reluctant to ask for help. Seeing the professor do exactly that was a revelatory experience.

These shifts in the way power relations were enacted and perceived had a profound effect on how the participants regarded the course. There was a sense that students and professors in a “real” classroom course spend much of their time “acting” prescribed teacher-student roles in a way that holds them at arm's length from one another. However, in the Spanish 555 and French 555 projects, those relations were abandoned as participants embraced a creative project. In some ways, by acting in a play they achieved more authentic and real interactions with their peers.

David cited a specific example in his commentary on the changes in the power dynamic. Unlike his previous experiences missing a class, in which his main concern was whether or not the professor would be upset, with the Spanish 555 production he began to care more about the impact of his absence on the outcome of the show, and to take more personal responsibility for his choices and how they affected the production.

It was Friday, it was the day before the first performance, yeah. Or no, not the day before, the morning of, or afternoon of. And I - I had remembered reading in the email that, that it started at two, that we were supposed to get there at two. Well, of course, Friday we were supposed to get there at one, because that was our normal class time, which I had totally forgotten about, since ...

the idea of normal class had sort of long gone out the window by then. Um, so I showed up - in the end, so I thought it was at two and really it was at one, so I was an hour late, and they called me, like, ten minutes before I got there, saying “where are you?”, um, and it wasn’t so much that, like, if you, if you showed up to class an hour late you’d feel bad, you’d feel, like, afraid of the professor, or bad that you, like, were supposed to be there ... but I felt bad more that I might have missed something as far as the play was concerned, and whether Profe was mad or not was sort of a secondary issue. Which sort of shows how much, at the end, she was like, “It’s like you’re not afraid of me anymore!” ... and it really demonstrates well, as a - as a student it’s sort of hard to understand how much power you have to change what’s going on in the classroom, but it’s really apparent as an actor, how much power you have to change anything you want, because you have to do it when you’re on stage. And when it comes time, you could do anything you wanted to. So, that - so, though, so it destroys the whole dynamic when you realize it doesn’t have to be that way. (D2)

David goes on to qualify his use of “destroy,” noting that it is not entirely (or even primarily) negative, and that the destruction of the typical professor-student power dynamic is actually quite productive in this type of course.

In fact, the destruction David speaks of could be characterized in Bakhtinian terms as his transition from a framework of authoritative discourse to one that is internally persuasive. (1981, pp. 342-346) The classic professor-student power dynamic operates through authoritative discourse: social norms and conventions dictate that professors are more powerful than students, students must obey professors’ instructions, and students have an obligation to be punctual and dedicated in their class attendance, regardless of their personal opinions and preferences. In the previous quote, David acknowledges Profe’s right to be upset with his tardiness (a violation of the authoritative discourse that still reigns over the Spanish 555 context), but he characterizes this as “secondary” because his discourse frame has changed.

David is now internally persuaded by his obligation to his classmates and to the success of the show; he wanted and intended to arrive on time to rehearsal, and he recognizes his own power within the ensemble (and that of the other participants) to significantly affect the outcome of their mutual endeavor. The internally persuasive aspect of the discourse is now primary; he cares about Spanish 555 as his own project, as much as or more than as a course in which he has to fulfill the professor's requirements and expectations.

David revisited this theme in a subsequent interview, offering the following reflection that touches upon the idea of hierarchy as well as "comfort with interaction" and "freedom of communication":

[I]t definitely gave me a sense of comfort as far as being able to just go and talk to these professors as real people. And, I mean, not only the fact that I had to do the whole paper thing and talk to her about that, but also that I got to see immediately the switch within the same person from professor to director. (D3)

David again recalled the aforementioned moment in one of the later rehearsals at which Profe had commented on how the tables had turned, exclaiming, "It's like they're not afraid of me anymore!" Her comment was revealing because, indeed, the situation was no longer what it had been during Phase I.

Which, I think ... is really good ... for them, because, or for everybody involved, because I don't think the tables are really that different between a teacher and a student and between an actor and a director. I don't think the real dynamic is any different, but the imagined dynamic is really different. (D3)

One illustrative vignette shows how the participants of Spanish 555 transcended their conventional classroom roles of students within a student-teacher hierarchy to take ownership of the production. Approximately two weeks before the performance, a guest speaker visited one of the rehearsals and led the participants through some warm-up improvisations and energy-raising activities. As

the performance drew near, the participants noticed that one of their pervasive problems was the low energy level during rehearsals. A group of them, spontaneously and independently of the instructor, decided to revisit the energy-building activity the visiting speaker had used. David commented that “we were doing that ‘pass the energy’ thing ... right up to the end, before- long after anybody had said, ‘Okay, we have to do this now.’” (D2) In other words, it was not done in response to any imposed directive or external authority; rather, it was initiated by the participants, by their own choosing and for their own purposes. As such, it represents another example of initially authoritative discourse converting to internally persuasive discourse. (Bakhtin, 1981)

It was interesting to note that although most of the comments relating to the suspension of hierarchy during Phase II were positive, one participant, Cassie, was a little bit bothered by the way that it impacted rehearsals. She shared a number of scenes with John and Pedro, two graduate students (John, L1 English; Pedro, L1 Spanish) who also had leading roles in the production. Although both John and Pedro were more comfortable with Spanish than she was, neither of them had previous theatre experience. Both of them enjoyed the opportunity to act and quickly adopted a collaborative approach to rehearsing. John in particular was enthusiastic about sharing ideas and offering suggestions for how to stage scenes. Cassie’s comment also relates to a comparison with her previous experience, her comfort with the process, and the freedom of communication among participants:

From what I’ve learned, from classes, or from shows, you never, ever, ever try to offer direction to anyone else that’s in the show, unless you’re the director, or the assistant director, or something like that. So just, for me, I was just kind of taken aback, like when he would be, like, “Hey, can you say this line like this to me?” And I would be, like, “Oh, okay. Yeah, I guess I can,” but, like, I would never do that to someone else, just because it’s kind of like a respect thing that I’ve learned in the theatre .... I mean, like, nobody’s ever done that - like, really done that to me before, or had - had they done that before, they would get in trouble, like, you know, like, my

directors or some - someone would, like, have a meeting after the show and be like, you know, “don’t tell people what to do, that’s my job. Just stay out of it.” So ... I guess at times it was probably helpful, because maybe it was because I didn’t understand ... exactly what the dialogue in Spanish was supposed to mean, or something? Um, but it just, kind of, was a different thing that happened, but it didn’t usually happen to me in previous experiences. (C2)

Accustomed to operating within an established hierarchy for other theatrical productions, Cassie was uncomfortable with the ways in which the Spanish 555 participants disrupted the status quo.

### *Freedom of Communication*

In the context of French 555 and Spanish 555, “freedom to communicate” was a theme that emerged in the participant interviews. It frequently overlapped with the theme of “comfort with interactions” as well as with the “suspension of hierarchy.” It also took a number of different forms. One of the main ones was that over the course of the semester the participants felt less inhibited about interacting with one another, especially across the initial boundaries of status. They also reported feeling greater freedom regarding the *types* of interaction in which they engaged: as the semester progressed, undergraduates who during Phase I never would have dreamed of telling a graduate student what to do, by the dress rehearsal felt free to make suggestions and offer direction. Sometimes they mentioned feeling constraint, rather than freedom, in talking to peers.

Heidi commented on the social dynamic of Spanish 555 and the significantly greater ease of interactions during the second phase of the course.

Overall it’s been an awesome experience, just, everyone is so much more, like, friendly and involved when we’re in the theatre than in the classroom. It’s such, like, a different setting, so I’ve gotten to know the people so much better, and just like, there are so many little moments that you have with people. (H2)

Heidi also remarked upon how consciousness of the power dynamic of the group, and learning how to operate within it, was a huge part of the Spanish 555 experience and a valuable aspect that would have implications for future encounters and situations. She noted that at times students felt the freedom to offer suggestions and direction to one another and to the professor, but at other times they perceived limitations on how much they could or should say in that regard.

Learning, like, when things could be tweaked, and when they couldn't ... like, how would I put this, like, social interacting on a sense of, like, power. Like, where you stand in the power scale, and what opportunities you have to say things and when you can't, and who you can talk to about certain things - I think it's a really valuable lesson, life lesson, and important in every aspect that you're going to go into. It doesn't matter what career, you're always going to have to worry about, like, the power scale, and I think that we definitely learned about it, like, putting this together. (H3)

When asked to elaborate on this and offer some examples, Heidi noted that

One example could definitely be with *La Coreografía*. In that scene, we, um, originally everyone met together with Laura, and Laura showed us her idea of what her vision would be for that scene, and I think everyone was really hesitant. And, was kind of critical in a very hesitant way that she just didn't take at all, like, just went, like, full-fledged with what she wanted to do and what she thought would be good. And I think it created problems down the line, because none of us had really bought into the performance and that scene, and the validity of it, and, like, her vision for it, and so it created problems when we were actually putting it on stage and finally getting it with music, and that, because no one really wanted to do it yet, and everyone felt taxed by it. So I think if we could have maybe said things in a more forward manner from the beginning, and had her maybe explain to us why she thought that was the best way to go about things, we would have bought into it sooner, and been able to put it together a little quicker. (H3)

Heidi did note that ultimately the scene and Laura's original choreography were very successful, once it was fully rehearsed and the participants had accepted the approach that had been proposed.

It actually was really close [to Laura's original choreography]. Um, only minor things were changed. Little things like ... the synchronization, I think, was the only part that we really needed to tweak. But otherwise it was really loyal to her original image. Which, at the end of the day, when you, like, saw the, like, um, crowd interaction, was - it turned out great. (H3)

In a follow-up question, I asked Heidi what, in her opinion, had caused the other performers to go along with the choreography that they had initially resisted. Had Laura explained the rationale behind her choices in a way that persuaded them? Had they simply given up the resistance because cooperation was the only option? Heidi responded that

I think it was that it was the only option, but then also that when we were giving input on, like, synchronizing things and doing that, that we were also being heard for that. So we were putting in what we could, and being heard. It wasn't substantial changes or anything, but it was still our input going into it. ... I think everyone just felt like they owned it ... everyone took such ownership and wanted, wanted the scenes they were in to work well, so I think they were willing to put in the input that they wanted to do. (H3)

This participatory aspect of the Spanish 555 experience and the feeling of ownership in the end product is one of the most important aspects of the course. Heidi remarked that she saw it exemplified in the actions of John, one of the graduate student participants with a lead acting role.

John was probably the most vocal that I heard, of everyone, in saying what he thought was, like, his interpretation and what he wanted to see. And usually Profe and everyone else just let him go with it, and it, like, turned out great, and you could tell he, like, really had thought about the things he was suggesting, and really took an interest in it. So I think the fact that everyone - no



one was just throwing out ideas just to throw out ideas, they were doing it because they really had thought about it and believed in it, and I think that also helped. (H3)

As a graduate student but also an L2 Spanish speaker, John served as a role model for the UGs. His willingness to speak out and offer interpretations and direction, even to the extent of challenging the professor, set an example and served a licensing function for many of the course's UG participants.

For Felicia, the collaborative atmosphere of students offering direction to one another was helpful in expanding her understanding of the play. She noted that

you can't really, like, pinpoint when it happened, but I feel like it was just something just really, really gradual? ... I feel like it kind of started happening more once we understood the play more, and as we – like, when we first began, just, everyone, like, eventually had their roles, and we just kind of did, just, like, read-throughs, and, like, we interjected ... blockings, like “Oh, you should do this,” whatever. And I feel like it started with you and Profe and Laura just being, like, “Oh, like maybe you should do this,” like, “this will be better,” or “you should ...” I don't know, just anything, just like any sort of critique to make the performance better. And I kind of feel like once people understood that, first of all, you could do that, and second of all, just understanding the characters and the, the plot of the play, 'cause I – I know even, like, for me, like, when we were done reading the play, like, the first time, like, in class, I still didn't really understand it? I mean, like, it's kind of a complicated play. Um, but, so I think once people, like, understood that, first of all, you could do that, and, like, what the play entailed and, like, the motivations of the characters, then they were like, “Oh, like, I can maybe see this,” like, “you could do this to make it better.” Like, even, like, I've, like, just like, randomly heard, just like, walking around, like, people tell other people, like, even if they're not in the scene, like, “Oh, you should, like, do this to, like, make it better.” Or, like, I was just, like, waiting to talk to Profe, and Lucas was, like, to me, like, “Oh, like, you know, when you're on stage and you have the baby you should move

around more. Like, you are doing that, but, like, make it, like, more dramatic, like, exaggerate that a bit more, so, like, we understand what you're doing." So ... it's always just, like, kind of randomly just intermittent. So, yeah, I think it was, it was really gradual, so, I think, like, by now, it happens a lot more. Well, maybe not, not *right* now, 'cause we kind of ... have it down, but, you know, towards ... the end of that. (F2)

While numerous interviewees commented on the greater fluidity of communication among all the students and the professor during Phase II, David noted that for him it was an epiphany, during Phase I of the semester, to see the graduate students engage in debate with Profe on a footing of intellectual equality different from anything he was accustomed to seeing in his undergraduate classes. David described the specific encounter in his second interview:

I remember we had ... this whole discussion in class where ... John was telling Profe, "I don't think it's that postmodern. It's pretty - like, there's, like, a whole narrative that just sort of runs through." And Profe, they just sort of went back and forth, Profe really disagreed with him. ... it's supposed to be these ten, these ten *cuadros*, the type of paintings or whatever, scenes, um, and they're supposed to be distinct and then just postmodern, in, like, a postmodern way, joined just because they're put one end to another. And when you read it, I mean, what, they, it seems like there are different characters in every scene, and each one seems to stand by itself, but then when you see it, it doesn't seem that way at all. So, I much more agreed with John than I did when I was reading it. (D2)

In fact, this incident led David to two realizations that he found somewhat surprising: first, that it was both possible and acceptable for a student to openly disagree with a professor's interpretation of a text, and second, that after thinking it over and seeing how the production of *La obra absurda* came together, he himself actually disagreed with the professor and sided with his fellow student on this particular point.

David touched upon this incident again in his third interview, expanding upon what a revelation it was for him to realize that part of graduate study involved engaging material on a much deeper level and engaging with professors more as intellectual equals than as superiors.

I remember going back to my dad, who was a professor for 25 or 30 years, something like that, and I remember saying it was ... kind of jaw-dropping to see somebody argue with a professor for 15 minutes in class! I mean, the idea hadn't even occurred to me! You know, I'm - I'm just worried about making sure I've taken the right notes and have said something so I can get participation credit, you know? The idea of having come formulated with a completely different thought than anything that's on the agenda, and then to continue to argue it for ten minutes, was just a new idea completely ... so, I told that to my dad, and he said, "Yeah, grad students love to argue!" (D3)

Later, David reflected upon how witnessing this exchange might impact his own future participation in class discussions. He talked about how coming to class

having had more in-depth independent thought would be something I could do in the future ... and in addition to that, without getting caught up on what it is that we are discussing tomorrow in class ... is to pursue whatever, you know, a thought occurs to you when you're actually reading it. (D3)

David thus saw the possibility of transcending the somewhat superficial approach to class preparation typical of many UG students, thanks to having witnessed an intellectual exchange of a very different nature between the professor and a GS. It shaped his vision of his own possible future self, as well as his ability to see himself as he had once been and appreciate his new perspective:

It was funny to hear other people talk about the first part of the class ... Profe talking about the ... little group of undergrads in the corner that never said anything, we were just sort of scared. (laughter) ... I think, as far as the first half of the class is concerned, having graduate students in

the class helped a lot, for me. Because, uh, I think that's really the only Spanish class I've had where people actually talked. Because everybody's supposed to talk in these Spanish classes, and it's all about participation, but nobody actually really says anything. (D2)

David compared the level of interaction in Spanish 555 to what he had observed in one of his 400-level courses.

Spanish Culture Through Film ... was a huge difference because none of the undergrads talked. And it wasn't a change from the other undergrad classes I had taken, but after taking a class with grad students, I really realized how much of a difference there is between the amount of input that students have to classes depending on how old they are, whether they've graduated before. (D3)

David talked about how being in a class that raised the participation bar in this way was both exhilarating and intimidating: he felt a new freedom to contribute to the discussion at a deeper level, but he was also more anxious about the consequences of making errors in public.

On one level it was sort of a boost or a proponent for getting more input, on another level it was a little scary 'cause I felt like I actually had to know what I was talking about ... And, I mean, it was - it was really obvious to me at the time when an undergrad student was talking just to have talked, and get that little, you know, participation check-off: "I said something in class today!" ... and it's not obvious when everyone's doing it, to a certain extent, in an undergrad class. I mean, it might be obvious, probably is obvious to the professor, but ... in a graduate class, it was obvious to me as a student. (D3)

He went on to describe the interaction in the 400-level course as "like pulling teeth," saying,

I'm serious, *nobody* talked in that class! ... that was sort of a shame, too, because ... I mean, it was Spanish film, so, like, it was Buñuel and all this stuff that's actually, like - and we were watching, like, Almodóvar films, and so it was, like, really good stuff, and everybody was like, you know, she'd ask a question, and just silence. (D3)

Having experienced rewarding discussions in Spanish 555, David was able to recognize the 400-level class' failure to engage in conversation about similarly rich topics as a lost opportunity.

David also offered commentary about his experiences in his subsequent courses. After the spring semester ended, he had taken two summer Spanish courses, the second of which he was taking at the time of his third interview. He remarked that

it certainly makes me try harder to speak in Spanish all the time, in undergrad classes, because my colleagues have a tendency to speak in English when they can. And ... [in Spanish 555] like, a quarter of them were native speakers ... I don't know, some of them were, at least, native speakers. But everybody always talked in Spanish. And since they were still in that mode, I mean, they continued talking in Spanish as you were walking out ... Which is something that really doesn't happen in undergrad classes. So at least in [the subsequent] class it did encourage me to try to respond in Spanish if somebody did ask me something in English. Or, to continue talking like that. (pause) It's also something where I can speak faster now without worrying whether they'll understand me. 'Cause I figure they'll catch up, or they'll ask what I said. Um, since I know, since I've been in an experience where everybody was so far above me, now, I can sort of just play the same trick on other people, role-reversal, and not feel as weird about it. (D3)

Heidi made observations similar to some of David's about the types of interactions that took place between and among graduate students and undergraduate students over the course of the project:

[I]n the classroom it was definitely, I think, as an- like, the undergrads were really intimidated by the, like, graduate students, and graduate students by nature I feel like are like are just so much more used to the, like, "read all this stuff and we're going to, like, talk about it," and actually talk about it. Whereas the undergrads, usually things are a little slower, you don't necessarily need to be, like, focusing on the specific, like, points within papers that you want to talk about all the time. So, I think, personally I was just, like, kind of floundering there, but then we switched to the

theatre, and now everyone has their own individual, like, role that they have to, like, take on. And everyone has their specialty, so like, with, like, Felicia doing, like, lights and sounds, like, she, like, just like talks like to everyone like twenty times more, about, like, all of her details, and, like, we'll just start talking about the sounds that she's created, and, like, come up with. And then, I'm doing all the publicity stuff, and I'm talking to Lucas so much more about that, and emailing Profe so much more about that. And I never talked before, and didn't really talk to anyone except for like two undergrads. So, just like taking ownership of something. And you know everyone else is kind of depending on you for that. There's no one element that anyone is contributing that we could do without. It's so important that everyone gets it done, and I think everyone really realizes that, and puts forth the effort to complete their tasks and give 100%. Which, in the classroom it's also really easy to slack, and just know, "Oh, if I don't read that whole play, somebody else will prompt me." It's like, "No ... you need to know everything right now." ... It's like, if you have something to do, you need to do it, and you need to do it well. (H2)

Heidi also remarked upon how the change in the social structure of the course from Phase I to Phase II had given her new insight into what the social relationships *could* have been all along, and how she could have benefited from them much earlier. "Now that I know the people, I know if I would have asked prior for help, they would have totally been willing to explain things to me. But I was too afraid to do that before." (H2)

In her final interview Emily reflected back on how several aspects of the experience served to build her sense of self-confidence, which had a liberating effect on her. It helped her to explore new abilities and ways of relating to people, beyond what was familiar and what she had already mastered.

It really, like, helped me with my confidence ... it's not that I wasn't confident before, but just to think that I can do something else, you know? Because, like, for me, I love to write. I'm a very good writer. But to be able to ... act a little bit, I acted, you know, and ... to design the costumes

... and to think in a different way that I never thought before ... and theatre itself is so great because it incorporates *everything*. You know, it's like, your body, your mind, your voice, words, transformed into actions, like, I think it's really important ... to always try to jump out of what you're comfortable with, and, you know, not be afraid to learn from others. Because at first I kind of thought, you know, the grad students, they're kind of snobby, they all come in and they sit next to each other, you know? And I'm sure I would do the same thing, if I was them, you know? But ... I was scared, I felt like an outsider at first, but, no, it was great, because I think we all, like, went through the process together, you know, and even though we all had different jobs, it was like we all needed each other. (E3)

Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) noted that confidence is a fundamental component of lifelong learning, and they cited the importance of mentors and the peer group for encouraging learners to take risks and stretch their creative language capacities. Emily's reflections on her growing sense of self-confidence over the course of the semester clearly indicate that it was a factor in her ability to take what was for her a creative risk in participating in the production and engaging in a new domain of activity, acting and performance, in the L2.

#### *Comfort with Class Interactions*

Rubinfeld *et al.* (2006) offered criteria for defining L2 confidence: a relative lack of anxiety when using the language, belief in one's ability to cope linguistically with one's tasks, and relatively frequent and pleasant contacts with the L2 community. As a learning environment, the French 555 and Spanish 555 courses offered the participants opportunities to develop their L2 confidence by engaging with a supportive L2 community on a series of challenging but manageable tasks. Nearly all of the participants remarked upon the greater degree of comfort they felt in interactions with their peers and the professor during Phase II of the course. Some of these comments overlap with the previously-discussed changes to the classroom power structure and the emergent, newly-leveled hierarchy. Others found

comfort in the different *kinds* of interactions and speaking that took place in the domain of the theater. Comments classified in the “comfort with class interactions” category are related to participants’ sense of linguistic self-confidence during Phase II. Cassie, for example, had been silent throughout Phase I of Spanish 555, but working with the text in Phase II helped her to find her voice:

It was nice to be able to speak Spanish aloud again without being ... super nervous about it ‘cause, like, knowing what you’re going to say is better than, you know, having to come up with it on your own. (C2)

Emily had a rather unique perspective on her own comfort with speaking the target language in Spanish 555. When describing her language learning background in the first interview, she noted that thanks to her mother’s profession, she had gotten an early start on formally studying the language and, as a result, she had always been in class with students who were chronologically older than she, but who were at or below her level of proficiency. Consequently, although she was accustomed to being younger than her classmates, she was also accustomed to be one of the strongest performers in her peer group. As she described it,

I’ve always kind of been, um, the more, the youngest, but also advanced, in a way, you can say, student - So I’ve always kind of had that extra comfort not just because I had a resource at home, but because I feel comfortable with the language. (E1)

Unlike other participants who became more comfortable after leaving the Phase I classroom environment behind and moving into theater for Phase II, Emily felt more in her element in class and had a harder time adjusting to the different interaction patterns in the theater. Emily was the daughter of two educators and had always excelled in her Spanish classes. She felt comfortable in classroom environments where she felt that she knew the parameters of interaction and the expectations of her professors. To Emily, classroom interactions felt safe and predictable, and for her they constituted “relatively frequent and pleasant contacts with the L2 community.” (Rubinfeld *et al.*, 2006) She knew that if she read the



material the night before, she would be able to prepare her comments, look up the vocabulary she needed, revise her grammar, and go to class secure in the knowledge that she would be able to say something intelligent about the readings and earn credit for participating in the discussion. As she describes it,

the first half of the class I felt much more - well, I don't know about more "comfortable," but more, like, in my element, because ... in the classroom ... discussing literature, you know, that's where I feel most ... comfortable and, like, strong, because, you know, I have ... the night by myself to read ... the text, to read the play, and ... to form my own ideas, and then I kind of like have ideas of the words that I want to use to express my interpretations in my head and my notebook already, so then when we arrive to the class discussion, even though I was intimidated, very much by all the graduate students who, you know, and all the people who, their language comes ... much more easily to them, I was still able to ... actively participate, I felt, you know? ... I do try to raise my hand a lot in class and I like being part of the discussion, and I felt like ... in that setting, in the classroom ... more comfortable in the fact that I could express my ideas, that I felt like what I was saying, you know, had meaning and made sense." (E2)

Emily was considerably less comfortable with the greater ambiguity of the theatrical setting.

Suddenly, expectations seemed hazy and interactions were much more difficult to prepare for:

And then when we moved into the theater, it was all kind of like having conversations ... live almost. Like, I didn't have that planning time to figure out what I was going to say, and even though I knew, I know the words in Spanish that I wanted to say sometimes, when I was just talking to you or talking to Profe, or something, you know, a word - you just go blank, and also sometimes ... I notice that when I'm speaking with people who obviously speak Spanish better than me, even though I completely understand them, and I know what words I want to use, I ... choke, and I forget words, and I stumble, I, I make grammatical errors that I wouldn't make, or that I know are wrong, but I can't think of the right way to say it. So, and then I kind of began to

feel bad about myself in a way, because I felt like I looked stupid, kind of, because I couldn't express myself in Spanish as well as I wanted to, because it was moving really fast, and, you know, people are having a million different conversations, and even though I understood everything, I - it was hard for me. And then ... because I felt uncomfortable, I, like, reverted back to English. And I would ... if I couldn't think of a word I would just say it in English, even though you know the point is to try to speak Spanish the entire time. And, I think other people started doing that too, and then people started speaking English more. And, you know, I would have rather ... been forced to, like, speak Spanish, you know, but I think 'cause we were moving so fast, we had so much work to do, there wasn't time to ... sit there, collect my thoughts, or, you know, write something down, or, you know what I'm saying? So, that was one thing that was really difficult for me is not being able to, like, have ... a fast conversation with somebody ... Of course sometimes, but sometimes I just kind of felt that, like, brain freeze, you know, when I was talking to someone who, you know, speaks Spanish a lot better than me. So, that was one thing that was really hard for me, because I, I just felt, like, not as involved, even though I understood everything. (E2)

Emily recalled times when she chafed against the dynamics of some of the class interactions.

Um, so there were, like, little moments like that, where - you know, and even if I was just having, like, a normal conversation with, like, I don't know, Pedro, or, like, you know, one of them who speaks Spanish, you know, like, natively, or very fluently, I couldn't think of a word, and then I'd say it in English, and then they'd switch to English for me, and I'd think, "I don't want you to have to switch to English, because I want to practice," you know? So that also, I struggled with that a little bit. (E2)

A little later in the interview, however, she revisited that when she summed up how she felt about her choice to participate in the course:

I'm so glad I took the class, even though it scared me. And I think it did help me with my language in the end. You know, even though we did kind of - I did revert to English, and other people in the class also did that, too, just because we had to get it done, you know, I still felt like it improved my language skills. And, being comfortable around people who speak better than me. Which is, like, something that always makes me nervous. So, ... yeah, but everyone was so nice about it that it made me feel better, you know? And they, you know, they stuck with me even though I did - when I didn't really know what I was going to say, they would help me out, and - that's always nice, instead of just, like, giving up on you and switching to English, you know?

(E2)

Emily's belief in her ability to cope with the linguistic task at hand was more robust during Phase I and less so during Phase II, and she experienced greater anxiety about her language use. However, the preceding quote indicates that she does seem to have lowered her linguistic self-*consciousness* as a result of the experience, which may be a first step toward increasing linguistic self-confidence.

Regarding comfort with the classroom interactions, several students offered illuminating answers when asked how they would describe the Spanish 555 course to a hypothetical prospective student, an undergraduate who knew nothing about what the course involved and who wanted to know what to expect if s/he were to take it the next time it was offered. Cassie replied that

I would tell them that most of the first part of the class is just like, basically, any other literature class that you would take. Um, in the Spanish department, just a lot of reading, and ... learning new terms and new ways of thinking about what you're reading ... and then the second half, I don't know ... I would just say it was, like, super fun. Because ... it's way better than taking an exam at the end of the year, and you get to meet all these really awesome people, which is the case with any, I guess, show that you would do. And, like, not to be afraid? I mean it is kind of scary, going on stage and speaking a foreign language ... with all these people who probably

know it better than you do ... But, I felt like it was a really, really good experience ... especially for, like, someone like me who ... is terrified of speaking in class ... it makes you have to, you know, deal with the language and accents and all that stuff, but you don't have to come up with it on your own. So, it's not as difficult ... there's so many, like, other options that you can do if you're not someone who wants to be ... on stage ... there's, you know, lighting, and production, and sound, and all those other things ... I think probably everyone in the class found something that they were interested in that they ... could apply to the production. (C2)

David offered the following comment about his comfort with speaking in class at the very beginning of Spanish 555, comparing himself to his GS and NS classmates:

[T]he first day was the biggest day for that. Because I was listening to these people, and I was, like, "Holy crap! I'm going to sound so stupid when I say anything!" And, when I actually did say something, you know, sort of trying to look at myself, if that's possible, um, I was like, "Oh, okay, so, I'm fine" ... you know, 'cause I - it was just after winter break, when I had not practiced at all, so I was worried that I would be worse than even I thought I was. It turned out to be okay. I didn't feel bad, you know, *that* far below everybody else (D3)

although he did admit to feeling "in over my head at the beginning, with the literature." (D3)

Felicia talked about how the warm-up activities emerged somewhat late in the process, and how she felt more comfortable with them because of that. Yet, it did strike her as a little unusual and somewhat backwards that they happened later rather than earlier in the semester.

I feel like - those kind of reminded me of, like, icebreakers that you do? ... but I feel like, just because we have been working on the play for a while, it really wasn't, like, an uncomfortable thing to do, 'cause I feel like we're pretty comfortable with each other. So I feel like if we did that, like, on the first day, it would have been kind of awkward and something I really would not have wanted to do, but, um, so I think it's kind of funny that we did that last, instead of first?

Because I know I would have been like, “Oh, I really don’t want to do this, I - I feel really embarrassed,” but, um, after, like, s- basically seeing everyone do really silly things and, you know, having to be silly, like, um, so doing that icebreaker, like, I think (chuckle) it - I don’t know, it just, it - I think it was kind of funny that, like, it was last, and kind of - I don’t know - I guess maybe, like, made us more comfortable. But, I don’t know, I think it would have been interesting if, like, we did it first. (F2)

Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) discuss the importance of icebreakers as a means to put students at ease with one another and foster social interaction. They specifically recommend using icebreakers early in the term, but, as Felicia noted, using them during Phase II was also highly effective in Spanish 555 for fostering bonding among the participants at a point when they felt ready to do so.

I guess, like now, because with the play, it’s so, just, interactive and you have to collaborate with people, you’re almost forced to be comfortable enough with them to do that, or you, um, also, being forced you just kind of, like, naturally become more comfortable and, like, are willing to do that. Um, so, yeah, it was just kind of like a more natural process, I guess. And it’s, like, a very, like, gradual thing. Um, and then, also, it’s, like, a lot easier when you’re, like, on stage with them. Like, if you have a scene with them, like, you have to talk to them. Well, you have to talk, but, like, interact with them on stage, and act with them. But then, you, like, talk to each other and, like, maybe could give notes, and then eventually you just, talk about other things, I don’t know, and, like, you just – it becomes, I guess, more of, like, a friendship, not just like a – classmates? Like someone who – like, at the beginning of the class, like before we started the play, I don’t think I really knew everyone’s name even, you know? (F2)

Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) also emphasize the learning of names as an important step in fostering a cohesive classroom. Felicia’s comment illustrates that this cohesion, as well as the learning of names, were brought about much more readily during Phase II than Phase I.

As for, like, the first part of the class, um, because there were, like, grad students, ... that can be, like, really intimidating and it can be, I don't know, kind of, like, off-putting. Um, but once you, like get used to that fact and kind of accept it, and, like, realize that no one's going to think you're an idiot for speaking, like, and saying something, like, incorrect, or having an interjection in English in there, you know, it's totally fine. Because even, like, just discussing the plays, I feel like it was really helpful in understanding it. And also I think it was interesting that we, like, threw a lot of theory in there. Just to get, like, another perspective of theatre. So, like, you know, we read the plays, we're putting on a play, and then, like, to get, like, someone else's critique on, like, the plays themselves, I - I just feel like this was a really, like, well-rounded class on theatre. (F2)

MacDonald (2011) notes that “[m]aking a classroom environment that promotes and rewards risk-taking and allows for making mistakes is essential to both successful improvisation and successful foreign language learning.” (p. 275) He also points out that

Students in foreign language classes often are so wrapped up in the angst and fear of practicing a foreign language that they forget the obvious, they forget to look for linguistic cognates either in writing or orally, they forget to infer as much content as possible from the context in which they find themselves, and they forget that their communication and comprehension skills go far beyond the verbal into the tonal, emotional, contextual, nonverbal, and gestural realms. (p. 279)

#### *Comfort - Increased Confidence*

Another aspect of the “comfort” theme that emerged as important was the effect of the experience on participants' self-confidence. (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002; Rubenfeld *et al.*, 2006) Staddon (2007) reported that increased student confidence with the use of the L2 was one of the most significant outcomes of her study. In the present investigation, beyond merely a lack of self-consciousness, participants reported experiencing a boost in self-confidence that helped them feel capable of embracing

new challenges. This was seen both in their L2 confidence, i.e. their comfort in speaking the language, and more broadly in their general comfort with and confidence about participating in a public performance of a stage play. Felicia noted this when she said

I've always felt like that I was never a really good, maybe, like, not really good at anything that's very artistic like this ... I feel like, maybe I could be creative, but when it comes to, like, um, putting on a play or a show, like, I really didn't want to do anything like that. Like, I feel like backstage stuff is kind of, like, more, like, my thing, something I can handle, but even, like, being on stage for a little bit, like, made me really nervous, like the thought of it really made me nervous. I remember when we decided we were going to do *La obra absurda*, and I was so mad, 'cause I was like, "I don't want to be on stage, like, I wanted a play with less roles 'cause I don't want to be up there!" ... So, um, again, even, like, before the semester started, um, because I didn't know that the play we were going to do was, like, such a huge project, like, huge undertaking, like, I thought it was, like, a little thing we'd do, like, with our own class, like, you know. Um, and so then, when, like, I read the syllabus and realized that it was, you know, a huge performance, and that, like, it was open to the public, at the Play Circle which seats, like, over a hundred people, I was like, "Oh my God!" and I sent Profe an email of everything, like, "Do I have to act? Because I don't want to!" And she was like, "No, like, we'll see," Basically, she was, like, "you don't have to if you don't want to. There are a lot of other things you can do." But obviously, like, everyone had to act in this play 'cause there was just so many parts, and I was just, like, really, really intimidated, and I didn't really want to do it, but, by the end of it, it wasn't a big deal, like, like the – by the time we actually performed, the audience might as well not have been there. You know? ... Like, it – it probably helped that I really couldn't see them, because I c-, I couldn't wear my glasses. But, um, but even then, like, you know, you don't really, like – I guess you look at the audience, but you, you don't really pay attention to them? And that's bec-

you just, like, rehearse so much and you're just so comfortable with it. By the end of it, it felt like it just wasn't a big deal. So I feel like, for me, that was a great accomplishment that I, like, right before the show, like, I wasn't too nervous. Like, I was nervous, like, backstage, like, right when it was dark and, like, we were waiting for everyone to, well, I guess not dark yet, the music was playing and we were waiting for everyone to, like, get their seats. And, I was getting nervous, and I was, like, "Oh, my God, I'm so nervous, I just want this to be over with." But then, like, once we started, it was like rehearsal. So, that, to me that was, like, a great feat. (F3)

Gail mentioned this aspect of greater comfort and increased self-confidence as well.

I haven't had, like, huge issues with public speaking, but I think it was just sort of, like, speaking in another language. If I know what I'm saying, it's like in English, I mean, I can do pretty well, but, um, yeah, I think sort of having, like – being able to be heard and understood, I think, um, especially when memorizing Spanish things, um, I mean I don't think I'll have much to memorize, I guess, but I think, um, just sort of more confidence in the fact that people will be able to understand me if I sort of speak and communicate clearly enough, I guess? Be it something that I've memorized or something that, you know, I haven't really spent the time to memorize, you know, impromptu or whatnot. Yeah, I think definitely the ability to memorize something in Spanish. Or even just memorize something fairly quickly that's maybe a little more difficult, I guess? ... I think maybe just a little more, hm (chuckle) maybe confidence in a way to, like - that I could present multiple characters, that I could do it in Spanish, that I could, you know, I was able to, you know, sing something in front of an audience ... Yeah, I think, um, just sort of, like, the fact that I can actually do it, 'cause I did it. Um, yeah, I didn't think I would - I thought, you know, I'd have, oh, I'd have a little part, and that I'd probably do costumes or something. But the fact that we actually not only did a play, but also did one of the plays that was a little more



complicated ... and the fact that I got to play a variety of characters, in a way. Yeah, I think - I wasn't quite sure if I could do it, but now my, I did it, so I know I can do it.(G3)

David also reflected on how self-confidence was deeply intertwined with the ability to communicate effectively, whether in interpersonal conversation in the target language or while acting on stage:

[T]here's a threshold, basically, where people who haven't gotten there yet, whether they are just sort of really bad at acting ... I find that it's mostly to do with being able to let go and just sort of do it without being self-conscious - so, there were a lot of people that hadn't acted before in this play, that did - did a good job, or, you know, as far as dividing into strata, did significantly better than a lot of people who were still afraid of what they were doing. And it didn't necessarily have to do with experience, much less just lack of self-consciousness. So I really got to see the mistakes, or the lack of energy that people were putting into it. (D3)

#### *Summary of Social Aspects of Participation*

Other researchers, notably A'ness (2011), have reported on the social dimensions of participation in L2 theatre. A'ness described a variety of student responses to aspects of her course, primarily centering on its collective, collaborative nature, which was a new experience for most participants:

[W]orking as a collective was not something that many of the students had ever done, especially within the context of an academic class where they are used to working individually or occasionally in pairs or small groups for abbreviated amounts of time. The students had to learn to trust each other and respect each other's different opinions. This did create tension and having to rely on others made the process scary. Yet, in their final evaluations what stood out for all of the students, without exception ... was the hands-on nature of the activities and the communal feel of the class. (2011, p. 156)

A'ness goes on to enumerate aspects of the course that her students commented on: its difference from other courses they had taken, the bonds of friendship that had arisen amongst classmates, the opportunity to be creative, and the exploration of the text among peers, including the professor. A'ness (2011) cites Lave and Wenger's (1991) concepts of situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation to elucidate the learning environment created around the joint endeavor of a target-language theatre production.

Situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation are certainly applicable to my participants' experiences in French 555 and Spanish 555, most notably in the dimension of target language mastery. The NNS undergraduate participants perceived themselves as less proficient in the L2 than their GS and NS classmates and, in some sense, behaved as apprentices in their use of the target language throughout the project. However, in other very important ways they were not peripheral participants at all; rather, they were central players in the endeavor, possessing as much or more expertise as their classmates and even the professor in some domains of the project: Cassie was by far the most experienced actor in the group and executed one of the lead roles, for example, and David was far and away the most knowledgeable participant with respect to theatrical lighting. From this standpoint, then, I have found Bakhtin's (1965/1968) notion of carnival to be a more appropriate theoretical lens for my analysis. I feel that it more adequately captures the establishment of a clear hierarchy of expertise during Phase I of the semester, which was then upended during Phase II to create a space of greater freedom for the group's interactions.

#### *Comparisons to Previous Experience*

Many of the comments participants made in the interviews contained inherent comparisons to their prior experiences. In part, this was because Interview I focused on participants' backgrounds and how they had come to the course. Naturally, many of their reflections about French 555 and Spanish 555 and the two plays compared those courses to their previous studies and/or previous productions in which

they had been involved. Some of their comments incorporated different kinds of comparisons, such as how some of their typical interaction patterns changed because of, during, or subsequent to their participation in the course.

The students who participated in French 555 and Spanish 555 had all studied their respective languages for a number of years in order to attain the basic competence that was a prerequisite for participation. They were majoring in the language of study (possibly as a second major alongside another field) and had taken at least a few literature courses in previous semesters. My participants were a mixed group in terms of prior theatre experience, however. A few of them had fairly extensive theatre or performance backgrounds, a few had no experience whatsoever in this realm, and others fell somewhere in between those extremes.

#### *Comparisons to Prior Theatre Experience*

Those new to theatre performance included Anne, who reported that she was really not interested in theatre at all but took the course because she just needed another French credit for the semester, and it was the only option available to her; Emily and Felicia also had comparatively little prior performing experience. Aside from having been in an obligatory elementary or middle school play, Felicia had worked backstage on lighting for a high school production.

In middle school, like, we were, almost required, I think, to participate, um, in the plays we put on ... I think we had, like, a fall play and a, a spring musical. And in high school we had the same thing ... but I only did that freshman year, and I did ... backstage stuff; so yeah, specifically I did lights, and that's why I thought I could do lights ... 'cause I have some experience, though the system is a lot different, from what I hear, so I'm not sure how much I can ... use from ... freshman year of high school. (F1)

Emily reported that she had long been an enthusiastic and frequent theatergoer, and she also had previously enjoyed reading and studying dramatic texts in some of her classes.

The rest of the participants had at least some recent performance experience from their high school and college years. Gail and Heidi had participated in several high school theatre productions, and Gail had taken a couple of acting courses in college as part of her film studies degree. Brad and David had been involved in theatre productions fairly regularly throughout college; Brad had done quite a bit of acting, while David had focused primarily on technical and production aspects and for a time had even planned to major in theatre. The Spanish 555 production was his first opportunity to act, however. David noted that acting in *La obra absurda* had increased his self-confidence:

That was the first time I acted, was in this Spanish play. So, that was a big step, because I had been doing a lot of backstage theatre work before then, for, I guess that's five or six years? And I considered acting before, but I never really had either the impetus or the balls to do it. And, so I did it and it seemed to turn out - turn out all right. Um, which - which is definitely a confidence booster. Meaning, I might actually try to do it again. I don't know if I'll have the opportunity, or enough desire to create an opportunity, but, if there is, now I have more - more confidence. (D3)

Of all the participants, Cassie probably had the greatest degree of theatrical experience. She grew up in what she described as a "really theatre-oriented family." (C1) She was about six years old when she participated in her first play, and had been involved in theatre regularly since then, both in and outside of academic contexts. She was a Spanish and theatre major for whom Spanish 555 aligned perfectly with her explicit goals and interests. She had been looking forward to the course because, as she noted,

I had actually seen ... the performance of the show that was done [the last time Spanish 555 had been offered] and I was, like, "this is really cool, I wanna do this, it'd be really fun," and I'd always, like, joked with, because everyone always asked me, "What are you gonna do with theatre and Spanish?," and I'm, like, "I don't know" ... So, I was, like, "This - I can do that!"

(C1)

Differences in degree notwithstanding, one thing that the participants held in common was that their previous experiences with theatre took place primarily in the native language. Although Brad, Cassie, and Emily had attended foreign-language performances as audience members, none had ever participated in a play in an L2. Brad and Cassie had seen previous years' productions of the French 555 and Spanish 555 plays, respectively. Cassie had also attended one Spanish-language production by a professional company in the US and Emily had attended performances during travels in Latin America with her parents, one of whom was a Spanish instructor. Cassie stated,

I remember when I was in high school we went to the [name of theater] in [city] ... with my Spanish class, and we saw a play in Spanish. And I remember just being, like, super lost the whole time. (laughter) Um, because I didn't really understand as much as I - I think I do now. ... I remember it being really weird ... and not understanding a lot of what was going on." (C3)

"Not understanding a lot of what was going on," it turns out, was a common experience for many of the Spanish 555 participants early in the process. They described linguistic difficulties with comprehending some of the texts that were read during Phase I, and, after *La obra absurda* was selected for performance, there was a period of adjustment as the course transitioned into Phase II. There emerged a process of intercultural and interpersonal negotiation as the group came together to undertake an endeavor in which some of the participants had little or no experience, and those who *were* experienced brought different and sometimes clashing expectations about things such as rehearsal processes, timetables, and the responsibilities that pertained to different roles within the group.

Perhaps surprisingly, the more experienced theatre practitioners in the group sometimes had greater difficulties than the less experienced participants. These difficulties seemed to be particularly related to adapting to a more fluid rehearsal process than these students were accustomed to. For the inexperienced actors, theatre was entirely new to them and they had few pre-existing expectations with which to compare the French 555 or Spanish 555 experience. In contrast, Cassie in particular, and, to a

lesser degree, David, had received training from the theatre department that was designed to prepare them to work in professional theatre.

Prof, at the helm of the French 555 play, had spent part of his professional life as a working actor and had received his own theatre training in the United States, and so he was familiar with the culture of US university theatre and replicated it more or less faithfully in his production. The conventions, hierarchies, tacit expectations, and taboos of that world did not necessarily translate to the Spanish 555 production, however, as Profe's theatre background was from her home country, and the theatre majors in the group found it to be different from what they expected. Cassie noted that

at first, I was kind of turned off by the whole thing, only because it seemed not, um, super-organized, like previous shows I've been in and stuff, and I know I wrote that ... on our, like, comments sheet for the course. Like, not having, you know, a set day where you need to be off-book, and not having a rehearsal schedule was a little - I, I thought it was a little strange. (C2)

Cassie articulated a number of frustrations that resulted from following a rehearsal process very different from what she was used to in other shows.

Something I wish would have happened more ... [was] work on specific scenes rather than constantly running through the whole play. Because I don't feel like that's very beneficial, 'cause nothing gets worked out, or, like, made better if you just keep glossing through it. Um, I mean, people remember their lines and remember where they need to be, while doing that, but, um, not much develops, you know? ... But also, like, the time constraints that we were under, like, it wasn't a normal ... rehearsal schedule for a show. (C2)

*La obra absurda* is an ensemble-oriented play with a handful of larger roles and many smaller supporting roles consisting of just a few lines. Roles can be combined and distributed flexibly to accommodate anywhere from an absolute minimum of seven actors up to a few dozen. In the Spanish 555 production, the director opted to assign a single large role to a few participants, and cast everyone else

with a combination of anywhere from two to five smaller roles. Nearly all of the large parts went to graduate students, but Cassie's extensive acting experience led to her being the only undergraduate cast in a leading role. This obviously required her to memorize more lines than the other students; it also meant that she spent quite a bit of time in rehearsal mainly surrounded by the graduate students who were playing the other leads. When she was asked what it was like for her to step up and assume that responsibility, she commented that

personally, I felt kind of comfortable doing it, only because I've done theatre before ... it was frustrating at times because there would be, like, scenes with Corona or something where he would, like, try to tell me what to do, and, um, that would be kind of annoying, but, I think that's just the personality we were working with. And, um, I mean it was really, really intimidating getting the language down, um, like other than the acting part of it, just ... saying everything correctly? Because I knew that it wasn't always the, the right thing that I was doing. (C2)

Although Cassie was sometimes frustrated as a result of making comparisons to her previous productions, she also had very insightful observations about opportunities to incorporate activities that would have helped with character development and polishing the production. It is unfortunate, actually, that her previous theatre training had taught her to keep quiet and refrain from offering ideas to other participants, because in the Spanish 555 rehearsal environment it almost certainly would have been welcomed, and her comments would have been valuable:

I kind of wish we would have done more, like, character-building things, so people would know who they were portraying ... more asking questions ... when I've been in plays before ... if you make a movement that is completely unnecessary, or just, like, comes out of nowhere, like ... Profe had mentioned to John that he had been walking, just randomly? Like, there's this exercise where you ask them, like, "Why are you doing that?" And they have to ... give you an answer, and justify their, like, movements, and if it's not something that they can do, they have to do

something else. ... So I feel like ... that would have been helpful ... but that's something you do more in, like, scene work ... thinking about intentions, just for everyone, really ... if you're ... an *indio*, and you're ... watching the *músico*, like, what are you supposed to be feeling, and, like what are you trying to portray? So, I think that would have been helpful to people who hadn't been in shows before. (C2)

Cassie had further useful insights based on another unique previous experience. The previous semester, she had acted in a kabuki-style production of Japanese folk tales mounted by the university's theatre department.

That - because it was ... a different culture and a totally different style of acting than I'm used to, was really, really difficult, and challenging, and interesting, and kind of weird. And people who came to it didn't know what was going on the whole time, and I think it was the same thing ... for this show. ... I enjoyed the Spanish play way more than I enjoyed the kabuki one. ... It's difficult, because the ... kabuki one was in English. But, it had all these different cultural, you know, undertones and things like that, that nobody understood ... people who came from ... my side of the family ... or my friends ... they would come, to be supportive, but afterwards they would be, like, "That was really weird. I don't know what was going on, even though it was ... in English, and, like, some of it was kind of funny, but, like, I still don't understand it." And then, like, on the flip side, the Spanish one ... had they spoken the language, I think it would have been a completely different experience. Like, it would have been funny, and they would have gotten it, and it would have been something that, you know, people would have enjoyed. But because no one I'm close with speaks any Spanish, they were just all like, "Yeah, I don't know. Other people were laughing. It seemed like it was good, but I'm not sure!" So, um, that way it was kind of different, and similar, 'cause it was just kind of like a weird cultural difference thing that people didn't understand. (C3)



Cassie's observation about the accessibility of the two plays vis-à-vis the language and cultural barriers is an important consideration for target-language theatre. A play in translation may still be opaque to audiences because they lack the necessary cultural schemata to interpret it. With target-language theatre, providing the audience with resources to understand the play in spite of the language barrier can be part of the educational experience. One of the differences between the productions of *L'oeuvre absurde* and *La obra absurda* was that the French production incorporated surtitles; one of the students was tasked with creating a PowerPoint presentation that would project a running translation of the lines during the performance. The audience for *La obra absurda* had a greater percentage of native or highly proficient Spanish speakers in the audience, but Cassie's observation is useful for anyone contemplating a production that may be somewhat culturally inaccessible to portions of the audience.

#### *Comparisons to Prior Language Learning Experience*

The participants of this study also made many comparisons between the target-language theatre courses and their previous academic L2 study during the interviews, reflecting on similarities and differences in their experiences in the courses and their approach to the language learning process as a result of their activity.

David spoke about how participation in Spanish 555 led to a degree of maturation in his work habits.

Beyond the academic level and all the differences that we've discussed, I've also sort of had a track record of becoming bored or, I don't know, sort of paralyzed in school or something. And I sort of have a long history of not turning in papers when I'm supposed to. And this was one of the first times when, having not turned in a paper, I actually went back to talk to the professor and make sure I could work it all out. When usually I just try to disappear more, like, create more of a wall of denial. So, personally, it was a huge turning point in addition to everything else, because I did go back and I tried to, well, not tried, I did make up everything ... it was a paper for Profe.

That I had to go talk to Profe about. Which, I have to say, she is a really nice person, but she - she's really scary! ... Yeah, I've been more able to just do the work, whether I'm turned off or not, which is a good skill. (D3)

Later in the same interview, he reflected a bit further in this vein:

I think it certainly helped me be more comfortable with professors in general. Because I was able to go back and give her this late paper, and she was - I mean, she wasn't one of the laid-back professors that, then I would still be scared if I ever ran into a *real* professor and had to do that. (D3)

In other words, the academic rigor Profe infused into Spanish 555 (and, in all probability, the presence of graduate students that David cited elsewhere as being such an important part of his experience) let him to a heightened level of responsibility in his approach to the academic requirements of the course.

Several participants commented on ways in which the experience related to their self-confidence, especially in the linguistic domain. One aspect of self-confidence that is particularly relevant to the target-language theatre experience is L2 confidence, which Rubinfeld *et al.* (2006) defined as a relative lack of anxiety about using the L2 coupled with a belief in one's ability to cope linguistically with the situation at hand, a state of affairs derived from relatively frequent and pleasant contacts with L2 speakers. Heidi made an illuminating comparison between her experiences in Spanish 555 and in other courses that she had taken. She stated that the aspect of Spanish 555 that stood out, in her mind, was

the fact that I actually needed to speak. I'd say one of the biggest faults of the overall program [at this university] is that you can get through the program without actually having to learn to have a conversation. Because I can write papers, I can be academically Spanish, but I'm extremely intimidated to speak to people and to, like, use my skills. So, the fact that, like, being in the theatre now, we're going to, like, have to have conversations, you have to know how to express

yourself to get your ideas across and to be giving dialogue on stage, it really has forced me to need to use my, like, actual speaking skills. (H1)

Felicia noted that

I mean, obviously the graduate students are pretty much fluent, and, um, I guess I haven't had so much practice in speaking Spanish. Um, my freshman year I worked, um, in a restaurant and all the cooks were Mexican, so, like, you have to speak in Spanish, and that's probably my peak Spanish-speaking level, just because, like, I was forced to speak it. ... In class you have to speak in Spanish, but like, you make a couple of comments, like in class, like everyone has to talk, so, um, I guess that was - the most difficult part was just like the intimidation of being in a class full of people who are a lot more comfortable speaking Spanish than I am. ... Last semester I took advanced conversation. So, that entire class is just talking, and, um, but that, that class was a lot less intimidating just because everyone was more at my level, you know, maybe had to pause and stop and think about what they were saying, and like, the words didn't just come naturally. Though some people were a lot better than others just because they'd studied abroad and had more experience and whatever. Um, so, I guess that's probably the biggest difference, and like, it's really funny, 'cause, like I said, I'm taking phonology right now, and everyone's an undergrad, and so everyone kind of, like, kind of struggles through speaking it, like is not as fluent, so that kind of makes me feel better, that like I'm not the only one that has to like think about this and, you know, it doesn't come, like, super naturally right now. Um, but, so yeah, definitely working in, in the restaurant and with all the cooks ... it was really good ... experience in, like, learning and practicing to speak, and I think the reason that was, like, especially ideal is because, when we would, like, talk, it would just be about ... normal everyday things. In ... our class now ... it's about literature ... in terms of literature, in terms of the play, like, it's not something that you talk to most people about, right? So, like, maybe in that sense it's not like the

most practical way to learn a language? ... in the restaurant ... you work shifts, and sometimes it's, like, really slow, so ... you just have to ... sit around and just, like, talk. Um, I feel like that's probably the best learning experience I've had when it comes to learning a language, just because it was ... everyday things, just stuff that I would ... talk with my friends about. (F1)

The participants unanimously reported that their participation in French 555 or Spanish 555 was a unique experience in their language-learning history. They described it as initially much more intimidating than their previous coursework, but ultimately highly engaging.

#### *New Understandings and Meaning-Making*

Essif (2011) notes that “[w]hen actors collaboratively seek fuller modes of performative communication, they expand their (uncertain) self-awareness and their introspection dialectically.” (p. 26) Through engaging with the text and interrogating it, participants in target-language theatre are brought face-to-face with their own gaps in knowledge of both the language itself and the tacit cultural assumptions that underpin the drama. The participants must find a way to interpret the text in a way that is both respectful of the target culture’s norms and accessible to the local culture, given that most of the audience members are likely to identify the local culture as their home culture, and they may have varying degrees of familiarity with the target culture. As Essif explains, “[f]oreign language performance projects are especially dialectical in the oppositions and negotiations between the local culture of the actors and the culture and history within the text.” (p. 26) Although these cultural gaps initially represent a challenge to language learners, they ultimately drive a profound shift in their understanding of the L2 text.

A number of participants commented on the difference in quality and depth of their understanding of *L'oeuvre absurde* and *La obra absurda* as compared to other texts they read in the target language. Texts read for class discussion, they noted, were generally read rapidly. There might be considerable gaps in comprehension (indeed, at times students may not even be aware of the existence, let alone the extent, of their own gaps). When prepared for performance, the texts of the two plays were exhaustively mined

and students were confident that they had achieved, if not 100% comprehension, at least a much more thorough appreciation of the meaning of the text and an awareness of the different levels of meaning it contained.

Fonio (2012) remarks on this mining of the text and grappling with lacunae in comprehension when he notes that

[a]ll thorough work on text-centred ... theatre, in particular in a foreign language, begins with a meticulous close reading of the script, because a deep understanding of the text is necessary in order to perform it with accuracy both on a literal and expressive level. (p. 21)

Murphy (2011) remarks that

with each play the students read, they are confronting not only a literary text but also an imagined performance. In order to comprehend better the dialogued story that unfolds before them on the page, they need to pay close attention to many other features. Set and costume descriptions as well as stage directions that may indicate the movements, gestures, and tone of voice of characters are just a few of the details that also give meaning to the developing action. With this type of careful reading, students can begin to “see” the play as it moves along; they can create a mental image of the playwright’s invention. (p. 164)

However, the comments from my participants’ interviews suggests that, at least for students who have not previously participated in theatrical productions and perhaps even for those who have some L1 theatre experience, they may not fully realize an “imagined performance” upon initially reading the text. Rather, the rehearsal process leads them to confront their own gaps in comprehension and their failure to absorb paratext, such as stage directions, leading to significant lacunae in their imagined performances which are later remedied through the enlightening process of staging the play.

There was overwhelming consensus among the participants that the process of working on the play led to profound changes in their understanding of the text. Predictably, they reported understanding it

to a much greater depth; some of the participants also reported that their initial readings had been confused or incorrect, and so working on the play helped them to correct some basic misconceptions in their grasp of the material. David offered the following remark:

[I]t's sort of interesting because I haven't read plays before in Spanish, well, I mean I guess I did once in high school. But in high school you can sort of like walk through everything, but, like, when you read a whole play it's interesting ... how easy it is to miss things that you wouldn't miss in, in English for me, just because, like, unlike literature (*sic*), like, it's not sort of, like, notated exactly how you're saying that, it's sort of like just implied. So ... you say, "Okay, I read this play and I sort of know Spanish, and I think I know, I understand this play," and then you go back, and then you discuss it, and you say, "Wow, okay, so I got the whole, so I got the *gist* of it, but, like, these little sections, some of them I got totally wrong." ... And then you think you have it and you start rehearsals, and then you're like, (laughing) "Okay! Now I *really* understand what I was supposed to understand when I read this!" (D1)

David's quote beautifully encapsulates the iterative process of revisiting the text as gaps in comprehension are discovered, they begin to be resolved, and comprehension is gradually refined through the rehearsal process. Gregory (2001) describes how practice relies on the twin components of criticism, which allows the students to perceive their own shortcomings, and imagination, which assists them in remedying those shortcomings by envisioning how to fill the gaps in the performance. David also commented that there were

so many things that I did not, that just went right over my head when I was reading it. Like, the whole fact that ... the two comics are sort of doing this sort of seduction, sort of dance, basically overlaid with their comic performance ... went right over my head. ... The fact - I mean, I got that Corona was ridiculous, but the fact that he was referencing every single thing in [the country's] pop culture, I totally missed. Um, I missed that I was even, that my character was even

in the play (laughter) ... the *músico* thing and the La Coreografía thing ... when I was reading the play, you even read it a couple of times and you just start to skip over those parts, because I mean, it's one thing trying to imagine ac- somebody acting this stuff; it's another thing to imagine, like the songs, or the dances, and all that stuff. (D2)

David also realized through rehearsal how much more his (largely silent) soldier character was present in many of the scenes:

I was the Spanish soldier, of course, which, when I read the play, was like three lines. I was like, "Okay, I've got three lines." And then, when I, when I went to do the play, I realized that I was in maybe half of the scenes. Um, which was funny - well, sort of shows how much, how much it's hard to really imagine what a play is like while you're reading it. (D2)

This growth in David's awareness of the on-stage presence of silent characters and of the lacunae inherent in dramatic texts demonstrates how the experience of participating in L2 theatre deepened his skills of literary comprehension and appreciation. He articulates a deeper understanding of the unfinished nature of dramatic texts and the challenges of fully exploring them.

Heidi reported a similar experience of moving from a very poor initial understanding of the text to a rich and deeply nuanced appreciation of it by the end of the course.

So, I, like, didn't even understand half the play when I first read it, and that's kind of, like, one of the perks of having it be in the theatre, is like you're visually seeing it, people are acting it out, like, giving you the prompts and the cues and emotion, which is why I could tell, like, my family, who none of them speak any Spanish, that they should still come, and they'll probably get something out of it. Because you really don't necessarily, like, the language isn't the one thing that you're focused on. So, theatre, like, in that aspect is so much better. But also like from taking it from script to theatre, I think, has really changed my outlook on it. When I read it, you could tell, like, "Oh, those are kind of supposed to be funny," but you see it and, like, it just adds that

humor, like, especially John's role. Like, when you read it you're like, "Okay, he's just saying nonsense," but, like, you see it and you ... experience it, it's so funny. (H2)

Additionally, David reported a new understanding of the "holistic" dimension of staging scenes and plays - that is, the importance of understanding and reacting to *every* character's lines, not merely one's own. Hand-in-hand with the realization that his soldier character appeared on stage in many scenes even though he did not speak was David's realization that he still had to *act* through those silent appearances: "I didn't realize how much there was to theatre in, like, having to react all the time." (D2) Being in these scenes forced him to pay close attention to the meaning of other people's lines and develop appropriate responses to them, which was a revelatory experience for David. It also led him to reflect on the infinite possible interpretations that could be given to any one text.

The sheer number of moments there are in plays? I think each one could be - you know, you could put a little twist on it and - it was nice to be able to read a play without having seen it before, and then see people put it on. And so, all of the things that people do with certain lines that you didn't even, you know, think about what you - to do anything with that line, like, the thought not even occurring to me. So I - I could certainly go back and look at, you know, moments, or lines in the play and try to think of each one specifically and see if I'm actually putting what needs to be put into it. ... Where am I doing too much, where am I not doing enough? Which, I guess, is sort of like the actor's version of the novelist constantly revising his novel at some point. (D3)

Gail also echoed these observations about the myriad ways of unpacking the meaning of the text through minute analysis of individual dramatic moments. In reflecting on her experience, she repeated the phrase "a lot of little discoveries" (G2) over and over whenever she talked about the rehearsal process and her journey through it.



Emily also reflected on the importance of reacting to other actors' lines and the impact that small behavioral nuances had on the presentation of a scene. She reported a very positive first-time acting experience.

I liked acting a lot too. I mean, I didn't have to do much of it, but I really felt that ... I progressed a lot in, like, my little roles that I had, because, like, the more we did it, the more I understood, like, not only what was going on that moment, like, just literally, when I read the play, like, of course I knew what was going on, but when you see the play done so many times, you realize, like, the emotion, like, and how that one, you know, me as *guardia*, throwing down, you know, the prisoner, like, I realized, like, that I have to be mean when I do it, and that I'm the Emperor's right hand man. So, like, I have to be mean instead of, just, you know, kind of, when we did the first run-throughs we would all kind of just stand there and, you know, it made me really be more conscious of my face, you know? Like, everything has to change, everything has to be in character - it's not just the way you say it and the way you move, but it's like, your expression has to be there too. So, I learned a lot about, kind of, how hard it is to be an actor. And how, like, in awe I am at those who can do it, and am (*sic*), you know, talented at it, to transform yourself like that. (E2)

Felicia had similar comments about how the process of staging the Spanish 555 play was a revelatory experience in how it deepened her understanding of the text.

It's so hard to, like, visualize, reading a play, because, like, a play is a, a visual thing. An- well, not just visual, it's ... a mood-setting thing? ... plays ... create an, an ambiance and, I mean, you create a world that, like, you're just viewing, and just reading it doesn't do it justice. And so, I - I had a lot of trouble with all the plays throughout the semester, um, visualizing it, and, like, that's a bit part of understanding it. And so I feel like if I, like, reread all of the plays ... it would be really helpful and, like, you know, just - seeing it, and not just reading it, you know? ... Yeah,

and just like - and, like, the costumes and, like, what they looked like, and, like, um, also seeing it on a stage, 'cause I think when I read, I think you kind of imagine it more as a movie, which I, it, is - is a much different feel than, like, seeing, um, a play be performed on stage? ... because, like, you're on stage in front of us live, you're, like, limited in what you can do, and so, um, I think seeing, like, like realizing that, and then understanding, like, the logistical problems that, like, that entails would be really helpful. (F2)

Felicia went on to give a couple of concrete examples of scenes from *La obra absurda* that she had not understood upon reading. Only in seeing them fleshed out on stage with actions and props had she really captured the meaning of the text:

[T]hey (the stage directions) explain what she's doing and, like, how she's doing it and, like, what she's in, but, like, I just didn't understand what that was talking about, I just couldn't see it. And so, that's just like the biggest trouble with understanding it is actually seeing it, because once you see it, you get what they're talking about, it just makes a lot more sense. (F2)

Anne offered an insightful comment on the way that production roles (in her case, costuming) impacted the participants' understanding of the play. She remarked that the search for costumes appropriate to the era of the play and the setting of individual scenes helped her develop her conceptualization of the characters in greater detail. The professor had asked her and the other costumers to think not only about what was happening in a given scene, but also, "Where were these characters coming from before this scene began? What were they doing? Where are they going after this, and what will they do? How would they be dressed for this day in their lives?" This obligated the costumers to flesh out their understandings of these characters beyond the (possibly very few) lines of text they were given. Emily also discussed how her work on costuming *La obra absurda* expanded her understanding of the play, because of the balance she and the other (GS) costumers sought between historical accuracy (achieved by consulting sources such as the Codexes, *Visión de los vencidos*, and even a children's book

about indigenous Latin American culture) and the aspect of comic artificiality inherent in the farcical nature of the text. She mentioned Marina's dress and the three different hats Corona wore in the play as examples of costume pieces where realistic elements were blended with comedic exaggerations.

Participants also commented frequently on how much their understanding of the text was deepened and enriched through seeing its transformation from words on a page to a fully-realized production. Cassie stated that she

thought that the final scene was much more, like, powerful ... on stage than it was - than I had read it on the paper ... I just didn't know, really, how to take - because it ... switches to quickly from, like, being this really, really funny, comedic show to being, like, oh, crap, this is, like, something really intense ... So I didn't, I didn't really understand that in the, um, reading it. But it was much more obvious when we put music to it, and, um, the lights, and, um, all that stuff. So that's one scene that I think worked really well. (C2)

Interestingly, this deepening of understanding extended beyond the texts chosen for performance to other, non-dramatic course readings. Cassie had an illuminating observation about how some of the theoretical readings from Phase I, texts which she had previously encountered (in English) in courses she had taken for her theatre major, revealed themselves to her in new and different ways in Spanish 555:

[T]he [readings from the] first half were things that I'd done in literature classes in the theatre department, but, you know, in a different language, and even some of the ... articles we read, I hadn't... thought about things that way in English before. (C2)

David also had a reaction to some of the theoretical readings, although in his case it was the realization that he disagreed with its interpretation, or perhaps that he *possibly* disagreed with what he thought might be its interpretation. David freely admitted in the interviews that he had not always completed the class readings, and that in lieu of preparing, he had a tendency to try to coast on his

abilities in Spanish class. In this instance, a piece of criticism from the Phase I syllabus had analyzed the use of “gibberish” lines for the character of Corona in *La obra absurda*. David reflected that

all of this stuff that Corona was saying was, I mean, I didn't know what any of it meant, uh, when I was reading it. Well, and then we read that criticism that, um, said it was all nonsense. Or, I don't think it's - I haven't read it yet. Well, I haven't reread it. But I thought it said it, it was all nonsense. And it seemed, it seemed like that. And then when you put it in front of the audience with all ... the people who are from [there] and, like, know what he's saying, they, you could tell that it all had a meaning. I mean, half of that stuff, they thought he was funny. (D2)

Whether or not David correctly understood the argument of the theorist he may or may not have read during Phase I, he had very clearly formulated *an* initial interpretation of Corona's lines as meaningless gibberish, evaluated it, and rejected it in order to reappraise the lines as deliberately-constructed *meaningful* gibberish in which apparent nonsense was carefully arranged for both communicative effectiveness and comic effect.

Emily spoke about how she was enlightened by watching the reactions of audience members during the performances. This brought her to new levels of cultural understanding of some of the scenes in the play and certain comedic elements that were very specific to the country where the play was set, as well as the emotional resonance it held for spectators.

Yeah, there was one woman who sat in the front row on Friday, and she came back on Saturday, and she brought, like, her entire family. Like, her kids were there, they were with a baby there, and they were all in the front row, and I remember 'cause I was sitting in *Teatro callejero*, well, I noticed them right away in the first scene when I was, um, in the *coro*, but then, *Teatro callejero*, like, I think also on Saturday there were more people's ... families and siblings who didn't speak Spanish, and I didn't, like, it was more quiet in some areas, but that front row ... family, like, all eight of them, laughing, the girls, like, twelve, thirteen years old, during *Teatro callejero*, kind of,

like, you know, “Should I be laughing at this? This is pretty bad,” but, you know, Mom is sitting there cracking up, like, she brought her kids to it. So that was really - I also really liked that, and I was kind of like, “Oh, I wish we could do this ... next weekend,” and, you know, we could get out to the community more, because people think this is hilarious, and they will understand it, and they will appreciate it. Like [name] was telling me that when we played the ‘*La llorona*’ song, that people were coming to tears, because, you know, just music, and the images that we had, like, yeah, I can totally understand that, because music can bring me to tears, too. And especially when you have that deep, like, cultural connection, like, that’s your people, you know? And so, yeah, it was really great. And it was really great to see the audience’s reactions. (E3)

Emily’s remarks about deepening her appreciation for the text through watching audience reactions is fascinating in light of recent neurological research into the phenomenon of mirror neurons. Blair (2008) and Kemp (2012) describe how mirror neurons function within the domain of theatre to allow actors to immediately grasp the mental states of others and to imitate them in order to convey emotion to an audience. In Emily’s case, her mirror neurons were responding to the mental state of audience members while they watched her classmates’ interpretation of *La obra absurda*, providing a means for her to grasp their understanding of a text that was more culturally accessible to them than it was to her.

Gail made an illuminating remark when she talked about the audiences’ reactions to the performances and how sometimes she was surprised by the crowd response. “A lot of the people laughed in inappropriate places. A couple people laughed in the scene. It’s like, dude. (chuckle) Do you understand what you’re watching?” (G2) Gail’s tongue-in-cheek comment reveals that *she* herself, in fact, understands very deeply the pathos of the scene as a result of working so hard to develop the performance. When asked how it affected her when someone in the audience laughed at an unexpected or inopportune moment, she replied,

[I]t's a little annoying. Um, it's now, like, super annoying. There are things that - I'm, I'm sure there are things that people would think are funny. Um, well, obviously, cartoons are funny when people get hurt. But, I don't know. I think a lot of the violence and whatnot could be considered funny, but there is sort of the historical context behind it. Like, they basically came in and massacred a bunch of the natives, and, um, so, yeah, I think, thinking about the context, it isn't funny, and ... it feels like it should be disrespectful, but I do understand that, like, oh, yeah, it - maybe that isn't quite as in, you know, in the back of their mind as maybe it is in my case, because, you know, I'm actually portraying these people. So, yeah. But, I don't know, it sort of is frustrating occasionally when the audience doesn't interpret it quite the way you think they would. (chuckle) ... When they laugh when they aren't supposed to, when they don't laugh when they're supposed to. It's sort of like, what's wrong with you people? (chuckle) (G2)

Here, Gail's perspective-taking reveals her fairly sophisticated awareness of the tension between the playwright's cartoonish, absurdist take on what is ultimately very serious subject matter. She is aware that the play, the performers, and the audience all walk a fine line between comedic distance from the characters and empathy for their suffering.

Gail's aforementioned rhetorical question relates to a comment from David about how he reached a deeper understanding of the text. *La obra absurda* is a campy, farcical retelling of the Spanish conquest in Latin America from the point of view of the native people. Although much of the text is lighthearted and even playful, it does contain a thread of seriousness. At the very end, there is an abrupt, almost disorienting shift in focus to the tragedy of the subjection and slaughter of millions of natives by a force of a few hundred Europeans. David remarked on his understanding of how the play's balance of melodrama and comic relief was conveyed to the audience: "Which I guess is what the whole play was trying to do, after all. My parents, at the end of it they're like, 'Oh, that was really funny for being that depressing!'" (D2)

David further reflected on how his experience learning about Latin American history through the production of *La obra absurda* shaped the way he subsequently approached colonial literature and the study of history.

The strongest impressions I have at this point are probably of our lead actors performing their roles. Like, watching John do Corona, or watching Pedro do ... the Emperor. And, I mean, now, I have, like, this visual image with all the connotations and all the information from the play, that I can assign to those characters in real history. So that's definitely stuck with me. ... I think it's really stuck with me how ridiculous (*sic*) they are portrayed in the, the play. Which helps you take a critical distance to anything you read then about colonial literature or colonial studies or anything to do with, I mean, history in general, if you want to take it that far. (D3)

Through exploring the text's absurdist twist on official Latin American history and the *Visión de los vencidos*, David gained a new critical perspective on canonical historical interpretation in general.

In addition to discussing how their understanding of these plays had changed over the course of working on the productions, participants were asked about whether and how they felt the experience might shape their understanding of plays and dramatic texts in the future. One of the questions used in the interview was, "Now that you have had this experience of working on a stage production of a play, do you think it will make a difference to the way you read plays in the future? Do you think that if you were to go back and reread one of the other plays from the first half of the semester, one that we didn't perform, it would change the way you read and understand it?" The participants felt that their approach to reading dramatic texts would indeed be forever changed as a result of having gone through the process of rehearsing and performing *La obra absurda*. Emily's first reaction was, "Well, I'd probably pay a lot more attention to the *acotaciones* [stage directions]. (laughter)" (E2) She went on to describe how the very sparse stage directions in the text of *La obra absurda* had initially made it difficult for her to visualize the play very clearly. She also made an insightful comparison to another play and playwright

she had studied (not from the Spanish 555 syllabus), René Marqués and *Los soles truncos* (1998/1958). Marqués is noted for his overabundance of exhaustively detailed stage directions, and Emily commented that

even with such detailed *acotaciones*, like, you create a vision, but it's your vision in your head. It's kind of like when you read a book, and they come out with the movie, you're kind of like, "Oh. That's not how it was in my head," you know? So it kind of makes me really appreciate going to see plays. (E2)

She also spoke about approaching the reading process differently in terms of decoding and activating (or seeking) background and contextual knowledge.

I think, in terms of the reading process ... not just like skipping a word and trying to figure out the context, like, sometimes when you're reading literature, you know, like a novel or something, and you have to read many, many pages, it's different because you can skip a word and still understand, but I think, especially in like a shorter play like this, every word is there for a reason. And I, I think I would definitely slow down my reading more, and also research the author. And I think that's very important, because it's, like, very personal, a lot of the, the *dramaturgos*, and I think, I would definitely want to know, like, where were they coming from. Like, were they in exile? Were- what were they doing, you know, when they wrote this play? What was the context of when it was first produced? ... I think, like, all that, uhm, background, it's so much more important than - I mean, I knew, always, that it was important, but, I like, be more intrigued now to read it because of the experience I had in this class, you know? Because, like, this play is fifty times better for me now that I understand it ... that I have, like, sections of it memorized in my brain, you know, like, not to that extent, but I would definitely, like, slow down, read the *acotaciones*, try to visualize it, instead of just reading it literally, like, try to picture it in my head. 'Cause even just like drawing, like, a picture of, like, the *escenario*, like Profe would do that



every time we read a new play. “What is in the first scene? Where are the chairs? Where are the people?” Even just, even just, like, thinking it, ‘cause I think it just helps to understand the space, you know, in the understanding. (E2)

Similar to what David described earlier, Emily also demonstrates here that she has deepened her understanding of how to approach target-language dramatic literature and how to interrogate the written text to create a more complete mental picture of the scenario.

Heidi also elaborated on this aspect of achieving greater understanding of dramatic texts as a result of having had the experience of working on the Spanish 555 play:

It was really hard, originally. I was so focused on just trying to get, like, the words. Because of, like, being in another language and doing that, that I was really focused and I just wanted to know the plot and everything. Now I think I would be able to go back and really see, “Okay, these are the words that she’s saying, but this is what they really mean,” and seeing it in my mind and being able to envision more. ‘Cause that was something I really had a hard time with, writing in the papers, was connecting this visual aspect with the words on the paper. But now after at least taking one script and taking it from there to the endpoint of like having, having lights, having sound, having, like, positions on ... stage, I think it would be so much easier to put that together. (H2)

Felicia saw a connection between the Spanish 555 course and the goal of fostering independent thought. She noted that, to a much greater degree than in other literature courses, in Spanish 555 it was incumbent upon the students themselves to derive meaning from the text and find their own ways of expressing it - embodying it - on stage.

I feel like, in general, with just, in any type of analytical thinking, this is very helpful, just because, um, with literature, like, you’re given, you know, a set amount of information, and you have to - you can derive just so many different meanings and ideas and themes from it, and -

which can be a really daunting task, especially when it's in a foreign language. Um, but I feel like, because this class was - like, the - this class was obviously a very advanced-level class. And, um, a lot of it was taken- I felt like a lot of it was taken upon us to, like, get as much understanding out of it and not just rely on the class itself, and rely on our class discussions, or just rely on, um, Profe or whoever to tell us what to think, and, you know, "this is what the play means, and that's that." So, um, I feel like in that sense, um, this class was really helpful in, I guess, facilitating the, I don't know, the, um, what's the word I'm looking for? The skills necessary to, like, derive meaning from something like that and think critically about, I don't know, anything, really. 'Cause I guess, like, that skill can, like, be applied to anything. (F3)

Through these remarks, the participants demonstrated that the experience of working with the dramatic texts and putting them into performance challenged them to approach reading in a new way. They learned to interrogate texts more carefully and to explore for themselves the possibilities inherent in the skeletal nature of dramatic texts.

### *Problems and Problem-Solving*

Wittgenstein (1980) noted that "[t]here are remarks that sow and remarks that reap." (p. 78) One of the ways that new understandings were reached and new meanings were made was through the process of encountering problems, exploring them, and finding ways to solve them. Although at first blush "encountering problems" may sound like something negative, the seeking of problems and the exploration of possible solutions is an important, intrinsic part of staging any play. The emergence of problems, and the group working together to solve them as they arise, is the very heart of the experience of staging a play, and one of the primary means through which learning occurs in the theatrical setting. In other words, finding a "problem" in staging a play is identifiably a "sowing" moment when learning activity is initiated, and when a satisfactory solution is encountered the participants reap the benefit in terms of advancing their work on the production.

Problem-solving is what must be done in order to put flesh on the bones of the text. All the participants need to read the text and stage directions carefully to understand the explicit requirements for staging the play (i.e. “Character X enters stage right, carrying a book”). They also need to uncover the implicit requirements that arise as a result: the actor playing Character X needs to be in the right place at the appropriate time, in the right costume and with the right props. He or she may need to travel to the other side of the stage, if the character last exited stage left. At times the director may choose to make departures from the written text, but generally the focus is on working to find ways of achieving what the script calls for. This practical, hands-on work on the production reins in two potential tendencies of students as they read the text during the first half of the semester: inability to envision it at all, or envisioning a cinematic, unlimited elaboration. Putting the text into performance forces the participants to read the text closely to fill in their gaps in understanding, which may have been considerable on first reading. They then have to work with real, material limitations (such as the size of the stage, the project’s budget constraints, and the actual physiques and capabilities of the flesh-and-blood actors who are going to incarnate the roles) and realize a theatrical interpretation of the text within those parameters, rather than the idealized characters and settings they may have initially imagined. They also have to engage in multiple interactions with the text, as Redmann (2005) advocated, to identify and verify their understanding of the problem and to assess possible solutions. Blair (2008) described the process of analyzing theatre texts for performance as “typically one of initial careful reading – even excavation – of the text ... and then constant ‘re-reading’ through embodiment and enactment, repetition, refinement, and filling in the life lived in the performance.” (p. 85)

Emily spoke about this aspect of meaning-making at some length:

Like, when we first, like, had that text assigned, you know, I, like, did not understand pretty big parts of it. Like, I understood the words, it wasn’t the probl- it was, like, how, since it jumps around so much, and there’s so many different things going on, I didn’t really underst- I

understood, you know, the main theme, 'cause, you know, we talked about it, but we never really talked about how each little scene, you know, contributes to that theme, and what it says about that theme. So, that was really interesting to me, like, like, there was something, and it was on, like, the very last day, and I didn't even realize little things that are in- you know, like funny things. Like, um, like Katherine, with the little casita de cartón, like, "*esta es mi casa. Es chiquita, pero es mi casa.*" Like, that's hilarious! Like, that's so funny to me, and just with, like, I didn't- you know, when I read it, I thought of a woman standing in front of a house, like, a little house, you know, like, "*casita de cartón,*" I didn't even think about it as, like, really little, like, you know, like a little shack or something, and her standing in front of it. Not it being, like, funny, necessarily. And then, when I saw it, it became funny. Like, like I didn't even know that, um, like that they threw rocks at the Emperor, and maybe threw him in the river – I didn't even know that that happened until, like, we did that scene. I didn't even remember, or I didn't understand that part, or – there were lots of things, like in "*Bautismo,*" for example, like, you read it, and it's like you chuckle a little bit, and it's funny. But when they did it with the Barbies, and Cassie with her intonation, (*laughing* – "*Yes!*") hilarious. Like, and I understood it much better, you know? Not onl- like, I understood its irony, you know, and it's much, much better when I- when we performed it, you know. And the whole, like, the play didn't seem to flow when I read it, you know? It was almost as if it could have been performed in a different order. And it probably could, but, like, the way it is, it's like it has a reason, like it shows these different aspects of life, and how it led up to overthrowing the natives. And so – oh, my gosh, I understand it so much better! That discussion, I can remember now, like, I did not know who half the characters were. I did not understand it nearly as well, until after – not even, like, the first rehearsals, like, I was still confused, but then after, I was, I still, like, sometimes ... But my understanding of, like, [the playwright's] vision, and ... writing, like, improved way more. You

know, even, I feel like, even if I would have just read it, like, five times, and really, really read it, I would understand, but it wouldn't be the same. (*Oh, no, not at all.*) It would never – it's not possible, because – and that play, it's so visual. (*Yes.*) It's so visual, and you just can't understand unless you see it "*puesta en escena,*" you know? And so, I'm so grateful that I was able to have this opportunity just to understand [the author's] words, and understand the play, you know, and I think everybody everyone should have to – I think it should be assigned in high school Spanish class (*laughter*) and everyone should have to read it. (E2)

One of the problems that David encountered and successfully solved, that led him to greater understanding of the text and of acting in general, was the challenge of figuring out what to do with himself in one of his roles, that of a Spanish soldier, in which he spoke very few lines but spent a lot of time on stage having to silently act through scenes with Corona, Marina, and the Emperor. Naturally, the actors with speaking roles claimed the lion's share of the director's attention during the rehearsal of those scenes, especially early in the process. David realized that he needed to develop his own reactions and ways of remaining engaged with the action, so he explored using props to help himself develop stage business for his characters.

When you're saying the line ... whether it's just, like, the director and the audience, or a real audience, and you can sort of figure out if you're doing it right or not, or, you know, get like a really good idea of what's going on. But ... when you're a secondary character, and you're just listening to somebody else on stage, it's really hard to tell if you're doing it well or not. Because it's ... I don't act, normally, so I haven't practiced in a mirror or anything, I don't know what I look like when I'm trying to do these things ... And then hopefully you're just supposed to add to what they're doing, so yeah, it's hard to tell if you got it right or not. And it turns out that's what I spent most of my time doing. I guess which is why I tried to throw as many props as I could at it. (laugh) ... like having the sword, or having the apple - the apple helped a lot, because there's,

like, that entire monologue ... where she's talking about Adam and Eve and all that stuff. And ... I usually felt good, like, the first half of that, but by the second half I felt like I was just sort of, like, recycling the same string of looks ... eating the apple at that time, like, sort of made that scene easier. ... (*Is that why there were so many apples around all the time?*) (laughter) That's why there were apples everywhere! (D2)

David explained that he had initially wanted to use the apples for a different scene involving another actor, but she hadn't agreed with his idea. However, he had already bought a bag of apples and brought them to rehearsal, so he began to think about other ways that he might make use of them as a resource for stage business. In a spirit of playful exploration, he discovered that there were, indeed, several places in the text where stage business with an apple could actually work very well for his characters:

So, well, so I sort of went through each of my scenes, and I was thinking, well, at what point could I be - and like, I'm always in the background, maybe I could be eating an apple. ... then I realized that they were talking about eating ... the apple of the tree of, the tree of knowledge of good and evil ... where I'm getting baptized! (laughter) So I decided, well, I'll just eat an apple there! (laughter) So I timed it so it's just, just as she's saying "Adán mordió la manzana," and so then I bit into the apple ... And I sort of did it as a joke during dress rehearsal, and I figured they would yell at me and then I would either decide to or not do it in the actual performance.

(laughter) But apparently it was okay. (D2)

David's decision to experiment with using the apple as a prop at a fairly late stage in the rehearsal process was somewhat risky, but ultimately quite fruitful for the scene, and illustrative of a theatre truism that many of the biggest strides in understanding and interpreting the text are made late in the process, during the last few days of rehearsal leading up to the performance. This is when the many different areas of independent preparation begin to coalesce and to reinforce one another, leading to syntheses of new

insights, connections, and realizations. It is also, admittedly, the point in the process when stress levels peak, and, particularly with student actors, there is often temptation to pull pranks that may not be universally appreciated. Consequently, not all directors are equally comfortable with late-stage experimentation, as David himself acknowledged. He recounted an anecdote about a tradition of pranks in his high school theatre club, one of which had gotten him into trouble.

So, that's what I assumed would happen with this ... I would eat an apple, and then I was being nice ... starting on dress rehearsal, because then I could have my fun and then when the real audience got there I could do it right. Apparently it was actually a good idea! (laughter) ... [Profe] thought it was great. (D2)

David's further comments reveal that, although it began somewhat prankishly, the bit with the apple led him to some remarkably profound insights about one of his other roles, that of a young indigenous convert to Christianity who chooses to get baptized in defiance of his mother's wishes.

It sort of gets boring to just do those reactions, but it makes it more personal ... for Itzcuintlipotzotli to, to then be ... embarrassed ... he just kicked Ken out of, uh, out of the Garden of Eden. And so now I - I'm, like, guilty, or like trying to hide ... I mean, I always sort of knew that ... the character was, like, an adolescent, because he's, like, rebelling against his mother, and he's sort of an idiot. (laughter) Well, you know, he converts so easily, and he's sort of self-righteous. So, it was nice to be able to then ... have done something wrong, as this sort of teenaged character. (D2)

David described another incident, one that happened earlier in the rehearsal process but which played out in a similar way, in the sense that, without explicit direction from the professor, he improvised a solution to a problem that arose naturally and, as it turned out, serendipitously. David's fortuitous solution became a permanent addition to the scene:

That wasn't scripted ... everybody by, by luck, when we first did the scene with props and everything, everybody had taken all of the gold, and there was just that one [feather] boa sitting there. And as I was sitting ... standing just offstage, and as Pedro was walking off, I, well, he does this really sort of overdramatic, like, sort of sad face, and like mopes off, and I was like, "God, this is taking forever!" (*laughter*) ... I wanted to, something to - I had the impulse to go grab that last thing. So then I did. Right, and exactly the same thing happened: "Oh, that's great!" So then I had to do it. I had to run and do that every single time. (D2)

The approach David describes, of playful experimentation that frequently leads to the incorporation of extra creative touches in the performance, is one of the wonderful aspects of theatre that makes it such a rich learning environment as well as a space where participants can relate to one another with greater freedom. This stage typically emerges at the point when actors have memorized their lines, or nearly so, and no longer depend on carrying the printed text in their hands during rehearsals. Depending on the director, this experimentation may be encouraged to a greater or a lesser degree. As the performance nears, many directors prefer to have their actors' routines more or less solidified, but, as David notes, often new insights and discoveries are made right up to the final dress rehearsals. Shier (2002) notes that "[i]nnovations that grow out of the rehearsal process often find their way into final performances, a reminder that this is process over product." (p. 188)

The more informal and process-oriented (as opposed to product-oriented) the production, the more latitude performers often have to engage in late-stage experimentation, which carries both rewards and risks. It does often lead to fruitful and creative additions, but one actor's inspired bit of improvisation might enrich his/her own performance at the same time that it destabilizes that of another actor. For instance, while David obviously derived a great deal from his explorations, a performer like Cassie who is accustomed to a more formal rehearsal process might well find his actions frustrating and unprofessional. Because the process of exploring the text often unfolds a little more slowly in target-language theatre



productions than it would in an L1 performance, directors of such productions need to be extra mindful of balancing these two dimensions of the experience: to allow extra latitude for exploration and tolerate a certain amount of fluidity in the later rehearsals while still maintaining the discipline necessary for the acting craft.

“Solving problems” also took the form of satisfying the material production demands of the text, i.e. finding costume pieces and props that presented challenges to the participants responsible for those areas. Gail reflected on how this shaped Phase II of the project, making it sharply different from Phase I:

[W]e tried to focus, like, on sort of, you know, understanding the play, but also thinking about how it’s, would be, um, you know, shown. How it, you know, would actually work out in the theatrical setting. But, the – it’s very theoretical, I guess, and sort of, um, once you get to the second act of the class, second *part* of the class, well, it’s, it changes, I mean, you know, imagine how it would be in your head, but once you actually have actors, and you know who’s who, and you know what kind of costume you can make, and, well, sort of what you can and can’t do, it, it’s interesting that, like, yeah, you can imagine something, but it doesn’t always work out. Or maybe it works out better in some ways? (G2)

Heidi related an anecdote about how problem-solving had led to creative innovation on her part, and, as a result, greater investment in the play. She described how she and Susan, a graduate student who was primarily in charge of props and costumes, had talked about needing something to do with their hands during a shared scene in which they played young girls. Heidi had come up with the idea of making “corn dollies” out of ears of dried corn, which worked beautifully for the scene in question. She cited the corn dollies as an example of collaborative problem solving and creativity, one of the aspects she loved about participating in Spanish 555.

When those problems were successfully solved, when the needed element was found or created, it enriched the play as a whole and the entire cast’s understanding of the text, but such elements were often

particularly resonant for the participants who had a hand in acquiring or producing them. Emily spoke at length about this aspect of her work on costuming:

Like Marina's dress, like, there was, like, a pattern on the bottom. And Susan just, like, sewed that on, and ... we took it off to, like, preserve the dress, you know, which was really old, and ... Corona's shirt was my great-grandma's ... from Yugoslavia! So, like, something that you would never - have nothing to do with the Spanish conquest, you know, it worked, it looked exactly like it should have. And that, like, lion it had on it, it was perfect. So, um, we got lucky with a lot of stuff. You know those headbands that the *indios* wore, those are my headbands that I, you know, bought in Mexico and Ecuador and Peru, you know, in some *feria*. You know, those are all mine, but they worked. So, it was really, it was really awesome, like, to see the finished product for us, 'cause we were kind of, like, in Susan's little living room, for weeks and weeks and weeks, with all this material and glue and paint around us, and we're like, "When is this ever going to look like something somebody could wear?" And then, finally, it started coming together. And like, when we brought it to the actors, like, when I brought her the - when I brought Cassie her dress that I'd been slaving away on, you know, I had to cut each little piece, and, like, glue all the pieces on, and wait for one layer to dry, then glue another layer on, I don't know if you remember, you know, and like, cut the dress out the way it was supposed to be, I was so - even though she was, like, only on stage for a few minutes total with that dress, it made me feel so good that I could look at her and say, "She looks *awesome!* And I did that!" ... That made me feel so good, you know, that I could help her look awesome in her role that she played awesomely, you know, I don't know. I really liked that part too. Even though you're not, like, recognized, like John was, or Pedro was, 'cause they're, like, awesome, and they had a huge role in the play, you know, you still feel like, well, "he looked awesome because we, you know, we made his costume," and so I felt like ... I accomplished something and I felt, like, really good

about myself that we were, and like, Susan and Natalie did so much work. They really planned everything out so well. And it was overwhelming for us, but we did it ... And the props really help, too. And the lights, you know - and we only got the lights, you know, a day or two before. But even that, like, it just, it really helps you get into character. Like, it's dark everywhere else, and the light is on you, and it makes you feel more powerful to ... be that character. It was awesome ... I mean, when Pedro said that last line, I, like, was, like, choked up. Even though I'd heard that line so many times - the first time we did it, when the spotlight was just on him, and he was, like, shaking, and he had his costume on, I, like, felt it, you know? Inside me, I was sad, I was sad, you know, and that's amazing, that theatre can do that. Something I saw so many times, something I read so many times, when all the components are put together, how amazing it can be, how powerful it can be. (E2)

Regarding the problem-solving and decision-making involved in staging a play, Emily expanded upon her aforementioned comments about the relative paucity or abundance of stage directions and how to use them (or not) in making choices about how to interpret and present the text. She demonstrated an understanding that nothing in a play, in its text or its performance, is there arbitrarily, and few things are there accidentally. Even when guidelines are few and most of the information has to be extrapolated, or choices made based on availability of resources,

it gives you more freedom as a director, to, you know, and, as actors, to choose how you want to represent it. I think all the decisions we made, you know, they had reasons, and we, we had research that we, you know, used, and so I think, you know, either way, if you have a lot or if you have a little, you kind of have to slow down and think of the author's point of view, more, and your own creative mind point of view, too. (E2)

Felicia reflected on her production role as sound designer, which required her to find music to be played at the beginning and end of the show and during scene changes. She needed to search for music

that would help to establish the mood of the play, and she reflected on the process of searching for and evaluating appropriate pieces. In the following extract, she talks about a song (Billie Holliday's "Strange Fruit") that she and the director considered. They ultimately opted not to use it for the production, but Felicia was made aware of new resonances between the play and other aspects of history because of evaluating the song:

I think it's really interesting that we try to incorporate, um, not just like, like tribal [indigenous] music, but like, we thought we were going to use, like, the Billie Holliday song, and then, um, and, you know, try to, like, make it, make the play more current, and just, like, try to, like, show, like, the overarching themes, and, like, how, like, um, the themes and ideas of the play, like, are relevant now ... one day Profe and David and I were talking about, um, music and lights and all that fun stuff, and, uh, Profe brought that up, and we listened to it, and we were just kind of, like, "that's kind of strange, it doesn't really fit with the play," but we listened to it and we were, like, "Oh, this is so, like, this is just so applicable, and just so interesting," and I feel like it'd be interesting to use, just because, when the audience is listening to it, because, like, it's, it's kind of like our intermission, like, that short break that we have. And people would probably be very puzzled, like that's, "I'm not sure why we're listening to this," but once they listen to the lyrics, maybe if they don't get it right away at that part in the play, but by the end, they should understand, like, oh, like, these themes of, like, conquering and, um, overtaking others and kind of, like, implementing their own will upon others and abusing others is totally relevant now. Even though this play, like, takes place in, like, the 1500's or so. (F2)

Through the process of problem-finding and problem-solving, participants were first led to confront their own gaps in understanding the target-language text, and to identify "empty spaces" in the text that needed to be filled in to create a coherent performance. Subsequently, they were spurred to exercise their creative faculties in finding original solutions to address the empty spaces and fill them in

ways that were both practical and artistically satisfying. This brought about a deepening of understanding as well as of personal investment in the production.

### *Interdependence*

One of the overarching themes of the participant interviews was the interdependence and interconnectedness of the French 555 and Spanish 555 projects. Participants reflected on how peer relationships, especially during Phase II, became highly interdependent; they spoke of the way the experience integrated various aspects of the FL curriculum that they had previously studied more or less in isolation; and they talked about connections they perceived between the subject matter of the play and other courses, in other departments and domains.

### *Interdependence of All Participants*

Educational contexts for second and foreign language learning vary widely, but certain commonalities inherent to institutionalized learning underlie the surface variations in L2 classrooms. (Seedhouse 2004) The social roles of “instructor” and “student” are relatively fixed across most learning contexts. Kohonen (1992) cites Glasser (1986), noting that most language learning occurs within a classroom format in which work is largely independent and isolated, even competitive: “Students learn as individuals, and the cooperation between them is limited by competition for grades.” (p. 30) Recent work in education has begun to advocate more strongly for more collaborative learning contexts (for example, Martin & Dowson, 2009). Although in recent decades much progress has been made in promoting more communicative and collaborative classrooms, dominant cultural models of individualistic and teacher-centered classrooms still exert much sway and shape many students’ language learning experiences.

However, target language theatre productions disrupt the dominant model because, as Murphy (2011) notes,

students have creative control and authority. Their ideas and opinions are crucial to its success ... this is a project in engaged learning and the institutionalized role of the instructor as a source of

all information is radically changed. The students have much more authority and responsibility ... not only are they preparing to be actors on the stage, they are also commenting on the progress of others, discussing set design and lighting, and making group decisions on wardrobe. They contribute artistically, intellectually, and physically to the production and at all times must take into consideration the deeper meaning of the action and how to convey it. (p. 168)

This contributes to the development of an *esprit de corps* and a sense of solidarity among group members.

In Lutzker (2007), one of his participants noted that

[t]hrough the intensive working together during the rehearsals and the need to rely on each other during both the preparation and during the performances, the sense of solidarity in the class grew stronger – at least during this time. I believe there were never as few outsiders in the class as during the time of the class play. (p. 323)

The participants in the present investigation remarked on how, especially during Phase II, the classroom dynamic shifted toward much more collaborative activity in which everybody's contribution was valued, and, furthermore, everyone *knew* that their participation was valued by the others. Felicia described it by noting that the locus of control no longer rested exclusively with the professor.

I've actually really enjoyed it. ... I think what I've enjoyed the most is the collaboration. Um, I think it's really interesting that, like, every person has some sort of idea to contribute, and it isn't just, like, Profe's play. Like, it isn't just, like, her vision and her ideas and that's what we're gonna do. Um, and so I think that's really interesting, and I really like that. Everyone is really open to, like hear new ideas, and everyone's like, I guess, feels pretty comfortable with, like, sharing their ideas and, you know, stuff like that. (F2)

Felicia's remark alludes to the inherent contrast between the Spanish 555 course, in which every participant contributed to the overall vision of the production, and more typical classroom courses in

which the vision for the course and the choices of what to study originate almost exclusively with the instructor.

David articulated how he came to realize that every member of the ensemble, even those who barely spoke in their roles, was essential to the success of their scenes and the performance as a whole.

It's supposed to be done with ... seven actors. And doing it with seventeen actors, I mean, at first it's like, okay, yeah, we're going to have a lot of actors. Then you get to the space and you realize ... the logistical nightmare it is to have seventeen actors. ... I had two, three roles, you know, and I was one of the minor actors! (laughter) ... even, like, the ... was it Susan's one line, like, "*pa' todos tengo*"? Like, even that had to be right or the scene didn't work ... or, it was ... so nice because Emily couldn't make it to a lot of the, uh, the rehearsals, so when she was actually there to say, "*¿y les hacen un bailable?*" it was nice. ... You know, if you think ... it's that same thing, where you look on the page and you say, "Oh, I have one line," ... and then you watch the play, and it's, like, really important. Which sounds corny, because everybody says, "Oh, it's all important." (D2)

David seemed to be thinking of the (perhaps somewhat clichéd) theatre aphorism, "there are no small parts, only small actors," but he was expressing his heightened understanding of the truth behind the proverb, that even performers with few or no lines need to be fully invested in their roles and execute their parts well in order for a scene to succeed. He had seen this borne out multiple times in rehearsals and the performances.

Felicia echoed a similar sentiment:

This is such a huge team effort, and everyone has to do their part, and, you know, if you don't really come through, you're kind of letting down everyone else. And so, um, I feel like this – I think it's a good, like, learning experience for everyone, that, like, team-playing is very important, and, um, you know, even if you may have, like, a little part, like even if you have, like,

one line in a play, and you can't remember it that messes up everyone else, right? ... So, like, no matter how little your contribution may be, it is, like, adding to, like, a greater whole. So, um, yeah, like, you know, you have to do your part, you have to, like, take the responsibility to, like, come through on your, on your end, you know. 'Cause otherwise you're just messing up for everyone else. (F3)

Whereas David's remark focused on how the successful execution of even a small part made an appreciable contribution to the overall endeavor, Felicia's observation captures the other side of the coin, the difficulty experienced by the entire ensemble when even a small contribution is missing or goes awry. Emily likewise reflected on the group's interdependence:

I felt like an outsider at first, but, no, it was great, because I think we all, like, went through the process together, you know, and even though we all had different jobs, it was like we all needed each other. And that's what I learned is real - like, what the actors and producer and, you know, director and everyone, you know, they're a team. You need every single part. So that's, you know, I learned that. You know, you always think of the actors, but - sewing their little loincloths? I learned that - (laughter) how important [the] costume designer is! (E3)

As Emily noted elsewhere in the interview, although sewing the loincloths was in itself a small undertaking, it was nonetheless absolutely crucial to those actors, and their success in their role depended on Emily's contribution. Likewise, her efforts in making the costumes became worthwhile only when they were worn on stage.

Felicia reflected on the complexity of the overall endeavor and the value of undertaking such an elaborate project, one that requires the sustained investment of effort from an entire group of people and draws on multiple reserves of widely divergent skills, abilities, and talents.

Now that I've taken it, just, like, knowing, like, all the components that go into it, and all the hard work that goes into - like, a performance lasts, like, an hour and a half. Like, it's such a, like - so



much work goes into something that doesn't last very long. Maybe some people think that's kind of, like, futile, like, why do it then? But, like, it's just - it's just such a fun thing to do, I feel like, and it's ... fun because it's creative. Like, it's something that doesn't need to, like, necessarily, like, be studied, doesn't - it's not something that's, like, a burden, you know, like, I feel like some classes can be just, like, a burden to go to and I feel like this class is fun, like, I really like coming to it. Especially since we started doing the play. I think the first part was, you know, obviously more traditional: you read something, you discuss it. Um, but yeah, so this part of the class, I think, is just, like, a really, just a great way to learn about theatre. And, um, I think it's a really good way to understand that, like, you need to collaborate with people, and, to like, you know, get, like, a goal done. Um, but at the same time, like, it'll improve your understanding of the work itself. 'Cause I know, like, I would never have gotten this much, like, meaning out of it, out of - like, from just, like, reading it in the class. Um, so yeah, just, like, for understanding, like, the, like, the work itself, I think this is, like, a fantastic way to do so. (F2)

Felicia's comment recognizes that target-language theatre productions require a significant investment of resources and culminate in a relatively brief performance; she also reflects on the less tangible but enduring rewards of participation in the project, and the centrality of collaboration.

Heidi commented on how feedback from peers served as motivation as well as a source of support. She also talked about how the interaction of the various participants made for a dynamic experience in which she was able to observe how individual progress impacted the overall project.

It's also been really cool to see that, like, every day is different. Like, every performance is different. And, it's always getting better - like, people have their off days, I've had, definitely, an off week, like, last week, but with that, like, you can always change, like, how you're portraying things, and, like, seeing people put, like, feeling into it. And it was really cool, like, the first time, like, anybody said I, like, was doing a good job. Like with my like *desorejado*, like, doing that

whole, like, scene out ... having somebody be like, “Hey, you do a really good job with, like, picturing things and of describing it.” I was, like, “Oh, my God.” ... That’s such, like, it’s such a good feeling, and such, like - it makes you want to do better. Like, hearing someone say something positive, like, just makes you want to try that much harder. And, like, keep giving that much more effort, which has been a really cool, cool experience. (H2)

Heidi also spoke about how social aspects of the work on the play stood out to her as an extremely important part of the experience:

[T]he relationships we form every day, has really, like, been my favorite aspect of it. And just, like, being with the people and getting to do something with it. It’s been really cool, like, every day you see something that someone else has been doing, and just knowing that everyone’s, like, thinking about it and, like, wanting this to, like, work out, I think is cool, just, like, being with a group with a common goal. That’s kind of just my favorite. (H2)

### *Curriculum Integration*

Lauer (2008) spoke about target-language theatre’s potential to foster the assimilation of target-culture knowledge and to facilitate the transfer of knowledge between familiar contexts and novel situations. This potential can apply both to the L2 itself and to content knowledge.

In addition to perceiving a heightened sense of interconnectedness with their classmates, many participants also reported that over the course of the project they became aware of connections between the French 555 or Spanish 555 play and something they had encountered at another juncture in the language curriculum, or something they had encountered in another area of their studies. Some of these connections were cultural, others were thematic, political, historical, and some were linguistic or pragmatic. Participants mentioned many connections to the literature and linguistics of their chosen languages; they also mentioned a few perceptive and insightful connections to other domains and disciplines.

David articulated a somewhat surprising link between the content of a scene in *La obra absurda*, a linguistic and a cultural realization that it brought about for him, and a vignette he was reminded of from one of his other Spanish classes:

I guess one of the big parts was the, uh, the “*Cómicos*” scene, when he was talking about, what was it, *huevo y apoyo*? ... I love puns, especially in other languages. Um, it’s like one of those - it’s like puns and racism, you forget they exist in other languages? (laughter) ... it’s sort of off-topic, I guess, but ... when I took ... the Intro to Culture class in Spanish, and my TA was from northern Spain, and he was talking about racism betw- uh, against ... anybody from, sort of, Moroccan, African descent, which, they’re, I mean, it’s, like, right there, so there are a lot of them in Spain. Um, and I’m, like, “Wow! I suppose, yeah, that makes sense that everybody would be racist everywhere, you know, to a certain degree.” Um, but it’s, it’s weird that it had never occurred to me that it would happen in other places. (D2)

David first learned to appreciate a pun that had initially been opaque to him; from that, he made a tangential connection to an otherwise unrelated encounter, but the epiphany that speakers of other languages also appreciate puns and wordplay reminded him of a similar epiphany about how other cultures also experience racism. That connection caused David’s worldview to become a little broader and more sophisticated as a result of his participation in the Spanish 555 production.

David also came to appreciate the relationship between language variety and social identity through his work on *La obra absurda*. Shohamy (2005) critiqued the monolithic portrayal of the target language as the prestige variety of educated native speaker speech, and advocated for acknowledging the breadth of linguistic variety within the target language community in the L2 classroom. David, having just taken phonetics the previous semester, reported a heightened awareness of how John, the student playing Corona, was using the [θ] pronunciation of the soft “c” sound in Castilian Spanish to accentuate the comedic aspect of the character. In *La obra absurda*, a play written by a Latin American author and

intended for audiences from the same background, the peninsular accent was one of the ways the character of Corona was designated as a figure of ridicule. David, never having traveled abroad and having had only limited exposure to the differences between Castilian and Latin American varieties of Spanish, was nonetheless able to appreciate this detail by making the connection to the content of his phonetics course. His comment also highlights the fact that the participants of Spanish 555 reflected the hybridity of the target language community described by Jones. (2011)

Cassie made the observation that she had particularly enjoyed two of her previous Spanish courses that had integrated the viewing and analysis of films with conversation and linguistic development:

I took ... [*course number*] last semester, and it was ... based on watching movies in Spanish and then discussing it, 'cause it's advanced conversation, so, like, talking about it, which was interesting, and then I also took a culture class which was, um, "Filming Spain," so it's like all Spanish films which we would just like discuss and write papers on and stuff like that, which was really interesting as well. I like the classes that tie in other things I enjoy which is like acting and theatre and movies and stuff like that ... I also took a class in high school which was like, 'cause we had to take religion classes, it was, like, Spanish religion class and it was all taught in Spanish and focused on ... different cultures. It was really interesting. (C1)

Several students spoke about how the experience of producing *La obra absurda* gave them new insight into some of the other texts they read during Phase I of Spanish 555, texts that were not produced. David, commenting on how in performance *La obra absurda* turned out to be much funnier than it had seemed on paper, noted that "Profe was saying that about ... *Una pequeña historia de Chile*, that that one's much funnier than it reads, too." (D2)

Heidi noted connections between the play and previous coursework she had done which had focused on Latin America during the period of the Spanish Conquest:

[S]omehow I ended up with a track and really getting involved with, like, historical, mainly Mexico but Latin America in general, my last class that I took was, um, a course on, oh, gosh, what'd she call it? Basically "Colonialism in Latin America" was, like, the title of the course, so we did a lot of, like, indigenous relations and just all the different, like, colonialism aspects of things. And gender, and sacrificing, and things like that. Um, and I had one - my TA ... he had a really big interest in, the like, the indigenous peoples and that kind of thing, so he brought in a lot of the different, um, aspects of that. So I've just really kind of always oriented myself towards it. And now we're doing *La obra absurda*, which is indigenous peoples again ... Yeah, everything just keeps pointing back to it. But I also took the one linguistics class, which was really helpful. Like, as a class it was kind of frustrating, just setup, like, kind of dull content, but I really enjoyed linguistics and it really helped me understand accents, so I thought it was really helpful. And I enjoyed that. (H1)

These comments indicate that through their participation in target-language theatre, the participants found ways of synthesizing content across texts and across courses. They made connections within the target language itself, as well as between the language and aspects of the history and culture of the target language community.

#### *Connections to Other Domains*

The connections perceived by the participants extended beyond the FL curriculum to other courses, and even to some domains outside of academia. Because theatre draws on so many life experiences and brings literature into an embodied, kinesthetic experience, students are potentially able to perceive connections between the texts and many diverse aspects of their lives. Blair (2008) notes that since, in theatre, speech is embodied, we must take into account the specificity of word, sound, imagery, cultural and private associations, syntax, and rhythm that all work together to guide an actor in a particularly detailed way ... While this is most obviously about cognition, it is equally

as much about the neural nets that hold our memories and personal histories and experiences, and the way that language works on and through the body. (p. 111)

Below, participants detail a few of the associations they made between aspects of the text and a range of topics beyond the scope of the FL curriculum.

Emily talked about how working on *La obra absurda* had given her a greater appreciation of history and gender politics, and how she had shared that insight with a classmate in a course in another department.

In another class, what was it? It was, like, a women's studies class, I remember telling one of my classmates, like, a brief story of *Visión de los vencidos* and *La obra absurda*, like, just, in, you know, because I used it, like, as an example when we, we were talking about, you know, history is written by men ... I used the ideas, you know, to apply to the other classes, especially, like, women and genders courses, because, you know, it's kind of the same idea. (E3)

Theatre also offers students virtually unlimited opportunities to draw myriad connections between elements of the play, information they have learned in other academic courses (language-related and otherwise) and all manner of broader real-world experience. For example, David's aforementioned discussion of how he used a bag of apples to develop stage business for the times when his characters weren't speaking contained the following reference to something he remembered from watching a movie at some point in the past:

In ... the *Men in Black* ... director's commentary, apparently Tommy Lee Jones said, I don't know, when I watched this a long time ago, he said, "It's always nice to, like, hide behind a prop," when you, 'cause then you can just do something with that. It's much easier than actually acting. (D2)

Although he had taken a number of courses in the theatre department, David had not done any coursework specifically focused on acting, nor had he acquired any prior acting experience, but he was

able to recall this bit of information from a film that had interested him enough to watch the director's commentary, and he was able to transfer and make use of it in the theatre context.

### *Embodiment/Metaxis*

One of the elements of the experience that participants consistently mentioned across interviews was the importance of "getting into character." Although the participants referred to it in more roundabout terms, *metaxis* and *embodiment* are the theoretical concepts that characterize what they described. Metaxis, according to Boal (1995), is "the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different autonomous worlds." (p. 43) In the context of the French 555 and Spanish 555 productions, it can be understood as the temporary suspension of one's identity and the assumption of an imaginary identity of a character. It is the internal mental state that correlates with the exterior physical expression of a character through embodiment. Wilshire (1982) describes how this state of suspended identity allows participants the freedom to experiment and transcend boundaries, exploring the limits of a character and making discoveries.

In philosophical terms, the definition of metaxis as simultaneously belonging to two separate worlds bears a resemblance to the philosophical understanding of *ecstasy* as being or standing outside of oneself without ceasing to be oneself. Heidegger (1927/1962) examined the concept of ecstasy from a phenomenological standpoint. In the present phenomenology of target-language theatre, metaxis can be described as something of an ecstatic state in which participants stand outside of themselves as they are absorbed into the fictitious world of the play. Through metaxis, participants collaboratively create and enter into an unreal world. They can temporarily suspend their real-world identities to enter into this fiction, and they are able to draw from what they accomplish in the fictitious world of the play when they revert to their regular existence.

In a theatrical production, embodiment and metaxis are achieved by degrees. Early in the process, assuming a character's persona is effortful and belabored: the actors are still dependent on their scripts,

which hampers both their physical movement and their mental and emotional immersion in their characters; the action of a scene is frequently interrupted to discuss options and choices; and a great deal of time is spent on merely going through the motions as blocking is worked out. However, as rehearsal progresses, most actors find that eventually they are able to slip into character easily and naturally and it no longer feels effortful or artificial. Once lines are fully memorized and blocking has been routinized, participants find themselves more able to concentrate on making an emotional connection to what the character is feeling.

Metaxis is the unique feature of target-language theatre within the FL curriculum. No other type of course permits students the suspension of their identity to enter into the text through the co-creation of a fictitious world. Metaxis permits engagement with the text, the instructor, and peers on an entirely different plane.

Fauconnier and Turner (2006) remark upon the extraordinary importance of unreal states of affairs, “counterfactuals,” within real world contexts, noting that “reality is profoundly affected by cognitive work in the unreal.” (p.231) They cite documented cases of “lottery depression” studied in Britain in the 1980’s as evidence of the very real and profound effects of an unreal, imagined situation (fantasies of winning the lottery) on the psychological well-being of participants who purchased the tickets and indulged in the fantasies. Although the participants reported having no delusions about the remoteness of their chances of actually winning, they nevertheless dreamed about what they would do with the hypothetical winnings. In Fauconnier and Turner’s terminology, they “constructed a hypothetical blend that became counterfactual upon the drawing.” (p. 231) When they in fact did not win, they suffered the psychological loss of the possibilities they had dreamed about, with a very real negative impact on their well-being. In other words, an entirely imaginary state of affairs (their imagined winning of the lottery) led to a real world emotional reaction (their depression upon learning that they had lost).



The cognitive work of target-language theatre participants creating their own world of the “unreal” play world through metaxis can also have profound effects on reality. Emotional identification with characters can have real-world emotional impacts on participants. Emily articulated it very well when she said

I mean, when Pedro said that last line, I ... choked up. Even though I'd heard that line so many times - the first time we did it, when the spotlight was just on him, and he was, like, shaking, and he had his costume on, I ... felt it, you know? Inside me, I was sad, I was sad, you know, and that's amazing, that theatre can do that. Something I saw so many times, something I read so many times, when all the components are put together, how amazing it can be, how powerful it can be. (E2)

As Emily points out, she was already inured to the content of the lines, having read and heard them multiple times previously. However, in performance, when all of the elements came together, they evoked a powerful and lingering emotional reaction. Another participant, Gail, described herself as a naturally shy person; however, her role required her to assume a persona that she described as “cocky” and a “diva.” She commented on how “sometimes you just sort of forget that you're a shy person, or an actor on stage ... it's not completely losing yourself, but it is sort of like not really caring what people see of that person.” (G3) In other words, the counterfactual situation in which Gail adopted the guise of an extremely confident person allowed her to transcend, for a little while at least, her natural timidity and self-consciousness.

All of the participants talked in some detail about how it felt to embody their characters. Anne, who had initially been very reluctant to act in the French 555 production, expressed surprise at the degree of metaxis that she achieved in a role about which she had been so ambivalent. She remarked that “by being forced into being a character, I actually was one.” (A) Emily described the gradual progression of understanding that led her to immerse herself in her role despite having very few lines to speak.

I remember the first couple weeks, we all had our scripts, you know, and there was no costumes, there was no scenery, and I still kind of felt like, you know, this is me, I'm reading lines off a paper, like we did all year, you know? And then slowly I put my script down, and I knew the lines in my head, and I really, like, thought, like, "What do these words mean?" You know, because, oh, gosh, I can't even think of an example, but something that I, I said, like, when I was in the *coro*, like, some of the words I didn't even understand the first couple weeks. And they were my lines, and I didn't even think to look them up, you know, because I was so worried about not forgetting the word, the letters, and the word, and I'd been thinking, "What does this really mean that I'm saying?" And slowly I started believing what I was saying, and, you know, like, when - especially when I was *guardia*, like, I remember you and Profe telling me ... to use my, like, face more, and, you know, to get into it more, and, I just remember, like, even when I wasn't talking, when I was just sitting with the Emperor, like, you know, I was kind of glaring in the audience, glaring at them, you know, because I'm this mean *guardia* who kills people for the Emperor. And I remember, you know, a moment just kind of, like, looking around, and thinking, "I'm still in character, you know, I have my bat here," and even though I didn't have words ... I felt like I was in character. And I - I did, like, in a sense, lose myself. Because I did, you know, I was so focused on being this mean *guardia* that I, in essence, transformed, you know? I wasn't looking out at the faces of my teachers ... I was looking out on the empire. (E3)

At another point in the interview, Emily specifically discussed how the physicality involved in the embodiment of her role helped her to become immersed and to achieve a degree of metaxis, even in the absence of dialogue.

I did become more confident in speaking Spanish, and I learned a lot ... new vocabulary and everything, it helped me, you know, from an academic point of view, too ... but I think, like, I really felt my character, even it was, like, a small character, who had so few lines, but, my

character, even though I didn't have lines, I had to move a lot. I had to do the, get her and then drag her off stage and then come back and ... stand next to him, and so, for me, even though I didn't have words, I still had to, you know, act. ... And it was fun being the evil, mean, cruel *guardia*. (E3)

#### *Ways in which Embodiment and Metaxis were Facilitated*

Participants mentioned a number of factors that influenced their own ability to immerse themselves in a role, and they also remarked upon ways in which they noticed other actors improving the depth of their interpretations. They mentioned the powerful effect of costumes, props, lighting, and sound for enhancing the actors' sensory experience in role, adding visual and tactile elements that helped them to deepen their imagined experience of their characters. They also talked about specific physicalizations and how those aided in the realization of embodiment and metaxis. All of these aspects can be considered affordances within van Lier's (2000, 2004, 2010) ecological framework for language learning, that the various participants encountered and drew upon in order to advance their understanding of the text and how to interpret their roles. Costuming was one of the primary affordances mentioned by participants as helping them enter more fully into their assumed roles. Putting on a costume is a tactile and kinesthetic experience that involves one's whole body and changes one's appearance. Adam and Galinsky (2012) have recently investigated the phenomenon they term *enclothed cognition*, whereby the wearing of a particular garment has been shown to have a demonstrable effect upon the wearer's psychological state.

Cassie discussed how elements of costuming were very helpful to her, both for interpreting her own role and for gaining a new understanding of other characters in *La obra absurda*:

I mean, I think that my *Llorona* costume helped a lot, just because it was ... flowy and, like, when we were just rehearsing I didn't know how to move, because I was like, "Um, this is kind of awkward," but ... once I put that whole thing on, because it was, like, so big, and had all those, like, strips coming from it ... it was better, for me. ... I think once you add costumes everyone

gets a little more into it. Just in general. Like, um, when the Emperor added his, like, big feather thing? I felt like he probably - I could tell that he felt a little bit more regal ... It was beautiful.

(C2)

Gail also cited the importance of costuming in helping her immerse herself in her various roles. In reference to the singer she played in the prologue, she stated, “I loved the costume. I always liked costumes, ‘cause, you know? They totally make you feel like you’re the character, and that costume actually was a lot of fun.” (G2) She also talked about how holding a weapon in her hands assisted her in embodying a native warrior. Similar to a costume element, the prop helped her to enter into the fiction and access the frame of mind of her character.

I had fun, sort of embodying, like, a [indigenous tribe] warrior, being strong. I think at first it was just sort of me, walking around, trying to look tough, but then I sort of got into this sort of, like,

‘Rrr, I’m a [indigenous tribe]’ mode, sort of like “Ha, I’m your bow warrior” sort of thing. (G2)

One of the interesting features of Gail’s references to her characters in the interviews, and a reflection of the degree of her immersion in the role, was that she consistently referred to all of them as male, even those, like the singer, who could easily have been female. When asked about this, she responded,

As for the *músico*, I mean, he is sort of like this masculine, super-macho, cocky sort of character,

I guess, so, it fit. I just, like, didn’t think, like, a female singer would be that way as much, I guess. ... Just the way I saw it. (G2)

This was a fascinating insight from Gail, for several reasons: there was very little indication in the actual text of *La obra absurda*, in the way of stage directions or character description, of what the singer’s personality was actually like. Gail’s interpretation of the character as “masculine, super-macho, cocky” derived from her own research and decisions about the character.

These qualities are also the polar opposite of Gail’s natural demeanor and personality, a fact which other participants remarked upon when they recalled her rather extraordinary execution of the

*músico* role. Throughout the semester, Gail had been fairly shy, diffident, and even a little bit languid in how she carried herself and interacted with others. In the play, though, she took several minor roles with virtually no indications in the stage directions as to how they were to be played, and she interpreted very strong, powerful, and attention-grabbing characters, embodying a confidence and a dynamism that she had never demonstrated previously. Emily articulated everyone's astonishment at the transformation Gail achieved through immersing herself in her characters:

That that voice could come out of that girl, who was so shy? And didn't speak? And then when I heard her the first time, and it was later on, we heard her, that I heard her sing for the first time, we couldn't believe it. I was like, "Oh, my gosh, that voice comes out of that girl?" She's amazing, you know? And she – she just needed to, like, get more confidence, I don't know what it was, but yeah. (E2)

Gail was not the only participant who found behavioral and gestural means of deepening her metaxis and her identification with a role. Goldin-Meadow (2003) has investigated the primacy of gesture in enhancing the expressivity of utterances, and Koerner (2004) has noted the liberating potential of comic exaggeration for helping L2 performers to relinquish their inhibitions and abandon themselves in a role. David remarked upon how one of the other actors found a very effective way of physicalizing his character and achieving a thoroughly convincing embodiment of his role despite a certain inherent absurdity in the actions he had chosen.

John was really good as Corona, and - I mean, he basically has no acting experience. I think he said he'd been in an eighth-grade Macbeth play before. But, what he did do was ... just over the top. And, I think at some point people were making fun of him because he was always sticking his tongue out, partly because of the way he was playing this bloodthirsty Corona, partly just a tic he was doing, as acting, partly because he was doing ... the *ceceo* over the top. So - and I'm sure he heard that, but it didn't stop him, you know, he continued to do all the ridiculous stuff, and he

didn't get scared that "Oh, I look stupid up there." ... I hadn't even noticed it consciously, when somebody told me that. I saw him, and I saw him sticking his tongue out, and I thought, "That looks - you know, that - that *does* look weird, if you look at it," but I hadn't noticed 'cause it seemed to blend in with the character. (D3)

In addition to costuming, props, and behavioral and gestural elements of characterization, participants also talked about the boost that environmental factors such as lighting, sound effects, and background music afforded their interpretations. Felicia, who was largely responsible for the sound as well as some of the lighting, reflected upon how these technical roles exercised a subtle yet extremely important influence on the actors' characterizations and the play as a whole. She stated that what

I really like about, like, doing sounds is that it's such a big part, but - and, like, Profe and I talked about how in places it usually isn't, like, the focus, it's, like, kind of in the background, and it really is just to set the mood, and, like, create that tension, but, like, it's so unconscious that you don't really realize it, like, "oh, like, there's intense drumming, like, I have to feel anxious," but it just, like, it creates that within you ... (laughter) and I'm a psych major, so I really think that's interesting. Um, and I guess with lights as well, 'cause, like, it's all about, like, setting the ambiance and, like, the mood. Also I think that's been really cool with finally putting all the, the components of the play together since we, like, just started doing that last week or so? And so, to get a better picture of, like, the final product and to see, like, how we've created, like, these characters, with these mannerisms and their movements which, obviously, like, you know, makes the play go forward, but then having all these, like, more subtle components, um, interjected in there, that creates, like, a more complete picture of what we're trying to represent. (F2)

#### *Difficulties and Hindrances to Embodiment and Metaxis*

As previously noted, metaxis and embodiment happen by degrees. Participants temporarily separate themselves from their identities and their customary social roles of *student* and *undergraduate* in

order to enter into their characters, but the process is fluid and easily reversed or interrupted, especially early on. For various reasons, some participants may resist abandoning themselves in their roles, or they may wish to do so but have difficulty overcoming their self-consciousness and achieving a sense of full immersion. The following remark from Heidi nicely captures what was, and was not, achieved by participants in terms of metaxis:

I think I didn't get to that point where I was completely absorbed by the character. And I think it would be really difficult to do with this show, considering everyone had multiple characters that they were playing. Um, maybe for the main characters who, it was just, they had one or two main roles, but, um, overall, and the fact that I was a character, too, that wasn't really supposed to be named, I was overall just, like, oh, I was an *indio*, I was ... a [indigenous tribe], but, it was definitely, I got to the point where I wasn't consciously thinking, like, "Oh, my God, what are people thinking about me?" because this is *me*, more, "I'm on stage, this is my character." So I kind of was on my way there, almost." (H3)

Although Heidi describes her immersion as incomplete, what she describes does fit with Boal's (1995) definition of metaxis as a state of occupying two identities simultaneously.

Cassie also articulated her consciousness that even in the middle of a performance she was constantly slipping in and out of role and maintaining her awareness of herself in both worlds.

See, I'm the person, even in English, who constantly has their script backstage, like, even at, like, the last show, just because I always think that I'm going to forget something. So I was, like, constantly going through lines in my head and stuff, and I would be well aware of what I was saying on stage, um, just because I wanted to, you know, get the verb in the correct order, or, like, make sure that I didn't say *árbol* wrong (laughs) ... I was always thinking about that. Especially during, like, "*Bautismo*." I was constantly, like, "Okay, make sure you get this sentence correctly," because I'd done it before, a different way, and that was not right. So, I think for me

... I wasn't really ... lost in the character because of that, because I was so preoccupied with ... the language and ... how my accent was sounding, and, um, words and stuff like that. (C2)

Because of her extensive acting background, I was particularly interested in how Cassie's experience of metaxis in this production compared to previous ones when she was acting in English. Cassie responded that while she was able to get herself fully into character, even when acting in English she still retained a strong sense of dual consciousness and Boal's (1995) two simultaneous worlds, of being aware of herself acting and of worrying about saying lines correctly even while immersed in her role. However, although she was always mindful of her lines, she perceived that the stakes were higher and the danger of failure was greater in Spanish than in English, and in some ways this was an impediment to her immersion in her role.

Yes ... there have been some shows where I've been, like, completely in it ... again, I wouldn't say that it happens, like, frequently. But, like, a few of them that I've been in ... I've been going through a similar thing in that period in my life, or something like that. ... But usually it's more like, "Oh, my God, am I going to get my lines right? (laughter) Am I going to do the right thing?" But not as much as in this show, I would say ... Because usually ... I can just, like, ad-lib something if I ... forget, or if I ... mess it up, but here I wouldn't have any idea what to do in that situation. ... Nope. No. Not at all. (C2)

Cassie was not the only participant to express doubts about her ability to extemporize in Spanish sufficiently to ad-lib her way out of a tight spot if she, or another actor, were to fumble lines. The possibility of making a mistake and having to improvise a solution is a source of anxiety for any performer; in an L2 production, for some it can rise to the level of dread. For others it can be regarded as more of a challenge. David admitted that he had thought about this possibility and

I secretly kind of wanted it to happen just so I could see if I could get out of it in Spanish, but, no, it would certainly be much more scary. I mean, 'cause it's scary on the one level that you're on



stage in front of people and now have to come up with something good, and that makes sense.

But I think the fact that you'd have to do that in Spanish is even scarier. (D3)

Lutzker (2007) noted that one of his participants reached a point at which she achieved a kind of linguistic metaxis in which she was sometimes not aware that she was speaking a foreign language. (p. 324)

Clearly, the participants of the present study did not attain the same degree of unself-conscious confidence in their L2 proficiency. It is an open question as to why this is the case, possibly having to do with differences in initial developmental level, time on task, task demands of the various roles, and social context of the participants. However, it is clear that not all participants in target-language theatre attain the same outcomes, linguistic or otherwise. This has already been demonstrated by Moody (2002), who noted that when proficiency and motivation are high, students will support one another to achieve successful outcomes on very challenging projects, whereas in a context in which proficiency and motivation are low, students may struggle to execute much simpler projects adequately.

#### *Linguistic Aspects*

Ryan-Scheutz (2010) noted that target-language theatre productions often encompass multiple and partially overlapping goals, and the instructor of a target-language theatre course needs to define for him-/herself the primary aims and goals of the course: is it mainly a literature course? a language course? a culture course? Ryan-Scheutz notes that the way the instructor conceives of the course has a direct impact on how s/he approaches the question of assessment. (pp. 299-300) In the present study, I pose questions about how the student participants perceive the course and, consequently, how they approach the learning process within this environment.

Language learning was undoubtedly one of the important aspects of the experience as reported by the participants in this study. French 555 and Spanish 555 were positioned within the auspices of university language departments and populated by students of French and Spanish as a foreign language. Improving language proficiency was one of the participants' stated motivations for taking the course, and

in their interviews they commented on ways they did or did not see themselves making progress in this arena. Participants did remark on specifically linguistic aspects of the experience, although (perhaps somewhat surprisingly) these received comparatively less commentary than did the aforementioned social and literary dimensions. A few students remarked on the relative lack of explicit linguistic instruction in the courses. Although L2 development was certainly one of the pedagogical goals stated by both professors, it was definitely a secondary or even a tertiary focus of the courses. The students were not studying language for its own sake; they were engaged in an endeavor that used language in order to achieve a goal, the staging of a play. Some of the participants remarked on more generalized language use, but many of their comments clustered around the details of pronunciation, the way the experience affected their motivation to improve their L2 proficiency, and the effect of memorized, preformed utterances derived from the text on their spontaneous language production.

Gregory (2001) noted the need for both criticism, i.e. an awareness of shortcomings, and imagination, the ability to envision possible solutions to the challenges raised by those shortcomings, as essential elements for successful practice contributing toward eventual mastery of a learning endeavor. Felicia made the following observation about how, when working on details related to the show, she soon realized that she couldn't just rely on getting a general grasp of the gist of the conversation, as she often could in other L2 situations. She needed to comprehend details at a higher level in order to productively engage with her tasks and respond appropriately to the professor's requests and suggestions.

At first it was kind of hard with, um, how much Spanish was spoken, just because with something like this, you, like, have to understand what everyone else is saying. So, I know when Profe would talk to me about, like, about the music we needed, or, like, more towards the beginning of the play it was specifically on lights, and so she would talk to me in Spanish and whatever. And I would get the general idea of what she was saying, but I'd always think, "If you spoke in Spanish (*sic* - she clearly meant to say 'English') I would know exactly what you're talking about, that'd

be so much easier, but I understand, like, the whole point of this is to better our Spanish.” Um, so that was kind of hard. Just because, like, you – things need to be explicit sometimes. And, you know, and, like, not being fluent makes that really difficult. . . . and then so I’m just sitting there being like, “Uh-huh, uh-huh,” and I feel like she’s, like, “You don’t know what I’m talking about.” (F2)

Whereas Felicia talked about language comprehension difficulties related to extemporaneous conversations about production details, Gail’s take on the way language comprehension fit into the overall context had more to do with comprehending the language of the text in order to be able to interpret it.

It was interesting. I think it’s sort of like any, really, any theatre in any language. It’s not all that hard to, like, memorize the syllables, I guess, um, you know. But to actually sort of understand what you’re saying? I mean, in English, it’s a little easier, ‘cause, I mean, if you run into a word that you don’t know, it’s not nearly as common, but in a lot of the lines it was like, “Okay, I’m not entirely sure what this means, ‘cause this is sort of, you know, [an indigenous language] or something.” So, um, yeah, it was a lot – a lot of sort of memorizing what words you use, because I knew that I probably would not be able to, like, you know, fake it. Um, so, yeah, line memorization was important. Um, it was also important to actually go back to the text, to make sure you were saying the right words but also to sort of look at what is actually going on, so you can actually understand what you’re saying, and not just spouting words that you remember. So, yeah. Um, yeah, it, it just lay- puts on a more, another layer of difficulty, I guess you could say. (G2)

### *Pronunciation*

Koerner (2004) and Sosulski (2008) both noted the opportunity for target-language theatre participants to take advantage of the distancing effect of metaxis to explore inflections, vocal intonations,

and cadences that they may be reluctant to adopt when speaking the L2 “as themselves.” In addition to the increased focus on pronunciation that L2 theatre performance entails, Koerner noted that by using an exaggerated accent for comic roles, students develop a heightened awareness of their enunciation. Weist (2004) also noted the potential benefits to pronunciation from work with speaking L2 texts aloud.

Some participants commented that the theatre course incorporated a more explicit focus on pronunciation than a typical classroom course. For instance, as a result of his work on the French play Brad was made aware that he was lacking an entire phoneme in his spoken French (i.e. he was failing to differentiate between the sound of “ou” in *vous* and the pure “u” sound as in the word *tu*.) After the professor drew his attention to this lacuna in his repertoire, Brad made a conscious effort to differentiate the phonemes and imitate more native-like pronunciation patterns, with great success. He remarked that, in all probability, he may never have corrected that error through classroom study alone and might have gone on committing it for years, had Prof not intervened thanks to the French 555 play and the need to remedy his mispronunciation for the performance.

David offered a perceptive comment on the social factors that affect L2 pronunciation and phonology:

It’s sort of the idea that you know that you’re not going to be able to do it perfectly, so if you screw it up, sort of subconsciously but on purpose to a certain degree, then you can say, “Well, yeah, I’m not a native speaker.” You’ve sort of given up the - the possibility of success, which then takes away how much the failure will hurt, since ... “Oh, you know, it’s ‘cause I wasn’t trying.” So, to a certain degree, I think that’s what a lot of people are doing when they’re still sounding like English peoples (*sic*) speaking Spanish without trying to really imitate the accent.

(D3)

David also expanded upon the way that participating in Spanish 555 assisted him in overcoming those social hurdles, because the social milieu of the course was different, given that it included a critical mass

of native speakers as well as a group of graduate students who had obviously made a conscious effort to perfect their L2 skills, including pronunciation. This created a social environment which, for David, promoted a different set of standards and expectations among the peer group. Working on nativelike pronunciation was tacitly encouraged.

What really helped me in 555 was I was able to get completely into a Spanish mindset. Whereas, when you have a whole bunch of people who don't have quite the sound of the vowels, or all the consonants right and don't have the accent right, it's harder to get your mind to speak in only Spanish. Um, whereas if everybody around you is doing it, it's sort of easier to just drop into the group, I guess, which is why they say immersion learning is really effective ... when I don't get that automatically from the class, the classes that I've taken since, I try to ... do it from within, as much as I can. What was really useful about these classes I've taken immediately afterwards is, the first class I took was phonetics, so I got that immersion idea, and then I learned exactly, physically, how I was supposed to say everything. So, I mean, that's improved my accent a lot ... it's like a one-two punch. (D3)

Felicia also reflected on this aspect, specifically considering how on-stage pronunciation had an influence in shaping audience's perceptions of the play's setting:

I'm taking phonology, and so, um, I think my - our teacher just does this, just for, like, our benefit and to give us a more well-rounded view of how Spanish is spoken across the world ... And so we, like, talk about, like, different dialects and, um, different accents, and, like, how - uh, like, yesterday we were talking about in, uh, like, Puerto Rico, or, like, in, like, the Caribbean, um, r's and l's ... will be switched, like, r's will sound like l's, l's will sound like r's, or, like, both will sound like h's, you know? ... He was saying how, like, in the Dominican Republic, like, it's, like, a linguistic joke that, like, they eat their words, or whatever ... yeah, um, so I guess that's really interesting just because if this is a [name of country] play and we have to be conscious of the

accent and how we pronounce words ... I just think that's really interesting because it's not something that I was ever really aware of. Because, you know, you learn Spanish a certain way, and we speak it a certain way, but I guess we don't really realize that, like, that's not the only way to speak it. And, like, there - there's a ton of variation in it. And, like a lot more than I realized. And so I think, like, this play and that one class has really showed me that there isn't just, like, one way to speak, and - and that's really important to this play, just because we're trying to, you know, create that we are in [country] and, like, indigenous people of [country] and, like, we have to be aware of, like, how we pronounce things, because that is part of creating this world. (F2)

Felicia further remarked on how the project was useful to her in helping to develop and enhance her *comprehension* of different accents in spoken Spanish.

[J]ust even, just, like, listening to everyone else speak has, like, really helped, like, my ability to, like, understand Spanish. Um, I think, um, probably one of the biggest troubles I had was just that everyone else – most people in our class, you know, are American, therefore they have, like, an Americanized Spanish accent. So even though everyone's accent is, you know, really good, it's much easier to understand, maybe, you or any of the grad students than, like, it is to understand Profe, or Laura, or even Lucas. So, um, and I think that's – I think that's really helpful, just because, like, to bring it back to, like, my phonology class and, like, you know, um, realizing that there's so many ways to speak Spanish, it's really interesting to get that, like, firsthand experience from that. Like with Lucas and his [country] accent, Profe and her [country] accent. Um, so I think that's been, like, really helpful, just for, like, a real-world, like, type of experience, and, like, if I go to [Profe's country] it'll probably be easier to understand them, and if I go to [Lucas' parents' country] it'll be a lot easier to understand them. So I think that's been, like, really, really helpful. (F2)

### *Motivation to Continue Improving*

Martin and Dowson (2009) proposed that greater personal and emotional connectedness led to greater scope for academic motivation, engagement, and achievement. (p. 328) Dörnyei (2001, 2009a, 2009b) and Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) have investigated language-learning motivation, especially with relationship to group dynamics. Shand (2008) has investigated motivation and language learning as related to dramatic activities. David commented that the social milieu of Spanish 555 and the experience of working with a group that included more competent peers had influenced his motivation to continue to improve his Spanish.

I don't have the ... impetus to get comfortable with my ability, now that I've seen what grad students and native speakers and people who are really into this are like, because ... it would be easy for me to look at how I am compared to other undergraduate students and just sort of slack off, and just, you know, take these last classes and then do something after that. But it's really inspired me to now start reading more, like, novels in Spanish, to try to get a better, bigger vocabulary, because it became really apparent that no matter how good I was at Spanish in this graduate class, that my vocabulary was a lot different than people who have studied it for a long time. (D3)

### *The Liberating Effects of Preformed Utterances*

Jones (2011) observes that among the benefits of working with L2 theatre, there are methodological justifications for using dramatic literature in the target language to promote communicative engagement with the L2:

Because the grammar of theater text takes the form of direct speech in the voice of a specific individual while it also conforms to formal rules of composition, it is a hybrid of linguistic structure and native-speaker use patterns. (p. 116)

These NS use patterns are a valuable resource for NNS students acquiring the L2, who are afforded the opportunity to inhabit them and adopt them, populating them with their own accents in the way Bakhtin (1981) described. Jones (2011) elaborates:

Dramatic literature is historically embedded, but dramatic *performance* of this literature brings the hybrid, diverse culture of language to life in a real and present way in which few other classroom experiences can. The memory of this native grammar, the feeling of “getting inside” the language in real time through performance, can be transformational for students. (p. 116, emphasis in the original)

Haught (2005) noted that his participants (adult ESL learners) preferred working with L2 texts over improvising. He attributed this to their limited vocabulary, which made improvising a formidable challenge; to their enthusiasm for the L2 text as a source of collocations and idiomatic expressions; and to the opportunity to investigate target cultural practices that arose through discussing the content of the text. Staddon (2007) remarked that the text supported students in engaging in meaningful and error-free target language communication, liberating them from the challenge of formulating their own utterances and allowing them to focus their attention on other aspects of communication.

Participants mentioned that as a result of working on the plays, they were exposed to and came to better understand a greater number of colloquialisms and standardized expressions, and they grew to have more confidence in their ability to deploy these gambits in their own conversation. They also felt that, because the text relieved them of the burden of formulating their own utterances by providing them with already-composed, reliably grammatically-correct speech, they had more cognitive resources to dedicate to infusing emotion and expression into their words. Brad stated that the French 555 production felt to him like “the first time that I could genuinely be expressive [in French]. Usually I’m thinking so much and sound like a robot.” (B) In other words, the greater cognitive demands of formulating utterances in the target language consume so many cognitive resources that Brad had difficulty in also attending to the



expressive dimensions of his L2 speech. When, in contrast, he was speaking memorized and rehearsed lines, he didn't need to devote so much of his attentional reserves to *generating* the speech, freeing up resources so that instead of worrying about *what* he was saying, they allowed him to experiment with *how* he was saying it.

Cassie also commented that “it was nice to be able to speak Spanish aloud again without being, like, super nervous about it 'cause, like, knowing what you're going to say is better than, you know, having to come up with it on your own.” (C2) David's take on it was that

when, like, in conversation classes or things like that, when you're speaking Spanish to other people, it's sort of, you never, you never put yourself in, like ... It's never role playing, you're never, like, angry or sad, or trying to - you're usually not trying to convey emotion, usually it's just working on information, and making sure you said it, you know, grammatically correct. And so, having to, like, it's basically having to act, and then speak in Spanish, is something I wouldn't - you know, I didn't imagine would be any, you know, it didn't even occur to me that it would be different, but it's, it's amazing how much that changes everything. (D1)

Brad also remarked that the lines he learned for the play became so naturalized that they began to appear in his speech outside of rehearsal: “I was using it so much, and saying it over and over, and over, and over - eventually it just invaded my everyday speech” (B). Emily also remarked on this increasing automaticity of the lines as the rehearsal period progressed.

Sometimes – the lines just pop into my head! Like, even lines that weren't mine! Just like, funny things like, ‘*Ustedes son indios.*’ (Psh! [laughing]) Yeah, you know! Like, anything, like, I just, like, or like, the song, the *músico*'s song, that pops into my head all the time! ... Yeah, and, like, it's crazy how it sticks with you! And, you know, at first I was – when I first got my, like, four lines that I had, I was like, “How am I gonna remember when to come in? When to -” you know, 'cause I had to, like, bring people in, bring them out, and remember, and I was, like, so nervous

that I would mess up, and after a while, it was just, like, automatic, I knew, “Now. Now. Now.” It just comes together, and it’s because everyone works so hard. (E2)

David reflected on the relationship between emotional speech and the language one (voluntarily or involuntarily) uses, giving the following example:

When Itzcuintlipotzotli is sort of saying, um, to his mother ... it’s kind of interesting, there’s a whole range of emotions he goes through between being sort of afraid, and ... asking forgiveness, and then, like, just like yelling at her and telling her he’s going to burn her house down and burn her to death. ... I actually found myself thinking of all of the - have you seen *Modern Family*? This is sort of off-topic, but there’s a character that speaks Spanish. ... I mean, she doesn’t really speak Spanish in the - ‘cause, like, it’s an American television show - but ... she’ll do sort of asides, or if she gets really angry she’ll start speaking Spanish ... I actually found myself, like, thinking about that ... trying to copy what I’ve seen other people do on TV, ‘cause ... my only experience in Spanish, really, especially since I haven’t studied abroad, is just, you know, like academic discussions. ... Well, and it’s interesting to see other people try to get through that too, beyond just like reading the lines ... and like trying to be phonetically correct, and then ... trying to, like, sound like you’re a native speaker, when you’re like cutting off words, or, sort of conveying something else. (D1)

In her third interview, Emily talked about lingering effects of the play’s lines. Her final interview was somewhat delayed by extenuating circumstances, and when we met she was taking another Spanish literature course. Another classmate from Spanish 555, Lucas, was also taking the same course, and Emily discussed at some length how their shared experience working on *La obra absurda* impacted both of them with regard to the subsequent course:

I remember, like, two weeks, three weeks after the play, I still had, like, lines stuck in my head, and songs from the play, like the *músico* at the beginning, oh! Like running through my head.

And even, like, on - the other day in class, Lucas, he said something, what was it? He quoted *La obra absurda* just to me, you know, like, just to me he said something that she [the professor] said reminded him of *La obra absurda*, and he said, oh, I - I wish I could remember, because you would think it was hilarious, too. Something, “*por el río, el río,*” something like - something like that, and he just looked at me and kind of, like, said it, and I just, like, started laughing. I was, like, “That’s hilarious!” ... I can still, if I think about it, I’ll, like - or if I see a word, like, um, *hocico*. Like, I was reading something, and I saw the word *hocico*, and I never knew what that word meant before it was in the play, and Heidi had her monologue, and she was describing, remember, *hocicos grandes*, and I never knew what that word meant, and then I was reading the other day, and I saw it, and it reminded me of the play, and I went, “Oh, that’s where I learned this vocabulary word.” So, like, I realized that it helped me with my language, too, you know, the play, and so it’s, like, little things like that, like, a word that, you know, you wouldn’t associate with that, but - it had no big meaning in the play, but it sticks, sticks out. (E3)

Felicia offered an insightful comment on how the relative *lack* of this, in her case, caused her to perceive that she had fewer opportunities for linguistic improvement than did some of her peers.

I feel like if I had a larger part, that it would most definitely help. But yeah, because I don’t – like, I think I have, like, four lines in the play – um, it really hasn’t helped my speaking ability. Um, and then, like, talking to everyone else, like if I talk to anyone else in the class it’s usually in English, and then, um, like, if I talk to Profe about something, then, we’ll probably start off in Spanish, but then realize, “this is really inefficient,” because it’s going really slowly, we’ll just go over to English. Um, so really, I guess, in that sense, um, it hasn’t, but probably because I haven’t really taken full advantage of this, um, opportunity to do so. (F2)

Felicia also expanded on her previous reflections about the differences in Spanish across countries and regions of the Spanish-speaking world. She remarked on the usefulness of the

colloquialisms in the text as examples of contemporary, informal speech, but she also noted that they were very region-specific and thus their usefulness was somewhat context-dependent.

We were in front of an audience, like, speaking in, um, Spanish, but also not just Spanish, but, like, well, I guess, some more than others, but, like, very, like, natural Spanish? You know, with, like, slang and just basically, like, full of colloquialisms and that's, like, how you're supposed to speak? And, um, I feel like this probably would have been more interesting for me if I was going to, like, [country where the play was set], just because um, like, like, our, um, at the end of "*El tesoro*," when we were, like, "*¡La fiesta, buey!*" or whatever, that's only said in [country], right? And, like, the way that it's supposed to be said, and, like – like, I can, like, hear it in my head how, like, maybe Lucas might say it, and I feel like that, then that would have been, like, more applicable in, like, [country]. But, like, overall, I think so. (F3)

### *Linguistic Metaxis*

Radulescu (2011) draws an explicit parallel between speaking an L2 and performing a role that occasions a departure from our everyday self:

We do not just speak a language, we inhabit a language; we love, hate, imagine, and die in a certain language. Hence, doing anything in a foreign language, or in a language acquired second to our native or first tongue, requires not only an effort of memory and linguistic practice or ability, but also a degree of reinvention of one's self ... In this process of reinvention one could also be said to be playing a role, or to be performing a different persona. Our voice, gestures, facial expressions usually change whenever we speak in a foreign language, similar to how an actor has to change and transform herself in order to become the part she is playing. (p. 35)

Radulescu expands upon how the ability to convincingly improvise within this role for extended periods of time is, in large measure, the defining characteristic of target language proficiency:

Communicating in a foreign language is a performative act in which we have to constantly negotiate between the knowledge of the new role, that is, vocabulary, idioms, grammatical structures and the ability to improvise and mimic, as closely as we can, the ideal model of what is commonly referred to as “native fluency.” ... Ironically, the ultimate test of how well I can play the role of a native speaker of the language that is foreign to me relies ... on how well I can improvise in the adopted language and thus in how seamlessly I can use the text of my role (vocabulary, grammatical structures) and match it to its substance - that is, the totality of cultural constructs ... the semiotic systems, the gestures, expressions, and metaphors ... As immigrants who even when becoming citizens of their adoptive country will still always remain “naturalized citizens,” so speakers of a foreign language will be “naturalized” speakers performing a role through which they are constantly negotiating between the universe of thought and culture related to their native language and the one associated with the adopted language. (p. 36)

Boal's (1995) concept of metaxis as the state of simultaneously inhabiting two worlds is, in some ways, analogous to the situation of the bilingual who simultaneously inhabits two different languages. Just as metaxis progresses from being effortful to effortless with time and rehearsal, language learners who receive enough L2 exposure and practice over time eventually reach a point where they are able to transition into the L2 with relative ease. Felicia commented on this similarity between learning the lines of the play and learning a language.

It probably is going to be a lot more comfortable speaking Spanish just because even though it was, like, rehearsed lines and things that, like, I had to memorize, um, it became almost second nature. Like, before our performance, I didn't have to, like, repeat over and over again, like, what my lines were. It just kind of, just like, came out very naturally. Um, and so, and I feel like that's what being fluent in a language is, right? (F3)

In a sense, achieving this ease and comfort with the L2 could be characterized as *linguistic metaxis* or *L2 metaxis*. Lutzker (2007) described an instance in which one of his participants ceased to even be aware that she was interacting in the L2, so absorbed was she in what she was doing (p. 324). Although such a degree of linguistic metaxis is rare, Sosulski (2008) notes that “simulating realistic dialogue is one short step removed from creating one’s own discourse,” (p. 5), and that the structure provided by the L2 text provides support upon which participants can become more comfortable inhabiting the target language world.

Emily also commented on her progress toward this state of comfort with the L2. She specifically remarked on how the changed classroom learning environment made a difference. She also reflected on the continual background presence of L1 English in her consciousness, and the way that participants did indeed move back and forth between the two languages in response to communicative pressures.

I learned a lot in that class, because we weren’t only, you know, having, like, a lecture and discussion format, but then also, just, in the theatre itself we were, you know, trying our best to always speak Spanish. ...’cause, you know, even when, just, we were talking, we would try to speak Spanish, you know. And, like, you know, that’s kind of the one, like, aspect of learning a language that you can’t get from a class. You know, that’s what people study abroad. And I almost felt like when we were in the theatre, we were studying abroad, you know, because we really tried to always speak Spanish. And you know, toward the end, when we were kind of freaking out, we would resort to English, because that’s where we’re comfortable ... I really did - do feel, you know, like, more fluidity, and just being in that different setting kind of, you know, not so, like, desks, teacher, circle, raise your hand, you know? Like, now I feel more confident to even make mistakes, you know? Because of course I’m going to make mistakes, but I hope, you know, that my professor will correct me and, you know, not - I’m not going to be embarrassed about it. So, you know, after I couldn’t remember, I couldn’t figure out what Profe was telling

me, when she was telling me to drop the *cinta*? ... Like, after that, I realized, “Okay, I can’t look any more stupid than that, (laughter) so, whatever, I might as well give it a shot.” And that’s what all the professors tell you, is to try your best, you know? Like, how else will you learn? ... So, yeah, I’ve - I guess I’ve let go of a lot of that nervousness, too. (E3)

Emily also talked about how the opportunity to engage in repetitive conversational scenarios in real-world, non-theatrical settings where she needed to produce extemporaneous speech factored into her growing comfort with simultaneously inhabiting both of her languages.

At my job I’m the only Spanish speaker there, and we have a lot of, like, Latino families. So, I did, you know, have the same conversation thirty times (laughter) with different families, you know, about how we’re going to get them funding and, you know, like, kind of - I had to learn a lot of new vocabulary ... With that, too, you know, like, I didn’t know how to say, you know, “child care assistance from [name] County” ... I had to learn how to say “pay stub,” I didn’t know how to say that, you know? So I did, you know, have that practice Spanish, but that’s a very different kind of Spanish that I really think I need to work on a lot. Which I think, because I didn’t technically study abroad, that I haven’t like, learned that conversation, like, ease. Like, I have it, but I get really nervous when I’m sp- talking to a native parent. ... Like they’re going to judge me if I make mistakes, but they’re all very nice, and they all help me, and a lot of them, you know, speak a little English, so it helps, sometimes, but I would always, like, write everything out that I wanted to say at the beginning. Because I didn’t want, you know, to reflect badly on our program, either, you know, if ... they just didn’t understand me. But, you know, it never came to that, thankfully. ... I’m hoping to reach that moment when I’m comfortable soon. It’s been many years I’ve been studying this language. (E3)

Gail also reflected on immersion and the idea of working in both languages. She recalled an eighth grade summer camp experience when she was immersed in L2 Spanish, and she compared it to the

work on the Spanish 555 play, commenting on the difference it made to be engaged in a goal-directed activity.

It was interesting, like, especially looking back as to when I was in eighth grade and now. I think it wasn't immersion, you know, in this case per se, but it did, like – I was working in both languages. So I wasn't completely immersed or, um, forced to speak Spanish, but it was something that I could do, it was something that sometimes I had to do, just b- depending on, you know, the situation and whatnot. I think it was – it was interesting, because I was a student of Spanish, but I – I was also someone who was using Spanish to accomplish a goal. Whereas, in eighth grade it was – yes, it was immersion, but it was, um, it was sort of like we were st-, you know, s- well, English speakers trying to speak Spanish. And we were supposed to be – speak Spanish, but we weren't necessarily always, like, trying to create something ... it was kind of artificial. I think it was sort of like, we were only speaking Spanish because we had to, otherwise people would be like, "Stop speaking English!" Um, and obviously, I don't know, we – A lot of times we had – it was, um, it wasn't, like, a project that wasn't particularly related to Spanish. Um, it was usually, like, a - like, maybe – one of the times we did a Spanish presentation where we did a mini-sketch. Um, but that was – it seemed to have more of a focus on the language, whereas this is – it's – we do have a focus on the language, because we have to act, we have to, um, present the text, but we aren't focused so much on the grammar, we aren't focused so much on how we're saying it, but rather, you know, what we're presenting, and what, culturally and sort of, I guess, emotionally, we're doing. So, yeah, I think there's – back in eighth grade it was obviously more basic, but it was more of a focus on, like, the basics of the language versus, sort of, what is the language and what, you know, is sort of the culture and what are we trying to, you know, reach out to people with. (G3)



In general, participants regarded L2 metaxis as a future goal and possibility, but one which most of them felt they had not yet fully attained during the French 555 or Spanish 555 experience. They did feel that they had made significant progress toward it, however, as evidenced by Brad's remark that he felt that for the first time he was able to stop concentrating on grammar so much and really be expressive in the L2.

#### *Relationship to (Possible) Future Experiences*

A primary purpose of education is to prepare individuals for their futures and for the experiences they are likely to encounter. Target-language theatre does this by assisting students in developing their grasp of their L2 and building their confidence in their ability to use it to communicate, and to augment it with other forms of nonverbal and paralinguistic communication. Few students, presumably, will actually have a need to perform in L2 theatre productions beyond their school years. However, this investigation did discover links between the French 555 and Spanish 555 experience and participants' anticipated future plans. One student did, indeed, entertain the possibility of using her L2 in a specifically theatrical context, while a number of interviewees commented on how their participation in the project had opened their eyes to the world of graduate studies and brought them into peer contact with real, live graduate students in a way they had never before experienced. These students envisioned becoming graduate students themselves someday, and they reported that the production had made that possibility seem much more realistic to them because they had gotten to know individual graduate students as human beings beyond simply the encounters in the classroom.

Cassie was the participant who talked about specifically using theatre in the target language as part of her possible future experience.

I'd always said ... that I'd wanted to be in .... some kind of Spanish theatre and plays ... I'd also always said that I'd wanted to, maybe one day if I have the funds, or the will ... to open up some kind of Spanish-speaking theatre program for ... children ... I feel like being in that play kind of showed me ... what it would entail, going into ... this whole Spanish show, and, like, just the

research that goes into it and stuff like that and trying to work with people who aren't native speakers and trying to get them to be comfortable enough to speak in front of groups of people ... I actually looked into an internship which is in [city] ... with this *Teatro del Pueblo*, which is a Spanish-speaking theatre company ... (C3)

Emily found a different connection between the Spanish 555 course and play and her subsequent and anticipated future experiences. The following term, she found herself in a Spanish literature course focused on 20th-century peninsular theatre. Once again, she was in her comfort zone in a literature classroom and with an expertise equal to or greater than that of the rest of her classmates.

I feel like ... I'm a little ahead of the game because I already know all the *términos teatrales*, you know? The first day, no one knew what *acotaciones* were, and I was like ... Yes! I know this one because Profe asked the same question on the first day of, like, Latin American Theatre, which I took two years ago with her. But ... I feel, you know, better, and I feel like, may- me and Lucas can maybe bring another aspect. I really hope that she has us act out scenes, because I think that helped a lot. So far she's kind of, like, lecturing a lot, but we'll see, hopefully it develops, you know. We started with reading some theory. Um, which I also felt like I was better prepared to read, you know? (E3)

Emily also hearkened back to her previous comments about stage directions from her second interview and remarked that she had, indeed, changed the way she approached reading theatrical texts:

I ... turn the page and when I see *acotaciones* I'm, like, excited, I'm, like, "Yes! I will know more about what's going on!" You know, and now they're, like, my savior, like, I would never even imagine skipping them, you know? It's, like, the, you know, the most important, if anything. (E3)

A few moments later she concluded, "I really fell in love with reading theatre while I was ... here at [university] with the few classes I took." (E3)

Emily also talked about how the Spanish 555 experience impacted her work both inside and outside the classroom.

Definitely yeah, with this course, you know, 100% it helped me. And not only, like, helped me with the knowledge, just, you know, the basic theatre terms, but helped me in just be more enthusiastic about it, and like, you know, like in the first class, I think other students could kind of tell that I was, like, excited, you know ... Me and Lucas, especially, are, like, always raising our hands and stuff. But, um, it's good, and also, it's made me want to, like, see theatre more ... to go and watch plays, and definitely incorporate theatre into my work, with like, the elementary age kids I work with. Kind of like, like theatre games ... they help kids, you know, like, jump out of their shell, and use their voices and use their bodies, and that's like, what we like where I work.  
(E3)

Emily offered the following summary comment, touching on many of the aspects of experience that have emerged as themes in this research:

I think being in the play is one of the best decisions I made when I was at [university]. ... Like, I was scared when I signed up for the class, I was very close to dropping it, but I - 'cause I was scared, I think I told you in the first interview, and the grad students really freaked me out.  
(laughter) But, like, if anything, I learned so much, and I met so many really cool people that can now, like ... I can ask people about, you know, grad school here, and about professors, and I feel like I've made connections, and it's made me more interested in theatre. ... I probably ... feel like one of the graduate students in my class now, because I, you know, I feel like I have a little bit of the upper hand because I've learned so much. And not only read theory and *crítica* and everything like that, but being in the play, I feel like I have this kind of, like, extra eye, I don't know (laughter), you know? And, um, I hope that I have a chance to share my experiences in *La obra absurda* ... um, with, you know, my new class, um, if it helps. Um, but no, I definitely felt

more confident/competent\*, and more excited, too, to, like, open up a play, like, you know, read another play (E3)

\*It was impossible to distinguish from the recording which of these two words Emily actually said, and both of them are perfectly possible given the context. I will leave it to the reader to decide which s/he thinks is the more likely possibility.

Felicia was slated to study abroad in Spain during the summer following the spring semester in which she took Spanish 555, and she offered the following observations on how she expected the experience in the Spanish play to impact her encounters in Spain:

One of the things I'll probably take the most is just, like, listening to others and, like, being able to understand them, because that's so important, and, like, going abroad and, um, listening to native speakers who are speaking to other native speakers, 'cause I know, like, probably when you talk to us, you'll talk a little bit slower. You know, kind of alter that to our level. Um, and, like, I know teachers do that, always, but, and if you talk to a native speaker, like, it's, it's not like that at all ... 'Cause I mean, I know I would talk - I would speak English a lot differently to, like, another American versus someone who isn't native in English. So, I feel like that - that will probably help me a lot. Um, just like - I think just, like, being exposed to having Spanish being spoken, just, around me for, you know, hours upon hours every week will be very helpful. (F2)

Felicia's focus on being better able to cope with comprehending full-speed, native-level Spanish conversational exchanges was consistent with her earlier and subsequent remarks that her work on the play had demanded less speaking from her overall, so she felt that her receptive capacities had been enhanced much more so than her productive capabilities.

Felicia also anticipated that her experience in the Spanish 555 course would help her to be better prepared for the Spanish literature course she knew she would be taking during her time spent studying abroad.

I think, um, when I go to Spain, and- like, I'll be taking a literature class there. And so, like, I don't know, like, what kind of literature class it is. Like, it, I don't know, it could be plays for all I know, you know. But, um, so I think, like, taking, like having this class as kind of like, um, almost like a prerequisite for that? Like, you know, it kind of has, probably, like helped me, or will help me, um, in that class, and, you know, it wouldn't – I feel like it wouldn't be, won't be as hard as it would- would have been if, like, I hadn't taken a literature class before. You know, and like, especially since I took it second semester, I'm still, like, in that mindset of, like, reading in Spanish, and trying to understand everything in Spanish, and, like, in, an Hisp-, an, in an Hispanic context. Um, So I think that will be really interesting, and, like, really helpful. And also, like, if for some reason, like, any of these writers, or playwrights and any of these plays come up, then, like, I already have, like, that background for it. Which can always be helpful, especially since in literature everything is, like, a throwback to everything else. And everything references everything else. Um, I'm sure, like, um, any of the ideas that we talked about will be, will be relevant. And especially since, like, the, the plays, um, at least that we read, probably and plays in general, um, uh, reflect, like, a culture's history? And so, um, because we read so many different plays from so many different countries, um, I feel like that's, that's very helpful in, like, understanding the history of, like, a culture, and then this will give me the necessary background for, like, other literature I may read. (F3)

Felicia also mentioned the following connection she perceived between her production role working with lighting and sound and her other major area of study, psychology:

I worked on lights and sound, and that's, like – that's a very psychological, um, experience just because you're setting a mood, an, an atmosphere, without, like, throwing it in everyone's face, like, it's not an obvious, like, “this is what we're trying to make you feel” or “this is the emotions that we're trying to convey” And so, um, music and lights is a very subtle way, I feel like, of

doing that. And I feel like art in general is – it's a very manipulative (*chuckle*) um, medium. So, um, but even then with, with, let's see, like, um, like a painting or whatever, maybe, maybe it's not more obvious, but like, it's like a-, it's one type of sense that you're experiencing, right? So it's, it's, like, just a visual thing. But whereas with a play there's so many different things going on. Like you see what's going on, but then you hear it, and then, like, you see lights but then it, like, it, all melded together, causes, like, some sort of feeling. And, like, I know, um, especially in our first performance, like, a lot of people were moved, like, the end of the massacre of the [indigenous tribe], and then we had the song, like, um, *Mal- Maldición de Marina*, and, like, people, like, cried. You know? Just, like, that's a very, very powerful thing that, like, we created and I feel like that's such a cool thing to be able to do. Um, so, and then, in psychology, like, there, um, in, in all studies, really, they'll have, like, um, there's another word for it, I'm not thinking, I can't think of what it's called, but it's basically, it's, like, mood manipulation, and, like, they do it with, like, with, like, sounds or, like, smells and, you know, stuff like that, just anything for, like, any of your five senses. And so that's basically what we did here. You know? And so, like, that's something that's done in, like, experiments, like all the time. (F3)

Felicia offered this further reflection on how the Spanish 555 experience could be related to a science career. Although the two domains are radically different in terms of content, Felicia saw value in the experience of performance before an audience as a way of growing accustomed to public speaking and presentation.

For performance, um, I think, you know, like, that can happen in any sort of field, just be- like, in research, like, you have to give talks all the time, right? Like, you go to a conference, you have to ... give your spiel, right? You know, even if it's, like, ten minutes, like, you have to be up there and, like, be confident and know what you're saying, and, obviously, be well-prepared, rehearsed, like, you know, you just don't, like, wing it, you know? And so, I mean, that's like what you do

in a play. Like, you have your lines, you rehearse it, you, like, have, probably, like, the gestures that you want to, like, make to emphasize certain points, and then, um, and then you make, you'll have like a visual point, usually you'll have, like, um, like a PowerPoint or, like, some sort of, like, slide show, and – you do that in plays as well. So, um, yeah, so I feel like this is very applicable to even, like, the science field, if you do research, like, for example, like, you have to be able to perform well and, like, perform with confidence and, you know, know what you're talking about. Um, oh, yeah, and definitely, like, the confidence, I feel like, is very important, like, to be well-assured and, you know, deliver your lines, like, you know, as if you really know what you're talking about and, like, totally, like, agree, and like, you know, really just, like, yeah, understand what you're saying, so ... Yes, I feel like that'd be helpful in that sense. (F3)

Participants perceived connections between their target-language theatre experience and a variety of their anticipated possible future experiences. In addition to a few who mentioned the possibility of future L2 theatre experiences, participants mentioned graduate study, upcoming study abroad experiences, and pursuit of an academic career in psychology that would entail public speaking at professional conferences.

#### *Insight Into the World of Graduate Students and Graduate Studies*

One of the most surprising findings of this investigation, in the view of the researcher, was the unexpected number of comments made by interviewees about how interesting it was for them as UGs to get a glimpse into the lives of their GS classmates. This outcome of the investigation was unprecedented in the research literature I reviewed for this study, given that very few theorists focused on mixed-level productions. Of the few that did, none of them looked into the experience of the UG participants to uncover this particular facet.

The participants had certainly interacted with GSs before, but almost exclusively in their roles as teaching assistants, within a classroom and under the sway of a power hierarchy. To share the classroom

with them as fellow students during Phase I had been an interesting change for a couple of the participants (notably David), and to come to know them as peers and interact with them on a fairly level playing field during Phase II had been a revelation for many of them. Cassie remarked that “just hanging out with the people in the class, you know, at the party or ... during rehearsals or something, just kind of seeing what, you know, graduate school kind of was like, was kind of interesting.” (C2)

David took things a step farther. When I asked him what lasting impressions he felt the experience had left him with, he responded,

The biggest lasting impression, I would say, was that it encourages me to go to grad school.

Because in addition to seeing ... how they are completely different than undergraduate students in class, we also had the second portion of the class which involved a lot of just, basically, hanging out with graduate students. I mean we ... even, whether it was going out after rehearsals or performances, or, you know, like, meeting up to construct costumes. So, I got to know a lot of them personally. And I realized, sort of ... what it means to be a graduate student, or what that sort of lifestyle is like, and how it would - is different from my own, right now. So, it certainly encouraged me to - to like, you know, start doing my applications now, and stuff like that. Not that I wasn't considering it before, but it - I'm more excited about it now ... Generally, being a grad student is just more accessible now. (D3)

David felt that his experience in Spanish 555, especially the key moment of witnessing John openly disagree with Profe on the interpretation of a text and have a genuine intellectual debate about hermeneutics during class, had served as something of an initiation. He felt that through this course he had begun to be socialized into a community of practice, and that he now knew a bit more about what *to* expect as well as what would be expected *of* him in graduate school, both in and outside of the classroom.



David also undertook some perspective-taking about the GS experience in Spanish 555. If the UGs were initially intimidated but eventually attained a level of comfort with interactions, how must the GSs have perceived their less-advanced classmates, he mused?

It really makes me wonder what it's like for the graduate students in class with undergraduate students, because at a certain point, I mean, you could imagine, they'd be, like, "what are these people doing here? They have no idea what they're talking about!" Um, but at - at another p- well, purely, purely logistical reasons, they have a lot of "cannon fodder" actors to play all the minor parts! (laughter) (D3)

Joking aside, David did consider that there might be real benefits to GSs in working closely with UGs as peers on a joint project, benefits that could accrue to their abilities as teaching assistants in other courses.

I was thinking, I mean, if I imagine the life of a normal TA here, if they take this class, and now they have, not only is it now, like a peer relationship that they're able to teach the other undergraduate students, but also, the class was only seventeen people large, which means, if, if one TA then teaches one thing to an undergraduate student in, in that class, then that's much more of a personal connection than they're going to get with their, with their actual classes. I mean obviously unless you do office hours or whatever. (D3)

Gail also commented on the importance of the presence of GSs in the course for her. She was about to graduate and had plans to begin a graduate program in film studies during the next academic year. She compared Spanish 555 to one of her film studies courses that had also included GS classmates:

Yeah, so that was interesting to see, sort of, the grad students in general, um, with, not only just, um - In my film class it was more relevant to what I probably will do when I go to grad school. But in the Spanish class it was - I guess I worked with them more, so I got to know what a little bit of it, what it's like to be a grad student. ... I think it was a little more casual, I guess, in a way,

because it wasn't, I guess, really relevant to what I'll be doing, but I still sort of learned a lot about that sort of world. (G3)

Gail expanded upon her ambitions for her forthcoming graduate studies, and explained that she appreciated the chance to work with GSs in Spanish 555 because she hoped to become a teaching assistant, and she regarded them as role models for balancing their own TA responsibilities with involvement in the Spanish 555 production along with their other studies.

I got accepted to their Masters in Critical Studies program. It looks really interesting, it's a lot of, like, film theory and film history. Um, but they do have awesome production studios, so that's – hopefully will be something I can take advantage of. Um, I'm allowed, I, I think I need to do, like, eight credits of electives, so I'm wondering if that possibly could be an elective. Um, yeah, so a lot of, I guess, film analysis, looking at films, writing papers on films, which I'm not, you know, too gung-ho on. But hopefully it'll be a nice community of very intelligent people who are passionate about film. I'm a little scared, 'cause it's kind of, it's kind of intimidating, you know? Going to grad school, especially into, like, a big, fairly well-known place. ... I'm not entirely sure what I want to do with the Masters. I might go on to my Ph.D. Um, if not, I'm certainly in a good place, having, um, a Masters in film from a university in [city], I'll know the area, I'll hopefully know some people, I'll hopefully have other opportunities, maybe as a producer or something. So, yeah, I, I hope – actually, one of the reasons why I was looking at a lot of my fellow students who are grad students, I mean, obviously I hope to TA someday, 'cause, um, it's nice to have money, and it's also an interesting experience, I think that, I don't know, it's just something that I'd like to try. So hopefully I'll get to do that. And yeah, I'm not, I'm s-, I'm s-, I'm really happy to go to grad school, 'cause it is s-, you know, a great opportunity to learn more, but it's also sort of scary because it's new. And it, I won't have as much time to do stuff like Spanish, or theatre. So, yeah, it's a, it's a change, but hopefully it'll be a good change. (G3)

UGs' appreciation for the opportunity to interact with GSs as peers and to gain a glimpse into the world of GS life proved to be one of the most surprising findings of the present investigation. It was clear from their comments that the participants had begun to see their GS classmates as potential role models for their own possible future graduate studies.

### *Finding the "Right Fit"*

One of the aspects of L2 theatre production that most intrigues me as a researcher is the challenge of play selection: how does the instructor/director find a text that will fit a diverse group of students? Various models are available. Some instructors choose a text *a priori*, without necessarily knowing who will be in the class. They may have an idea of enrollment numbers (although the possibility of adds and/or drops must always be accounted for), they may have an idea of the expected gender distribution, they may already know or have worked with some of the students they expect to take the course, but typically there are a lot of unknown variables, and, unlike other theatre scenarios in which directors can select and reject participants from an audition pool, in this setting the instructor needs to work with the strengths and limitations of the enrolled students. Nonetheless, somehow instructors seem to find suitable scripts, students seem to "grow into their roles," and by the end of the production all the participants usually agree that the chosen play was the best possible fit for their particular group. Participants marvel at how well an individual's previously unrevealed talent satisfied the demands of the script, or how someone just happened to have a background in an area that the production drew on, or what a phenomenal job this or that student did of executing his or her role.

One possible explanation for this phenomenon may lie in van Lier's (2000, 2004, 2010) ecological framework for language learning. The dramatic text and the learning environment of target-language theatre come to constitute a network of affordances within which participants establish relationships and are able to derive what they need for their growth and development, based on what is available and what they are developmentally ready to exploit. The director initially assigns roles based

upon what s/he knows and perceives about the students' present skills, abilities, and strengths, as well as what s/he infers or intuitively about what various students may be able to achieve with the proper support. Lutzker (2007) also notes that the diverse array of tasks and responsibilities required in a target-language theatre production permits students to assume highly individuated roles that allow them to address their own specific learning needs. (p. 433) In this way, participants are able to collaboratively grow into their roles and help one another to rise to the expectations set out for them. By the time of the performances, participants have had many opportunities to develop exactly what they need to successfully execute their responsibilities.

The participants in French 555 felt this way about *L'oeuvre absurde*, and the students of Spanish 555 were no different in their assessment of *La obra absurda*. I was interested in their comments about how the specific texts and their manifest content fit with the makeup of the participants and the resources at their disposal, especially because they came about through two different strategies: Prof had made an *a priori* executive decision to use *L'oeuvre absurde*, based on his own interest in the text and an idea of the number and gender of participants who were pre-registered for the course. Profe, on the other hand, preferred to expose the students to a number of texts during Phase I and then select a text for production by having them vote for the one they felt would be the best fit for the class.

David had initially preferred *La obra absurda* for its humor, as opposed to the other leading candidate, a very serious "issue play" about illegal immigration:

[B]etween these two, I mean, they're similar in structure, they have a lot of characters, and they are in these sort of separate scenes, uh, put together ... I think that one is sort of more postmodern and, I think *La obra absurda* just leans that way. Um, but what I didn't like about that is that I knew ... almost none of us had acted before. And, I felt like ... if you haven't acted before, and a whole group of you, and you're trying to do something, that if you have a choice between farce and tragedy, that farce is going to be a lot easier to do, like, a respectable job. (D2)

Another aspect of *La obra absurda* in this vein that David reflected upon was the way that it drew on various realms of “amateur expertise” that the participants possessed, not necessarily related to either their studies or theatre backgrounds. Nonetheless, these abilities became extremely valuable contributions to the staging of the production. One of the members of the Spanish 555 class was a gifted photographer and possessed a lot of design and layout expertise. Another knew how to sew. Several were talented dancers, and one had experience with choreography. There were also a number of singers and instrumentalists in the group. These skills were put to use in publicity, in costuming, and in staging several scenes, among them a musical performance that served as the prologue and a festival ritual dance that took place later in the show.

The text of *La obra absurda* provided only the lyrics for the prologue song, with no indications as to how to score it for performance. The musicians in the cast debated whether to try to fit the lyrics to an existing tune or to write their own from scratch. The consensus was that although it seemed daunting at first blush, writing an original tune would probably be faster, would guarantee that its musical demands were within the capabilities and limitations of the group, and would also be preferable on grounds of respecting intellectual property and avoiding copyright violations. Although there were a few false starts, key changes, and rocky rehearsals along the way, the end result was something of which the entire cast was rightfully proud.

David was one of the group’s musicians, and he was present for much of the process of writing, arranging, and rearranging a melody and chords to fit the lyrics. He recalled that

when we were putting together the *músico* thing ... I sort of liked the idea of ... folk bands, just people who don’t, you know, who can play instruments, just aren’t necessarily, like, the best. ... Um, so I thought that was cool that we could find people who played enough instruments to put together sort of this little musical group. (D2)

Several weeks later he revisited the topic:

I have to say I've always liked the idea ... I guess, with a ... band, with creating impromptu folk bands ... it's sort of like a community theatre thing, where people who, certainly amateurs, and not even "professional" amateurs, are, you know, putting on a play, and I think, I think it's really sort of a cool thing to do because it is sort of like the contemporary storytelling method. And, whereas films are incredibly expensive and take a lot of technical know-how, I think it's possible to put on plays with people who haven't had a lot of experience. So, that I got to do that rather than just talk about it, you know, being a cool idea, I think is very neat. And that it worked. 'Cause it's - it's one of those ideas that, "Yeah, that's great, everybody should do theatre," and then, if you actually do it, it never really turns out. So, the fact that my idea actually might work is something that'll stick with me. (D3)

David found this experience to be a powerful boost to his confidence, and something unique that he was proud to be able to say that he had done.

I think it definitely gave me more confidence to present any sort of artistic endeavor, or anything, you know, that I've created, to a public. Because I played guitar, and I - you know, sure, I play guitar, but, like, I'm not great, I'm not somebody who can say, "Yeah, I will play in front of ten thousand people, and it'll be great." So, I did that, and then I've acted. So I think between those two it just gives me an ability to just put what I have out there without being as afraid, or as paralyzed by the fact that it might not be very good. And, to re- and to make myself look at it and decide if it's actually good or not, and not hedge my bets too far to one side. (D3)

David's ability to play the guitar was just one among many criteria that Prof, Profe, and the Spanish 555 graduate assistants had noted in their process of assigning roles to the participants based on their limited background knowledge of each person's skills and potential in addition to a brief audition process. Emily offered her thoughts on the distribution of roles among the cast and how impressively the individual actors came to incarnate their characters.

Yeah, and, like, your casting was phenomenal. I can't imagine, like, - and, you know, after a while, just, no one could have had any different role. It was just perfect. And I think, you know, John was so awesome. Oh, my gosh. He was my favorite, by far. He was awesome, I just have to give him a shout out right now, because he was awesome. And, like, I just, yeah. It was – and the fact that you guys organized everything, also, I was thinking about that the other day, like, the fact that you chose, after, I mean, you know, we had, like, that wasn't even like a real casting, was it? I'm sure it's much more in-depth, what, we had, like, one hour, and you saw everybody in the class who wanted to act, which was most everybody, and you chose, and it was perfect. And I think every- everyone adopted their role. (E2)

Heidi reflected on this aspect of theatre production and on how the participants of *La obra absurda* seemed to grow into their roles fairly seamlessly.

I would say my expectations from, like, Day One of choosing this production have totally superseded anything I could have expected. I was not one of the ones that really wanted to do this one because I thought it would be, like, a huge time commitment, and I was really nervous about having to, like, put forth all that effort. But now, like, in hindsight, like, I couldn't imagine it any other way. (H2)

When asked about how this tends to happen with play productions, Heidi remarked that

[i]t's interesting that it usually does, because I've been in so many situations where it's the opposite, you know? ... just, like, student organizations and things like that. Like, generally I've found that if I give - I'm, like, a co-chair of a committee in a pretty big [organization] on campus. There's like 200 of us. So I have a committee of like 15 or 20. And you'll give them something to do, and they'll be really excited about it, but really, at the end of the day, it's, like, on their back burner. And they, like, usually drop it, or you throw something together really quick in like 24

hours before it happens. So I just think that, like, in theatre, like, it usually is the opposite, people do really take ownership of it and like run away with it, is a really cool concept. (H2)

I asked Heidi (who had some prior theatre experience from high school productions) if this had always been the case, in her experience, or if she had ever participated in a play that had not turned out well, in which the participants had not really coalesced as a group or embraced their roles.

No, it has always worked out ... And those were in high school, so it really was like, then, I think it's, people find it such, like, a defining thing? Like when you're in high school it's like your clique, you're like, "I'm in theatre!" Like, "I do the musicals." So I think people are really, like, driven to make things succeed then, too. (H2)

Heidi also commented on the trajectory of her perceptions about the play and its potential for success. Early in the semester she reported feeling overwhelmed and doubtful as to whether the group would be able to successfully accomplish the goal of putting on the play.

I was super intimidated the first week, just thinking, like, "Oh, my gosh, I'm going to have to read all these plays in, like, Spanish," and knowing, like, just theatre has so many cultural contexts, and, like, colloquial language, and- so I was really overwhelmed, but as, like, we got into the swing of things, it got a lot better. Like, learning how to analyze the theatre, I was clueless on the first couple of papers, too. I was writing, like, whatever I could and didn't really understand, but I really started to get the swing of things after, just, like, being involved in conversation, and, like, just reading the plays, basically helps a lot. And finding additional resources online that tell me about things. Um, yeah, I didn't really know what to expect about producing the show. Because it was such a short period of time and everything, I was kind of skeptical whether that would actually, like, come together, but it seems like everyone is really experienced and able to put in the time and the effort, which is like basically all it takes. If



someone's willing to do it, then it'll get done. So I've been pleasantly surprised with the whole production aspect of things. (H1)

As Heidi notes, it is more common than otherwise that most productions do come together relatively successfully by the end of the rehearsal period. Therefore, there must be a mechanism (beyond invoking a type of popular theatrical mysticism that "it's amazing how everything just falls into place and everyone is so perfect for their roles") to explain this degree of success. Heidi perceptively observes that for many participants, they invest a great deal of their identity into their work on theatre productions, which surely accounts for part of the phenomenon. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, and as I shall explore in greater detail in Chapter 5, I believe that van Lier's (2000, 2004, 2010) ecological framework and his understanding of affordances within learning environments offer explanatory potential as well.

#### Conclusion

Participants in French 555 and Spanish 555 discussed a broad array of details related to their experiences of being part of a target-language theatre production. Many of their comments clustered around a number of central themes. The social aspects of the experience were prominently mentioned, among them the intimidation that participants universally reported when they compared their relatively lower L2 proficiency with that of the graduate students and, in particular, the native speakers in the courses. Participants also commented upon the profound changes to the classroom hierarchy during Phase II of the project, and the way those changes impacted class interactions. Participants made comparisons between the present course and production and their previous language learning and/or theatre experiences. They talked about ways in which they achieved new understandings, frequently through encountering and solving problems related to the production. They reflected on the sense of interdependence they developed with their fellow participants and talked about connections they perceived between the plays and their other studies, sometimes within French or Spanish and sometimes across wildly divergent domains. They discussed the experience of inhabiting the world of their

characters, and slipping back and forth between their character's identity and their own. They talked about their linguistic progress, and they likened it to stepping into character as an L2 speaker. They also spoke about the value they perceived in sharing the experience with graduate students and how this shaped their perception of their own future possibilities as potential graduate students. They also reflected on the process of coming to inhabit the world of the chosen play and feeling that they had found a perfect fit between the group of participants and the selected text.

Emily offered the following summary of the ways she felt the Spanish 555 experience had impacted her linguistic, literary, and social development, touching on many of the aforementioned themes:

I think, in addition to the things I said, um, I feel, like, smarter! I don't know if I can say that, but I feel like I learned so much! And I feel like I was, like, able to experience something that not everyone gets to experience. You know, not everyone gets to do a play in college when they're not a theatre major. You know what I'm saying? So, like, I - I really felt, you know, like, yeah, like smarter, and that I was, like, honor- I, honored to, like, be a part of it, you know? And to work with graduate students who have so much to say and who are really smart and, you know, they were all so nice and helpful and, you know, I really do think, you know, not just as, like, a student, it changed me, but as a person, because I just feel like I appreciate theatre more. And I think that's really important. And not just theatre, but all art. You know, beyond, like, words, 'cause, you know, I love reading, I love writing, and so, you know, to visualize words, I think, it changed me a lot. Because now, when I'm reading "not theatre," like, I can picture it better. And I can think, like, "Oh, how would this be, you know, alive? How would this conversation that's being described to me?" in, like, third person omniscient, even, like, I can visualize it better. And I think that's really what it helped me with reading theatre, is to visualize all literature, which is really important in understanding. (E3)

In the next chapter, I will explore the relationship between these themes and Bakhtin's dialogized heteroglossia (1981, 1986) and his concept of carnival (1965/1968). I will explore how turning a Bakhtinian lens on these findings can help language practitioners and curriculum designers better understand the experiences of undergraduate students in this type of course, and I will demonstrate the value of target-language theatre within the university L2 curriculum in theoretical terms. I will also look at how some of these themes relate to van Lier's (2000, 2004, 2010) ecological framework for language learning and the concept of affordances within the learning environment.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

### Introduction

This chapter contains a discussion of the findings of my study on the experience of undergraduate participants involved in mixed-level target-language theatre productions in a university foreign language department, and its implications for future target-language theatre courses as well as for the university FL curriculum more broadly. In this chapter, I will review my research questions, and I will briefly recapitulate the themes that emerged from my analysis. I will then interpret these themes in light of Bakhtin's (1965/1968, 1981, 1986) theories of carnival and dialogized heteroglossia as well as Van Lier's (2000, 2004, 2010) ecological framework for language learning. I will discuss the limitations of the present investigation, as well as the implications that can be derived from this study on target-language theatre courses and applied to more conventional courses within the FL curriculum, both lower-level basic language courses and more advanced literature and linguistics courses. I will also discuss directions for future research.

My findings encompass a series of themes that emerged from an iterative analysis of interview data. The interrelated nature of the themes reflects the complexity of the target-language theatre experience and the difficulty of neatly separating its impacts into discrete categories. As a reflection of lived experience, in which many impressions and sensations flow into and beget one another, this phenomenological study demonstrates the complex and multifaceted nature of theatre-based language learning. My participants experienced a range of responses to multiple features of this dynamic learning environment. They took an active part in shaping it at the same time that they were shaped by it, and the findings reflect this complexity. A number of theoretical lenses prove useful for interpreting the findings. Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) concept of dialogized heteroglossia sheds light on the participants' appropriation of language. Bakhtin's (1965/1968) theory of carnival helps to make sense of the social dynamics at play

among the participants in the French 555 and Spanish 555 productions. In light of van Lier's (2000, 2004, 2010) ecological framework, the interviews demonstrate that at various times participants perceived different affordances of the target-language theatre environment and used them to further their own learning.

## Part A: The Present Study

### *Epistemology*

I chose phenomenology as a suitable methodology for studying a complex, socially-embedded phenomenon from the point of view of the participating students. Phenomenology is an appropriate framework for research that aims at understanding human experience. For a phenomenon such as target-language theatre, which can be seen as a complement to more traditional FL courses, it seems appropriate to study it with phenomenology, an approach which can complement the more mainstream, positivist currents of SLA research.

In this chapter, I use the concrete knowledge shared by my participants as a base for further interpretation and creative theorization. I draw on the information they shared with me and the themes that emerged from the analysis, and I make sense of those themes by considering them in light of theories that help to contextualize them.

### *Research Questions*

I began with a fairly broad initial research question: *What is it like to be a participant in this type of course?* A target-language theatre production is a relatively unique learning environment within the university FL curriculum, and such a course that enrolls both undergraduate and graduate students is rarer still. My first research question, then, seeks to gain a general sense of what the experience of this particular learning environment is like.

My second research question narrows its focus to the social context of the interactions that happen within the course. In particular, it acknowledges that in a course focused on bringing a common

capstone project (the play production) to fruition, the participants will come to constitute a learning community that represents a range of expertise (linguistic and otherwise) distributed among its various members. What is the experience like for students who play supporting roles or bit parts? What about students who might struggle to keep up with their classmates, or students who are intimidated about speaking the L2 because they feel self-conscious about their own limitations? Are aspects of participating in L2 theatre helpful to them, or difficult, or possibly both? In order to focus on these questions, I formulated my second research question as follows: *What benefits and limitations do learners experience when engaged in theatre production with more advanced peers?*

Finally, the positioning of French 555 and Spanish 555 at the juncture of graduate and advanced undergraduate coursework led to the presence of some readily apparent distinctions in social identity. It was readily apparent from their spontaneous comments that the NNS UGs perceived themselves to be less adept at using the target language than their NNS GS classmates as well as the NSs of both levels. I was interested in what effect these social identities might have on the experience, so I incorporated them into my third and most specific research question: *What do undergraduate L2 learners experience as a result of taking this course alongside GS and NS classmates?*

#### *Bracketing*

The process of *epoché* was an important step in my investigation of undergraduate participation in mixed-level target-language theatre courses and productions. Articulating and bracketing my assumptions allowed me to approach French 555 and Spanish 555 with a more open mind and a greater willingness to listen to what my informants had to say. *Epoché* also helps to provide evidence of the legitimacy of the phenomenological researcher's findings. One criticism of qualitative research is that it can be prone to self-confirming but invalid conclusions, based on non-representative cherry-picked evidence that allows researchers to find exactly what they were looking for by ignoring data that doesn't support the conclusion they are predisposed to reach. I would counter that this criticism can (and should)

be applied to *poorly designed and executed* research, both qualitative and quantitative, and that good qualitative research builds in mechanisms whereby the researcher can identify and correct tendencies toward self-confirming conclusions. Within phenomenology, *epoché* is one of these mechanisms.

Some of the assumptions and preconceptions I identified at the outset of this investigation, that were subsequently challenged by my findings, included:

- my own skepticism about mixed-level target-language theatre courses. I worried that the presence of GSs in the course might rob the UGs of the opportunity to play leading roles and derive the consequent linguistic benefits.
- my assumption that the course would primarily appeal to “theatre people”: that it would attract students who had a longstanding interest in the performing arts and who already possessed at least some theatre experience in the L1.
- my preconceptions about what types of dramatic texts were most appropriate, in terms of both content and language. I felt that realistic plays were more appropriate than absurdism because in the former the verbal exchanges would have more real-world relevance; and that comedies were preferable to dramatic or tragic works for holding the audience’s attention and providing greater opportunities for broad physical comedy to support the text.
- my opinions about how to organize a production calendar and how to structure a rehearsal process in order to meet what I assumed were the primary goals of the project. I had expectations for what needed to happen, in what order and with what approximate time frame, based on my experiences in previous theatre productions.

The broader focus of this research is, appropriately, on my participants’ experience more so than on my changes in perspective as a result of the investigation, but I will briefly explain how I deepened my understanding of target-language theatre as a phenomenon by suspending each of the aforementioned

assumptions and learning from what my participants revealed during the interviews. Regarding the value of conducting L2 theatre courses in a mixed-level environment, my participants all admitted that they were initially intimidated about sharing the classroom with GSs, but the transition to the theatre brought a dynamic shift and unexpected benefits from the opportunity to interact with GSs on new footing. In particular, I was surprised that some of the participants reported that they had begun to consider graduate school, and specifically graduate study in the target language, as a possibility for their own futures.

Regarding my assumption that the course would attract self-identified “theatre people,” some of the undergraduates did indeed have prior acting or other theatrical experience, but by no means was this the case for all of them. One participant, Anne, had no interest or prior experience in theatre whatsoever and initially did not want to take the course at all, but she was obligated to do so because she needed an elective to graduate at the end of the semester and French 555 was the only option in the catalog that was compatible with her schedule. In spite of her initial reluctance, she found the theatre course to be a very satisfying experience. Even those students with the most iconic “theatre person” profiles surprised me in how they responded to the course. Cassie, for example, was a theatre major and an experienced actress, and she played one of the lead roles in the Spanish 555 production. If I had known that at the beginning of the semester, I would have expected Cassie to have been one of the most active participants throughout the course and to volunteer her expertise in interpreting the text, developing blocking, formulating objectives, brainstorming ideas for stage business, and other dimensions of staging a play. However, Cassie was instead one of the most reserved students, both during the classroom Phase I and, somewhat, during Phase II. In spite of already being familiar with some of the course’s source texts (for example, Stanislavski, 1936/1964; and Pavis, 1996/2003), having read them in English for her coursework in the theatre department, Cassie was quite reticent in classroom discussions, only speaking up during small-group work and never volunteering comments in front of the whole class. On the day she auditioned, Profe, the other graduate assistant, and I realized that we had quite literally never heard her voice before



that point in the semester. Even after winning a major role in the play, Cassie continued to be somewhat shy about socializing with the rest of the group. She also resisted taking a leadership role in developing the staging of *La obra absurda* because her prior training had instilled in her the belief that it was a *faux pas* for anyone but the director to offer direction or make suggestions. In spite of her reserve, however, she enjoyed the project very much and derived a lot of benefit from it. Throughout the project, Cassie's report was a helpful reminder to me that I needed to set aside my assumptions about how she (or any of the participants) would respond to the experience.

My research on the French 555 and Spanish 555 productions also challenged my assumptions about the suitability of certain types of texts. Both groups performed absurdist works that employed predominantly modern language, but that used it in sometimes surprising and challenging ways. Although these absurdist texts initially caused some confusion and difficulty, ultimately they became the source of some very productive wordplay and humor, and, contrary to my preconceptions, represented an excellent learning opportunity for the NNSs. Furthermore, both texts were largely comedic up until the final few scenes, during which the tone abruptly changed and became tragic. The physical comedy in the earlier scenes was indeed engaging, but in no way did this cause the tragic final scenes to be boring in comparison; rather, they were absolutely riveting, in spite of or perhaps even because of the strong contrast with the lighter mood that prevailed earlier. I had not anticipated that tragedy and drama in combination with comedy could be a particularly powerful formula for a target-language theatre.

Working on this research project and observing Prof's and Profe's approaches opened my eyes to new possibilities vis-à-vis course organization. I also learned from comparing some of the differences between the two course models. For French 555, Prof pre-selected a text with an appropriate number of characters (or one that would be adaptable to the number and gender of students in the course) and with engaging and challenging but accessible content. He then assembled a syllabus of historical background information, criticism and theory relevant to that specific work, playwright and time period or style. In

this respect, Phase I of French 555 was more or less a half-semester seminar on the playwright and Theatre of the Absurd. Profe used a slightly different approach. She selected half a dozen plays by different authors, from different countries, and from roughly the same time period but encompassing different styles. She also chose theoretical readings and criticism that were either broadly applicable to contemporary Latin American theatre more generally, or that were relevant to a specific play. She also sought plays with an appropriate number of characters and engaging, challenging, and accessible content; from these, she assembled a selection of plays with a variety of styles and themes. Thus, Phase I of Spanish 555 was more akin to a survey course of Contemporary Latin American Theatre than to a seminar. The group was then responsible for selecting, by vote, the plays they like the best, and for reaching a consensus on which one to perform. Before voting, Profe and the students discussed the advantages and disadvantages of each text, anticipating which aspects of its production would be user-friendly and which ones would be challenging.

There were also other differences between my expectations about production aspects, such as how to organize a rehearsal/production calendar, how to structure rehearsals, when to set memorization deadlines, how to approach blocking, etc., and how Prof and Profe proceeded. It was useful for me to suspend my assumptions and watch how other instructor-directors approached these matters, as well as to watch how the student participants responded to them. One of the notable things I observed was that participants with preexisting expectations (like those that I was deliberately bracketing) were more likely to voice frustration with those aspects of the production. The participants with more previous theatre experience had more defined standards of comparison, whereas participants who were relatively new to theatre adapted readily. This observation was illuminating: students who bring prior theatre experience to the course also bring their prior expectations about method and process, and may become frustrated if their expectations differ from the instructor's approach, while inexperienced students may have an easier time adapting to his/her directorial style.

Throughout my research on participation in target-language theatre, I found bracketing to be an important as well as a very useful component of the phenomenological approach. I believe that articulating my presuppositions served a necessary preparatory function in helping me to approach French 555 and Spanish 555 with openness to alternative perspectives, and it helped me to notice, better understand, and occasionally be surprised by what my participants had to say. Furthermore, the ability to be surprised by one's findings serves as a reliable indicator that one has not designed a self-confirming study, and functions as an assurance that one has uncovered something not previously known or assumed. Thus, the phenomenological *epoché* served its purpose in the present study.

#### *Data Collection and Results*

As outlined in the previous chapters, my investigation consisted of a pilot study with two participants of French 555, followed by the main investigation with six participants of Spanish 555. Both courses were divided into a literature-focused Phase I prior to the semester break, followed by a rehearsal-and-production-focused Phase II that began after the mid-semester break and continued through the end of the term, culminating in performances shortly before final exams.

#### *Pilot Study*

The purpose of a pilot study is to practice one's interview skills and refine one's technique, as well as to identify potential weaknesses in the research design and remedy them ahead of the main investigation. My pilot study with French 555 did exactly that, allowing me to improve my subsequent data collection with the Spanish 555 participants.

#### *Main Investigation*

I carried out my main data collection according to my revised research plan and conducted a three-part series of non-directed phenomenological interviews with six undergraduate L1 English participants from Spanish 555. Once all of the interviews were transcribed, I began the process of analyzing them for themes. I compiled a preliminary list of themes based on iterative readings of the

interviews. The next step was to refine these themes by determining how they related to one another and where the boundaries between them were. A number of the themes I had generated were broadly similar but subtly different, and articulating their definitions and distinctions was an important step in coming to understand what my data revealed.

It is not surprising in a phenomenological investigation that themes should flow into one another; humans generally experience - and describe - complex phenomena as having many interrelated components that intersect and influence one another, and they typically do not compartmentalize their experiences into neatly separated little boxes. Spurling (1977) describes it thus: “Experience, understood phenomenologically, is essentially *open*: it blends with other experiences of mine to create structures and patterns, and blends with the experiences of other persons to create intersubjective meanings, and to found communication.” (p. 41, emphasis original) In looking at the structures and patterns my participants described, my task as the researcher was to step back, analyze them from a critical distance, define what distinguished one from another, and interpret them. The next section of this chapter describes my thematic categories and subtopics in greater detail.

#### *Recapitulation of Themes*

I began by grouping similar themes together into categories, and eventually sorted a number of them into primary themes with secondary themes as subtopics. My first primary theme was “Social Aspects of Participation,” with subcategories related to the types of interactions that took place among the participants and their feelings about them (“Intimidation and Relative Language Proficiency”, “Suspension of Hierarchy”, “Freedom of Communication”, and “Comfort with Class Interactions”). A second major theme was “Comparisons to Previous Experience,” having to do with participants’ theatre backgrounds or lack thereof, as well as with their prior language study. Another major category, “New Understandings and Meaning-Making,” encompassed participants’ reports of various epiphanies they experienced throughout the course, particularly through encountering and solving problems.

“Interdependence” was another primary theme that included a variety of reflections on connections the participants perceived between something having to do with themselves or the course and something or someone else, including the subcategories “Interdependence of All Participants”, “Curriculum Integration”, and “Connections to Other Domains”. There was a category that focused on the kinesthetic aspects of the experience having to do with “Embodiment/Metaxis” with subtopics addressing how these processes were facilitated and how they were hindered. Another more cognitively-focused category contained participants’ comments about linguistic aspects of the project, with subtopics on “Pronunciation”, “Motivation to Continue Improving”, “The Liberating Effect of Preformed Utterances”, and “Linguistic Metaxis”. Another category, “Relationship to (Possible) Future Experiences,” detailed participants’ speculations about their future plans and ways that the target-language theatre production may bear a relationship to how those develop, especially regarding the subtopic of future graduate study. A final category, “Finding the Right Fit,” contained observations about how, despite early misgivings about the challenges of putting on the chosen play, by the end of the rehearsal period the participants had come to inhabit their roles and were astonished at how well each participant suited the part s/he played.

*Discussion of Themes in Relation to Bakhtin and van Lier*

In this section, I offer an interpretation of my findings using theoretical insights obtained from Bakhtin’s (1981, 1985) theory of dialogized heteroglossia to explore how the participants appropriated the language of the theatre text to populate it with their own voices and intentions. I also interpret my findings on the social dimensions of the experience using Bakhtin’s (1965/1968) theory of Carnival as it relates to the social dynamics at play in French 555 and Spanish 555, particularly during Phase II of the courses. Finally, I draw on van Lier’s (2000, 2004, 2010) ecological framework for language learning to understand the mixed-level target-language theatre setting as a learning environment that offers a wide array of highly individuated content and experiences.

### *Dialogized Heteroglossia*

Dialogism and heteroglossia are frequently invoked in the study of literature and literary theory. More recently, however, they have been used by language education and SLA scholars to study language use as it relates to real world interactions in educational environments; important publications include edited volumes by Ball and Freedman (2004) and Hall *et al.* (2005). Holquist (1990) describes the reciprocity between artistic literary language and the language of everyday life:

[A]rt and life are recognized by Bakhtin to be different places contained by a larger unit of which they are constituents. Both art and lived experience are aspects of the same phenomenon, the heteroglossia of words, values, and actions whose interaction makes dialogue the fundamental category of dialogism. For while art and life, when conceived as abstract topics *in general*, have no connections between them, in the experience of particular living subjects who consume works of art, who, as it were, “utter” them, there is a possibility for effecting exchange. Art and life are two different registers of dialogue that can be conceived only in dialogue. They are both forms of representation; therefore they are different aspects of the same imperative to mediate that defines all human experience. (p. 111)

Theatre is a domain in which the boundary between the literary and extra-literary aspects of dialogism grows especially fluid. When actors interpret a character or a scene, they draw on memories of their own lived experiences to bring depth and dimension to their performance. When designers choose music, costumes, props, scenographic and other production elements for a play, they likewise participate in dialogic interactions with diverse aspects of lived experience both within and beyond literature. In a target-language context, the dialogic interactions cross cultural and linguistic boundaries and an additional layer of heteroglossia is overlaid upon the already complex interactions at play.

I offer here a very basic, simplified description of some of the dialogic and heteroglossic aspects of target-language theatre that form part of the context of the experiences of the participants in this

investigation. Any text-based speech act realized in the theatre (i.e. a line spoken by a character, or anything considered to be part of the play) can be described on the mimetic plane as one character seeking a response from another. Throughout rehearsals, the actors employ metaxis to simultaneously interact on the mimetic plane as characters while also collaborating (on the real-world plane) as actors to develop and refine effective performances of their roles. These text-based speech acts occur within a matrix of surrounding speech acts: conversations among the actors, crew, and director about how to achieve the desired interpretations and representations for the production. These conversations invoke the theatre text as well as myriad allusions to all manner of external references. Individually, the actors also interact with their characters and with the text to enrich their interpretations by developing a deeper understanding of the character (often developing their own backstory to drive the character's motivations and choices) and of the work as a whole. The rehearsal process is, furthermore, iterative; subsequent speech acts and line readings refer to and are built on prior ones, and the entire performance develops as an accretion of interactions over time. All of these interactions, of course, rest implicitly on prior experiences with the language; in a target-language production, they often rest more explicitly on preceding or ongoing language-learning endeavors.

In performance, the characters continue to interact on the mimetic plane while, through metaxis, the actors simultaneously interact to carry off a successful performance. The actors also seek the understanding and interpretation of the audience while, indirectly, the designers and crew do the same through their efforts to make effective use of their production design. Underlying both the rehearsals and the performances are the interactions with the playwright, who seeks understanding and interpretation by the director, performers, and crew, as well as the audience. In the Bakhtinian framework (cf. pp. 72-76 of *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 1986) the entire dramatic work is a single utterance by the author, directed toward the reader/spectator, even while it encompasses myriad subordinate utterances between

characters, directed to one another but also toward the spectators. The work is also a link in a chain of other works that it refers to and that may also refer to it.

In the present investigation, Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism, heteroglossia, and double-voiced discourse prove useful for interpreting several aspects of my participants' reports of their experiences. Their comments on how the French 555 and Spanish 555 courses related to their previous experiences with theatre and language learning, how it raised their awareness of their interdependence with their peers, and the connections they perceived between the plays and other domains place target-language theatre in a dialogic relationship to these other experiences. Heteroglossia and double-voiced discourse inform many of the participants' observations about the linguistic aspects of the target-language theatre experience, especially those having to do with the liberating effects of communication through the voice of a character using already-formulated utterances. The following sections will explore the insights that Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) theories yield when considered alongside the interview data.

*Dialogism's relationship to the interdependence of participants and connections to other domains.*

Participants in the French 555 and Spanish 555 courses offered many observations that were categorized under the broad theme of "interdependence," organized into three subtopics: interdependence among all the participants in the course, resonances between French 555 or Spanish 555 and other courses in the university FL curriculum, and connections between the plays and other domains (other academic subjects or domains outside of academia altogether). Dialogism is useful for interpreting these findings. The participants saw their experiences, or aspects of them, as existing in a dynamic relationship with other experiences across time. The utterances that formed part of their work on the play and in the course were influenced by previous utterances of many kinds. Participants also reported that in some instances their work on the plays changed their understanding or appreciation of some of these past experiences, and they anticipated that some of their future experiences would be shaped by their current work on the



French 555 and Spanish 555 productions. This dynamic and longitudinal view of the experience fits within a dialogic perspective.

Dialogism is apparent in the way the participants viewed the contrast between Phase I and Phase II, and in the way they saw progressive growth in the importance of their individual contributions, however small, and in their overall ownership of the play. Felicia's remark that "it isn't just ... Profe's play ... it isn't just, like, her vision and her ideas and that's what we're gonna do" (F2) conveys a sense that during Phase I, on some level the texts *had* felt to her like "Profe's plays". In other words, her remark indicates that during the classroom portion of the semester, Felicia had viewed Profe as an expert on texts that she herself had not connected with or understood very clearly, but throughout Phase II, collaborative work on the production had increased both her understanding and her appreciation of the piece. By seeing individual contributions and suggestions come to fruition in the production, Felicia had engaged in an ongoing dialogue with *La obra absurda*.

Another dialogic aspect of the experience was highlighted for both Felicia and David by the appreciable difference it made when actors who had missed lines or delivered them poorly in early rehearsals eventually succeeded in mastering them. They cited various examples of minor characters and remarked that, small as those parts were, if they were missing from a scene, everyone was affected by the disruption. Likewise, everyone benefited from a single line well executed. Their appreciation for this aspect of stagecraft was informed by dialogism and by their ongoing relationship with the text. Eventual victory over a difficult line or scene was made all the sweeter by comparison to the previous struggles with the material. Heidi articulated this when she noted how fascinating it was to see that "every day is different ... every performance is different. And, it's always getting better - like, people have their off days ... but with that, like, you can always change, like how you're portraying things." (H2) Heidi also noticed that compliments from peers helped motivate her to develop her interpretation of her role. Gail likewise reflected on how absolutely essential interactive participation was for success in Spanish 555.

She pointed out that independent individual preparation of the material was a necessary but not sufficient complement to the collaborative group work of rehearsal. As she noted, in a rehearsal context one *must* be present and actively engaged with the material and one's classmates for the production to succeed. This, for Gail, was a key contrast between Spanish 555 and other courses she had taken at the university. The dialogic aspects of interaction were absolutely indispensable in the target-language theatre setting.

Another dialogic aspect of the French 555 and Spanish 555 relates to participants' reports of instances when they recalled something learned in another class as a result of some detail related to the French or Spanish play. In such moments, a present interaction was impacted by the memory of a previous conversation; in turn, the participant's recollection of the prior conversation was affected by insights gleaned from the present context. David spoke about this when a detail of the "*Teatro callejero* (Street theatre)" scene in *La obra absurda* led him, tangentially, to remember a conversation about North African immigration to Spain and his surprise at learning that racism factored prominently in the cultural landscape. He also spoke about how the contrast between peninsular and Latin American Spanish phonology evoked a deeper understanding of discussions he remembered from a phonology course he had previously taken. Heidi spoke about how her prior coursework on colonial Latin America shaped her understanding of the play and, simultaneously, how her work on the play led her to new insights on what she had learned in the colonial Latin America courses.

Participants in Spanish 555 also commented on the resonances between *La obra absurda* and some of the other dramatic texts included in Phase I of the semester. Many of them remarked that as a result of seeing their own understanding of *La obra absurda* deepen throughout the rehearsal phase, they felt that they would now be able to approach the other texts with a greater understanding of how to read them. In this way, they anticipated a future dialogic encounter with the other Phase I texts.

Participants also spoke about ways that their work on the play affected their understanding of a variety of subjects outside of their study of the target language, indeed, outside of academia altogether, and were in turn affected by it. Holquist (1990) stated that

Literary texts, like other kinds of utterance, depend not only on the activity of the author, but also on the place they hold in the social and historical forces at work when the text is produced and when it is consumed. Words in literary texts are active elements in a dialogic exchange taking place on several different levels at the same time ... simultaneity is found in the dialogue between an author, his characters, and his audience, as well as in the dialogue of readers with the character and their author. (pp. 68-69)

This was most immediately brought to bear as students noted parallels between the content of the plays and current political events at the time of the performances. They also considered their study of the historical context of the works during Phase I, and in some cases they transferred this knowledge to other domains. Emily, for example, reported that what she learned in Spanish 555 about how history is often told in a dominant narrative that silences marginalized voices proved relevant a few months later in a gender studies class. (E3)

Dialogism offers a means to interpret these participants' reflections on the connectedness of their target-language theatre experience to a variety of texts and conversations relating to diverse topics, taking place over an extended period of time. It allows us to appreciate the situated, contextualized nature of the experience within the larger curriculum. It also reveals that participants use insights from the the play to interpret other aspects of their lives, at the same time that they use insights from other aspects of their lives to better understand the dynamics of the play.

*Heteroglossia, double-voiced discourse, metaxis, and the liberating function of preformed utterances.*

Participants of French 555 and Spanish 555 made a number of observations about how entering the world of the play and memorizing its dialogue affected their relationship to the target language. Many are classified under “Embodiment/Metaxis” based on their relationship to the participants’ suspension of their identity in order to assume the identity of a character; others relate to the function of memorized lines in interactions and are categorized under “The Liberating Function of Preformed Utterances”. Heteroglossia and double-voiced discourse are useful concepts for interpreting participants’ comments on these subjects.

Bakhtin (1986) discusses how language is learned not as an abstract, recombinant system of discrete words and grammar rules, but rather through particular, contextualized utterances that hearers appropriate from speakers and refashion for their own purposes in other contexts. In “The Problem of Speech Genres”, Bakhtin declares that speakers organize what they say by means of utterances and *speech genres*, the various “relatively stable types of these utterances” (p. 60) developed in each sphere of language use. For Bakhtin, mastery of a language consists of mastering its associated speech genres:

We are given these speech genres in almost the same way that we are given our native language, which we master fluently long before we begin to study grammar. We know our native language – its lexical composition and grammatical structure – not from dictionaries and grammars but from concrete utterances that we hear and that we ourselves reproduce in live speech communication with people around us. We assimilate forms of language only in forms of utterances and in conjunction with these forms. The forms of language and the typical forms of utterances, that is, speech genres, enter our experience and our consciousness together, and in close connection with one another. To learn to speak means to learn to construct utterances (because we speak in utterances and not in individual sentences, and, of course, not in individual words). Speech genres organize our speech in almost the same way as grammatical (syntactical) forms do. ... If speech genres did not exist and we had not mastered them, if we had to originate

them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible.” (1986, pp. 78-79)

Bakhtin notes that mastery of speech genres, and thus language learning, occurs through exposure to and appropriation of others’ utterances, and that learners apprehend the characteristics of the speech genre as well as the unique expression with which the individual speaker infuses the particular utterance. They learn to harness others’ utterances to their own speech plans and infuse them with their own meanings, because while the words themselves may in theory be abstract and neutral, they are inevitably learned through particular encounters with contextualized speech events:

[W]ords can enter our speech from others’ individual utterances, thereby retaining to a greater or lesser degree the tones and echoes of individual utterances.

The words of a language belong to nobody, but still we hear those words only in particular individual utterances, we read them in particular individual works, and in such cases the words already have not only a typical, but also (depending on the genre) a more or less clearly reflected individual expression, which is determined by the unrepeatable individual context of the utterance.

Neutral dictionary meanings of the words of a language ensure their common features and guarantee that all speakers of a given language will understand one another, but the use of words in live speech communication is always individual and contextual in nature. Therefore, one can say that any word exists for the speaker in three aspects: as a neutral word of a language, belonging to nobody; as an *other’s* word, which belongs to another person and is filled with echoes of the other’s utterance; and, finally, as *my* word, for, since I am dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it is already imbued with my expression. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 88)

In the process of rehearsing a target-language dramatic text, the participants passed through successive stages of appropriation of its language. Some words were already familiar to them; others were entirely new, existing first as a word on the page, belonging to another, looked up in a dictionary as a neutral lexical item, and slowly incorporated into the student's own vocabulary. Target-language theatre gave participants of French 555 and Spanish 555 access to words framed within pre-existing, double-voiced and heteroglossic utterances originating with the playwrights and speaking in the multiple voices of various characters. Over time and with practice, they learned to imbue the words with the relevant situation and their character's speech plan, which they began to feel as their own through the function of metaxis. Gail was a striking example of this appropriation of utterances through metaxis. A self-described shy person, Gail executed a singer role which required her to master some difficult language as well as to project a commanding, assertive stage presence quite alien to her natural demeanor. As she described her growth into the role, she noted that "sometimes you just sort of forget that you're a shy person, or an actor on stage ... it's not completely losing yourself, but it's sort of like not really caring what people see of that person." (G3) This shedding of inhibitions through metaxis facilitated Gail's gradual mastery of her role's utterances and greater command of its attendant speech genres over the course of the project.

Gail's execution of the *músico* role is a useful example because it demonstrates how the metaxis of target-language theatre allows the performer to adopt both the language and the behaviors of another persona and, by extension, another culture. She was gradually able to adopt a new way of carrying herself and projecting her voice assertively to interpret the role. Time, practice, and metaxis allowed this foreign persona to become more natural to her. Noland (2009) describes Bourdieu's (1990) concept of *habitus* as the possession of

acquisitions, faculties that do not exist until they are learned ... it captures the odd temporality of the gestural, that sudden ownership of a capacity that is always virtually one's own (an innate

faculty of the moving body) and, paradoxically, something one obtains *only through the intermediary of the other*. (p. 24, emphasis in the original)

Turner (1982) reflects on how theatrical representation of another culture both complicates and facilitates the acquisition of habitus and the paralinguistic aspects of the target culture's representation:

[T]he task of communicating to the actors the setting and atmosphere of daily life in a very different culture proved quite formidable. In one's own society an actor tries to realize "individual character," but takes partly for granted the culturally defined roles supposedly played by that character: father, businessman, friend, lover, fiancé, trade union leader, farmer, poet, and so on. These roles are made up of collective representations shared by actors and audience, who are usually members of the same culture. By contrast, an actor who enacts [a target culture role] has to learn the cultural rules behind the roles played by the character he is representing. How is this to be done? Not, I think, by reading monographs in abstraction from performance, *then* performing the part. There must be a dialectic between performing and learning. One learns through performing, then performs the understanding so gained. (p. 94, emphasis in the original)

Gail's portrayal of the *músico* illustrates for us how target-language theatre provides the opportunity and propitious conditions for learning and acquiring the faculties and a degree of *habitus* of the foreign culture through the intermediaries of the target-language text and the assistance of the director and peers, especially including the native speakers and more experienced learners of the target culture.

In addition to metaxis, repeated practice over time is of fundamental importance in this learning environment. Theatre makes language-in-context repeatable and rehearsable, two extraordinarily valuable properties for learners of a target language. Children acquiring their native language are frequently exposed to repetition in the form of nursery rhymes, songs, and stories, in addition to thousands of hours of exposure to contextualized language use. L2 learners rarely have the opportunity to engage in the same kind of repetitious language play; however, theatre in the target language allows learners an alternative

way to absorb language through deliberate, collaborative repetition, exploration, and rehearsal of contextualized utterances.

Bakhtin also notes that particular speech genres and utterances are required for various contexts, social situations, and spheres of communication. One of the many advantages the native speaker has over the L2 learner is the much wider variety of social situations to which s/he is exposed, although Bakhtin notes that even they may be lacking in some spheres as compared with others:

Many people who have an excellent command of a language often feel quite helpless in certain spheres of communication precisely because they do not have a practical command of the generic forms used in the given spheres. Frequently a person who has an excellent command of speech in some areas of cultural communication, who is able to read a scholarly paper or engage in a scholarly discussion, who speaks very well on social questions, is silent or awkward in social conversations. Here it is not a matter of an impoverished vocabulary or of style, taken abstractly: this is entirely a matter of the inability to command a repertoire of genres of social conversation, the lack of a sufficient supply of those ideas about the whole of the utterance that help to cast one's speech quickly and naturally in certain compositional and stylistic forms, the inability to grasp a word promptly, to begin and end correctly (composition is very uncomplicated in these genres). (1986, p. 80)

Bakhtin's observation can easily be applied – with a few caveats – to L2 learners. In their particular cases, it may be partly a matter of impoverished vocabulary that prevents L2 learners from free participation in social conversations, but their reticence is also attributable to not having mastered the speech genres of the target culture. The participants of the present investigation said as much when they noted that they were accustomed to speaking Spanish in classroom discussions on academic topics, but they frequently struggled with it in other domains. Working with target-language theatre provided the participants with utterances already framed as speech genres within interactional contexts derived from the target culture.



They appreciated the opportunity to learn and practice the colloquialisms and everyday exchanges built into the play's interactions, and Brad noted the influence the play's language had on him outside of rehearsal: "eventually it just invaded my everyday speech." (B) Brad also identified the French 555 production as the first time he felt himself able to be truly expressive in the target language. Freed from having to formulate sentences, he could concentrate on the expressivity of his inflections as he used the heteroglossic, double-voiced utterances of his character, first within rehearsal and then later (as noted above) in novel contexts outside of the play.

Bakhtin (1986) states that utterances within the context of a literary work such as a novel or drama assume a special character by way of their fictitious context:

They lose their immediate relation to actual reality and to the real utterances of others. For example, rejoinders of everyday dialogue or letters found in a novel retain their form and their everyday significance only on the plane of the novel's content. They enter into actual reality only via the novel as a whole, that is, as a literary-artistic event and not as everyday life. (p. 62)

Although these utterances and their immediate significance belong to the fictional, mimetic plane, Brad's aforementioned comment demonstrates that they can nonetheless serve as the source from which a speaker appropriates utterances to be used in future interactions. Emily, likewise, mentioned examples of how lines from the Spanish play surfaced in her spontaneous interactions, even weeks after the end of the production. She spoke in particular about an incident in a subsequent Spanish course in which Lucas (a Spanish 555 classmate who happened to also be taking this other course) initiated an inside joke with her by using a line from *La obra absurda* as his response during a classroom discussion. In this instance, Lucas appropriated a piece of the play's dialogue and repopulated it with a unique and a double-voiced intention: he simultaneously made a comment relevant to the discussion at hand and transmitted an additional, specific, affiliative message to Emily, reminding her of their shared association with the Spanish 555 play. Emily also spoke about specific words she had learned through the play and the strong

contextual association that remained whenever she subsequently used or encountered them. She also remarked that “Sometimes the lines just pop into my head! ... it’s crazy how it sticks with you.” (E2)

In the case of the Spanish 555 production of *La obra absurda*, heteroglossia is a particularly apt lens to use for interpreting the participants’ experience, because it reflects the content of the play itself. Corona is represented as speaking semi-intelligible gibberish (very adeptly represented by John), and Cassie’s character interpreted the Spaniard’s utterances for the other indigenous characters. By making the natives’ speech comprehensible while portraying the Spaniards as the incomprehensible Other, the playwright inverts one of the classic tropes of the colonial power’s self-representation and privileges the traditionally under-represented voice. This resonated with the participants on a number of levels. By explicitly valuing subaltern and marginalized voices, the playwright’s message encouraged these students who perceived themselves as less proficient than their peers. Likewise, they drew encouragement from the way their classmate John succeeded in communicating very clearly and humorously in spite of (and partly because of) Corona’s garbled, muddled syntax. John’s interpretation amply demonstrated that paralinguistic resources are a valuable complement to spoken language and are often capable of transmitting information that may be disrupted by linguistic errors. On paper, Corona’s lines had been near-total nonsense, completely opaque to almost all the participants. However, through gesture, intonation, facial expression, and other resources, John had transformed the word salad into an ungrammatical but nonetheless intelligible attempt at genuine communication. In response to this aspect of the text, many of the participants reflected on the role of intercultural misunderstandings and the challenges of translation, both in the play itself and in their personal interactions with the various target language texts they read throughout the semester.

*Conclusion to dialogized heteroglossia.*

Target-language theatre brings about a complex matrix of interactions among the text, the student actors and crew members, the instructor-director, the target culture, the host culture, the playwright, and

the audience members. Through this matrix, the student participants familiarize themselves with the dialogic, heteroglossic, and double-voiced utterances and speech genres of the target-language text and, through metaxis, begin to inhabit a target-culture persona. Turner (1982) cites Schechner's (1977) formulation "from *me* to *not-me* to *not-not-me*" (Turner, 1982, p. 121) to describe the progression by which the actor gradually transforms him/herself to inhabit the role and the complex interactions of the various factors that contribute to its realization. The process begins with the script (i.e. theatre text), which is regarded as

an essential preliminary frame ... through which the rehearsal process must flow, though the extent and character of this frame may itself be modified, sometimes quite drastically, by the inner logic of that process. Other components have almost equal weight: the director, the actor, the environment, that is, the stage setting which is created anew for every production. All these, *and* the playscript, grow together, interact together, as the rehearsal process matures ... The *me*, the biological-historical individual, the actor, encounters the role given in the script, the *not-me*; in the crucible of the rehearsal process a strange fusion or synthesis of *me* and *not-me* occurs. Aspects of the actor's experience surface which tincture the script-role he or she has undertaken, while aspects of the dramatist's world-view or message embodied in the script and particularly as understood from the perspective of the "character" being played penetrate the essence of the actor as a human being. The director's role is mainly catalytic, he assists the alchemic or mystical marriage going on as the actor crosses the limen from *not-me* to *not-not-me*. The *me* at this third stage is a richer, if not deeper... *me* than the *me* of the beginning. (Turner, 1982, pp. 120-121)

Although Turner does not use an explicitly Bakhtinian frame, his description of the interactions between the dramatist's worldview, the actors' experiences, the catalytic role of the director, and the perspective of the character embedded within the dramatist's text points to the presence of dialogism and heteroglossia in the process of realizing a theatrical production. His description of the actor crossing the limen from

regarding the role as Other to integrating it with his/her identity through metaxis and thus achieving a richer identity by the third stage also echoes Kramsch's (1993) description of the cultural "third place" that language learners discover at the intersection of their home and target cultures.

### *Carnival*

Bakhtin's (1965/1968) concept of carnival as a time when the hierarchies, restraints and conventions that govern ordinary life are temporarily suspended so that people of all ranks and social strata may intermingle freely and indulge in excess and revelry is very useful for interpreting my participants' reports of what they experienced in the target-language theatre courses. Bakhtin also notes that the medieval carnival existed at a time and in a place where multiple languages (classical Latin, vulgar Latin, and various popular dialects) intersected and that through their juxtaposition the languages "frankly and intensely peered into each other's faces, and each became more aware of itself, of its potentialities and limitations, in the light of the other" (p. 465). Bakhtin also remarks on the juxtaposition of folk culture with the official culture of the ruling classes in the carnival atmosphere, and he notes that grasping the importance of folk culture is key to understanding carnival's dynamics.

In the target-language theatre experience of French 555 and Spanish 555, we also find a suspension of established norms for a time in which occupants of different social strata intermingle freely; an environment in which multiple languages intersect and inform one another; and a juxtaposition of the "official culture" of academia with the "folk culture" of ordinary students interacting with one another as peers. Thematically, the texts used in both productions also reflect this rejection of, or at least a challenge to, official culture: in *L'oeuvre absurde*, the playwright criticizes the rise of totalitarian authorities that curtail the freedom of expression and impose conformity to official state ideology; *La obra absurda* offers a reinterpretation of the official history of the Spanish Conquest of the New World, drawing on accounts of conquered native peoples.

Bakhtin (1965/1968) tells us that “Carnival celebrates the destruction of the old and the birth of the new world” (p. 410) and that

in this play with negation, the opposition to the official world and all its prohibitions and limitations is obviously revealed. It also expresses the recreative, festive suspension of these restrictions. It is a carnival game of negation, and this game may also serve utopian tendencies (though expressed in a rather formalistic aspect). (p. 412)

In this section I examine in detail several aspects of the target-language theatre experience that lend themselves to interpretation as a manifestation of carnival in an educational setting, including its relationship to the social dynamics among the participants, their exercise of agency and initiative, and the increased awareness of, emphasis on, and activity of the body alongside the mind. The carnivalesque atmosphere in French 555 and Spanish 555 was brought about through the establishment of conventional classroom norms in Phase I, followed by the very clear disruption of those norms in Phase II.

During Phase I, the classes met in ordinary classrooms with the usual physical features of such spaces: a teacher’s desk, a chalkboard, a projection screen. Most of the time, Prof and Profe stood somewhere in the center-front, leading the class discussion. They also walked about freely and wrote on the chalkboard whenever it suited them. The students sat in movable tablet-arm desk chairs, either in rows that roughly followed the contours of the classroom perimeter, or in small clusters. The students did not move very much or write on the board except when directed to do so by the instructor. For the most part, the graduate students in each course already knew one another prior to the start of the semester and tended to sit together, while the undergraduates came into the course not knowing any of their classmates. Phase I classroom discussion centered on texts: the dramatic texts of the play(s) being studied, as well as select theoretical and critical texts chosen by the instructor to provide context and historical background. The majority of the classroom discussion during Phase I was instructor-led, with 5-10 minute periods of small group discussion frequently interspersed throughout. Student contributions during whole-class discussion

came predominantly from the graduate students, and they also tended to hold the floor for more extended turns at talk. Most of the undergraduates made regular but comparatively brief contributions; a few of them rarely or never spoke up in class during Phase I.

Phase II was marked by its clear departure from the routines established during the first half of the semester. In both French 555 and Spanish 555, the physical setting changed. French 555 still rehearsed in classrooms for several weeks, but the space was visibly altered: the teacher's desk was pushed against the wall, tablet-arm chairs were pushed aside and stacked, open space was cleared in the middle of the room, and Prof no longer stood at the front; instead, he sat at the back of the room and observed while the students occupied the middle of the floor. Other rehearsals for the French play took place in the living room of a residence hall, before moving into a theater for the days leading up to the performances. The Spanish 555 rehearsals were held in a theater throughout Phase II. Profe also moved to the margins, sitting in one of the chairs on the periphery of the stage while the central space on stage as well as the preponderance of the speaking (the rehearsal of lines) now belonged to the students. In both classes, students also spent significantly less time sitting and writing in notebooks and more time standing and moving, on stage or while engaged in other activities such as making props, costumes, and set pieces.

These changes in the physical and material aspects were accompanied by changes in social interaction. Freed from the physical boundaries and social conventions of the classroom, participants found themselves licensed to explore new ways of interrelating.

*Carnival and the Social Dynamics of the Course: "It's like they're not afraid of me anymore!"*

In *Rabelais and His World* (1965/1968) Bakhtin discusses carnival's function of erasing social boundaries. He talks about carnival creating a period in which rank, rules, and social conventions are suspended and everyone is able to intermingle in "free and familiar contact." (p. 10) Bakhtin states, "this temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life." (p. 10) Bakhtin notes that the definition of carnival has

changed over time and that it has both a narrow and a wider sense, the former being the period prior to the beginning of Lent, characterized by liberty and indulgence in anticipation of penitential restraint; the latter encompassing “a number of local feasts of different origin and scheduled at different dates but bearing the common traits of popular merriment” (p. 218), taking a variety of local forms and evolving over time, but having in common the fact that

they are all related to time, which is the true hero of every feast, uncrowning the old and crowning the new ... The common denominator of the carnivalesque genres is the essential link of these feasts with “gay time.” Whenever the free popular aspect of the feast is preserved, the relation with time is maintained, and this means the persistence of its carnivalesque flavor. (pp. 219-220)

Phase II of the French 555 and Spanish 555 courses occurred as part of an academic course during the university semester, and the professors remained in control of leading the rehearsals and directing the productions. Therefore we must ask ourselves: in what sense can this be considered carnivalesque? Phase II marks a time of transition from classroom to performance, a liminal time in the semester when the old order is set aside and interactions take place on a freer footing, and a time characterized by laughter and freedom, “a temporary suspension of the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers. For a short time life came out of its usual, legalized and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of utopian freedom.” (Bakhtin, 1965/1968, p.89) Phase II represents a sort of “controlled carnival”: the death of the social norms that reigned during Phase I, and the birth of a new way for participants to interact with one another, with the text, and with the target language. This “death” of the old way of being students was part of a process of regeneration that led the participants to greater maturity in their interactions with target-language speakers. The suspension of hierarchy and the freedom of communication are keys to understanding the learning experience of the undergraduate participants in French 555 and Spanish 555.

The carnivalesque atmosphere that the participants experienced during Phase II was eloquently captured in a revealing moment that several participants referred to in their interviews: during one of the final rehearsals of the Spanish production, Profe was giving instructions to the assembled students and reminding them to arrive on time the next day. The students, meanwhile, were chatting, laughing, and teasing one another, and not listening very attentively. Profe turned in mock exasperation, and exclaimed, half-laughingly, “It’s like they’re not afraid of me anymore!”

Profe’s comment was tongue-in-cheek, but in fact she was exactly right: the students *weren’t* afraid of her anymore. As David had stated in his second interview,

the second half is not like a class at all. Because once the second half becomes, uh, just about creating this play ... [Profe] stops really being a professor, and starts being a director. And, it, it sort of becomes more of a collaborative project, rather than the typical sort of dynamic. (D2)

An additional revealing detail here is that in the original quote, prior to my anonymization of the data, David referred to Profe not by title or surname but by her first name. This was clearly indicative of the flattening of the social hierarchy that had taken place over the course of Phase II. The formality of the classroom had long since been set aside and the students and professor had coalesced into a community in which everyone worked together toward the common purpose of producing the play.

Carnival is clearly a helpful theoretical lens for understanding the participant comments organized under the thematic category “Social Aspects of Participation” and, in particular, its subtopics “Suspension of Hierarchy”, “Freedom of Communication”, and “Comfort with Class Interaction.” Bakhtin notes in *Rabelais and His World* that “A new type of communication always creates new forms of speech or a new meaning given to the old forms.” (1965/1968, p. 16) He then goes on to describe how, when relationships become friendly and change from a formal to an informal footing, their verbal discourse changes to reflect the relationship’s new terms. “Verbal etiquette and discipline are relaxed” and new forms of discourse such as teasing, mockery, and the trading of friendly insults are permitted. (p.



16) Although in literal terms these forms encode disrespect, their pragmatic function in the context of a friendly relationship is an affiliative expression of warmth, solidarity, and affection. Laughter, joking, and teasing were not entirely absent from Phase I of the courses; however, they occurred within the limits of “appropriate” classroom behavior, whereas during Phase II they were expressed much more freely.

Laughter, in particular, served an important carnivalesque function with respect to the social dynamics of the groups. Bakhtin (1965) notes that “the acute awareness of victory over fear is an essential element of medieval laughter”, (p. 91) and a few pages later he observes that laughter “liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power.” (p. 94) Throughout Phase II of the courses, the participants and the instructors shared numerous instances of laughter: over the comedic elements of the plays; over flubs, mistakes, and unexpected developments during rehearsals; over goofy costumes and ridiculous props; over a clever idea or a new and effective line delivery. Some instances of laughter were celebratory, others were a form of stress relief. Through laughter, the participants drew strength to overcome their fears of performing in public, of speaking in the target language with the professor and with classmates they perceived to be more proficient, and of transgressing social norms that would be respected in other circumstances.

Another equalizing factor, particularly in Spanish 555 but also somewhat in French 555, was that the theatre setting required knowledge in multiple domains (acting, costuming, building scenery, lighting, stage makeup, music, dance, photography and graphic design, publicity, advertising, social media, etc.) in comparison to the one (or perhaps two) domain(s) of focus in the classroom (literary knowledge and target language mastery), and during Phase II the professors no longer possessed obviously superior expertise in every area. Prof had some background as a working actor in the professional theatre, but he freely admitted his limitations in carpentry and tech skills, and relied on the collaboration of others. Profe, likewise, had significantly more experience with dramatic literature than with theatrical performance, and

comparatively less knowledge of stagecraft and theatre technology. By revealing the need for others' skills to supplement their limitations, Prof and Profe contributed to dismantling the social hierarchy of Phase I and opening up a wider avenue to the carnivalesque. During Phase II, expertise became more distributed. As it happened, none of the GSs knew anything about stage lighting, but two of the undergraduates, David and Felicia, did have prior experience with it and could legitimately claim the mantle of expertise. Likewise, some of the most experienced actors in both groups were UGs, who were able to assist their GS peers in developing their characters and fleshing out their roles.

*Carnival's relationship to participants' agency and initiative.*

One of the factors that contributed to the carnivalesque nature of the theatre phase of these courses was that the students' exploration was a necessary part of the process. Theatre-based learning (in the L2 or otherwise) absolutely and ineluctably depends on student participation. In the classroom, knowledge is seen to rest with the professor; although ideally students should participate, asking questions and making contributions to the discussion, the reality is that when students are unable or unwilling to do so, the professor is still very much in control, (indeed, even more so than when there is lively participation) and capable of lecturing for the entire class period. In contrast, in the theatre, the professor is *not* capable of carrying out the functions of the activity entirely on his or her own. The students *must* engage in exploration of the material, because the professor, as director, doesn't "know" the material in the same way - the material emerges out of the embodied actions of the participants. The director may have an idea, more or less, of how the basic interpretation is to be, but the details and richness necessarily emanate from the actors themselves, the students.

Because the activity of Phase II and the eventual success of the production depend so heavily on student participation, the participants find themselves in a position of much greater power during Phase II. At the same time, they have fewer limitations on what they might choose to do. In the classroom, students expect to sit in desks, read, listen to the professor, take notes, and, when they want to say something, raise

their hands and wait to be given permission to speak. In the theatre, the participant's individual role or responsibility and the requirements of the text, more so than the professor or habit and social convention, dictate what a student does. The student may need to decide what to do to bring a character to life; s/he might need to build a prop or piece of scenery, or create a costume; s/he might need to design a publicity poster or program booklet. In the classroom, students are usually engaged in more or less the same activity at the same time, and it is fairly easy for the instructor to direct the whole group's activity and answer questions that will generally relate to the same topic. In the theater, it will be virtually impossible for the instructor to oversee all of the students doing their various activities simultaneously; this simple logistical fact obliges students to work more independently and take initiative for making creative choices and artistic decisions, using the dramatic text as a guide. Dramatic texts, furthermore, are necessarily skeletal and full of interpretive gaps that can only be fleshed out in production and performance.

For example, a text might give costume descriptions such as "a blue dress" or "sandals and a feathered headdress." These general, vague descriptions will need to be realized as a *specific* blue dress or pair of sandals and feathered headdress for a performance, and this will entail asking questions, drawing inferences, and making decisions: What *kind* of blue dress? Long-sleeved, short-sleeved, sleeveless? Formal or casual? What shade of blue: pale, dark, bright? Solid-colored, striped, patterned, polka-dotted? Cotton, velvet, satin, silk, denim? What about the character wearing the sandals and headdress - surely there must be more to the costume than *that*? All of the details left unmentioned in the text and/or paratext need to be defined through choices and decisions, and the director will not be in a position to make all of them; many of them will fall to the students.

This is equally true where acting choices are concerned: stage directions may give *some* information about how to say, or what actions should accompany, *some* of the lines, but for the vast majority, the performers will need to supply the interpretation. For example, *La obra absurda* contains a scene in which four actors, described only as a "*grupo*", discuss how Corona and his Spaniard

companions went crazy with greed upon seeing the great stores of gold in the Emperor's treasury. This section of text is purely expository: the conversation informs the audience about other characters' actions that presumably have already transpired off stage. No stage directions indicate action, movement, or manner of expression for how the *grupo* should speak the text. Even the character names give very little information: we have an *anciano*, *un hombre*, *otro hombre* (both of the latter presumably younger than the *anciano* by inference, but how young? Anything between approximately 17 and 70 is plausible) and a *mujer*. In its most basic form, this scene gives us four talking heads and very little else.

Scenes like this do not merely invite student agency and initiative - they *demand* it. Without creative choices on the part of the actors, this scene would be excruciatingly boring (and, indeed, early in the rehearsal process, that is exactly what it was. The four actors stood on stage, reciting their lines but uncertain what to do with themselves otherwise.) One of the valuable lessons student actors learn in a situation like this is that they have the power to imagine possibilities for their character and try them out in rehearsal. The Spanish 555 students had to supply context for themselves: Who were they? *Where* were they? What were they doing while having this conversation? What was going on in the background? Various possibilities were suggested: maybe they were neighbors, gossiping with one another at the public market while doing their errands? Maybe they were members of a family, at home preparing a meal in their kitchen? Maybe they should hold their conversation over on one side of the stage, while the actors playing Corona and the Spanish soldiers pantomimed the scene on the other side, so that the latter group's actions would illustrate their words? Eventually each actor made some choices about who s/he was and what to do during the scene. For example, Felicia played the *mujer*, and she decided that a prop would help: she wrapped a baby doll in a blanket and played the scene as a mother caring for her infant.

In another scene, Heidi played one of two nameless, non-speaking little girls. All the text revealed about these characters was that they were young and they giggled in response to some of the others' lines.

Heidi and the other actor developed some children's games to use as stage business, and in her second interview Heidi described how she was inspired to make dolls out of corn cobs to use in the scene:

I actually made little dolls, which I should show you ... I made them at, like, two in the morning, so they don't even look like dolls to me anymore, but for *las niñas* ... just like, little, like, corn dollies for them to play with ... so I was excited. (H2)

This decision, undertaken in the middle of the night, was entirely Heidi's own initiative and represented a very tangible way in which she asserted agency in deciding how her character would be portrayed and added a visual element of her own inspiration and creation to the stage picture.

David cited an incident during Phase I of Spanish 555 that, for him, opened the way to the more carnivalesque atmosphere that obtained during Phase II. He was particularly struck by a discussion in which one of the GSs engaged in a fairly protracted disagreement with Profe over whether and to what degree one of the texts could be considered postmodern. As things worked out, it happened to be *La obra absurda*, the text eventually chosen for performance. This perceived subversion of hierarchy surprised David. He had not seen such a discussion take place between a student and professor in any of his other classes, but for him, that became the moment that touched off the flattening of hierarchy that was realized more fully in Phase II. He witnessed this student, John, engage with Profe as an intellectual equal and defend his interpretation of the text, and he continued to think about how John's interpretation shaped the eventual *mise-en-scène* of the production. This helped David to realize that the students, and not just Profe, would have a significant impact on the staging.

Later, during Phase II, David translated this into an initiative of his own, making one of his characters eat apples through several scenes. David's use of the apples to flesh out stage business for his characters contains a strong flavor of the carnivalesque. In addition to being an example of a student asserting agency within the flattened power hierarchy, the apple-eating bears two other connections to carnival: first, the obvious association with food and eating that is a hallmark of carnival; and second, his

bringing in the apple as a sort of prank during a dress rehearsal gives the incident the puckish, transgressive nature of a subordinate subverting authority (even though, as it turned out, Profe was delighted with David's idea and wholeheartedly accepted it for the performances).

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin (1965/1968) described the medieval carnival as a powerful creative event. He contrasted it with modern iterations of carnival, such as Mardi Gras, by noting that everyone was a participant in the carnival of centuries past, while many modern carnival celebrations keep most people in the role of spectators and fail to upend social norms and expectations to the same degree. The target-language theatre courses studied here met Bakhtin's criteria: the students were full participants in the endeavor, not merely spectators, and they exercised agency and initiative through making independent choices about their characters and their contributions to the production.

*Carnival and the role of the body.*

One of the hallmarks of the carnivalesque is the greater attention paid to the body and its functions and processes, as compared with the more cerebral orientation of ordinary life. Bakhtin (1965/1968) describes the link between carnival's qualities of freedom, laughter, and renewal, and its focus on bodily processes such as eating and drinking; copulation, pregnancy, and childbirth; belching, flatulence, vomiting, urination, defecation, and death. In Phase II of the French 555 and Spanish 555 productions, there emerged a much greater involvement of the body and embodied experience, as compared with Phase I. This resulted from a number of factors: the move to a different physical space in pursuit of a different purpose, with a different set of expectations about how students' bodies were to function in the environment. As the ordinary rules governing classroom life were suspended, students enjoyed a new freedom to explore the text using the resources of the body. Not only were they *permitted* to do so, they *needed* to do so in order to uncover the meanings embedded in the text.

This inherently carnivalesque aspect of target-language theatre was heightened in the French 555 and Spanish 555 courses by the fact that both groups performed absurdist plays containing scenes that

demanded exaggeration, distortion, and parody that mocks and implicitly critiques social customs and mores. *L'oeuvre absurde*, for example, contains a scene in which some characters get inebriated at a sidewalk café while others organize an elaborate funeral procession for a pet run over by a car, and over the course of the play many of the characters are physically transformed into animals. In *La obra absurda*, a few of the carnivalesque moments included an enactment of a human sacrifice, a parody of a catechism lesson and baptism, a ribald piece of street theatre, and a celebratory ritual that turned into a choreographed battle scene complete with vomiting and flying entrails, using exaggerated props (a red balloon with a blinking bicycle light inside, blown up to approximately the size of a human heart; Ken and Barbie dolls to illustrate Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden; "intestines" made from coils of nylon stockings stuffed with cotton balls and tissue) to highlight the parodic nature of the scenes.

In developing their characters and their stage business, participants drew on their bodies and adopted exaggerated mannerisms that helped create fictitious *alter-egos* that freed them from their ordinary selves. Gail was a notable example: a self-described shy person, her vociferous singer character astonished her classmates who had barely heard her speak during the earlier stages of rehearsal. Another frequently-mentioned embodiment of an exaggerated character was John's depiction of Corona. By highlighting Corona's garbled syntax, exaggerating his *ceceo*, adopting a pronounced swagger and, especially, prominently sticking out his tongue as a character tic, John created a thoroughly ridiculous, yet entirely convincing, interpretation of the role.

Costuming and props were additional elements that helped to facilitate students' embodiment of their roles, allowing them to step away from their ordinary identities and enter the carnivalesque world of the play. For her role in *L'oeuvre absurde*, Anne donned a truly hideous wig and thick black plastic glasses that, while deeply unflattering under ordinary circumstances, nevertheless put the finishing touches on her hysterically funny character. In *La obra absurda*, Emily helped build a costume that Cassie cited as being extremely helpful to her for embodying her role. She discussed how she initially

experienced difficulty with figuring out how to interpret a mythical, ghost-like figure, and she felt awkward moving across the stage. But when she was given an elaborate, flowing costume with fluttering tendrils of fabric, she was able to work with the costume to develop body postures and movements that maximized the floating, otherworldly effect of the garment and helped her to feel that she was connecting with the role. She also cited a costume worn by one of the graduate students that included a magnificent feathered headdress: “I think once you add costumes everyone gets a little more into it ... Like, um, when the Emperor added his, like, big feather thing? ... I could tell that he felt a little bit more regal.” (C2) In all of these instances, the use of costumes helped demarcate the theatrical space as something outside of ordinary life and facilitated the participants’ deeper entry into the world of the play.

A further instance of the body’s role in the carnivalesque nature of the French 555 and Spanish 555 productions was the sharing of food and drink through post-rehearsal (or sometimes mid-rehearsal) meals and cast parties after the performances. Bakhtin dedicates an entire chapter of *Rabelais and His World* (1965/1968) to banquet imagery and carnival feasting. Some of the relevant aspects of Bakhtin’s discussion include the link between food and labor, as a victory and a celebration, and the collective nature of a banquet as a meal shared by all members of society. Bakhtin also notes that “the banquet as a triumphal celebration and renewal often fulfills the function of completion” that contains within itself “the potentiality of a new beginning.” (p. 238) The meals shared among the participants reflected this celebratory camaraderie: the UGs, GSs, and the professor shared meals that marked the culmination of their labors, the celebration of a job well done, the end of an academic semester and course, and a new beginning as everyone prepared to go their separate ways, changed by the shared experience.

#### *Conclusion to carnival.*

Carnival marks a time outside of ordinary life, when the rules, ranks, conventions, and protocols of day-to-day existence are suspended and replaced by role reversals and the transgression of social hierarchies. Turner (1982) differentiates between the sanctioned position of social structure and the



shifting, spontaneous affiliations of ‘communitas’ to which the festival atmosphere of carnival gives rise, providing opportunities to test out new modes of being. Bristol (1985) reminds us that carnival is a liminal space in which profound change is possible: “Liminoid phenomena are not merely reversible, they are often subversive, representing radical critiques of the central structures and proposing alternative models.” (p. 38) Furthermore, although carnival is a temporary state that eventually comes to a close, and order is restored, some of the changes it brings about are more enduring. The UGs, GSs, and professors coalesce, for a brief time, into a theatre troupe in a liminal existence in which their relative equality transcends the hierarchy that governs their ordinary existence. Although they revert to their customary roles after the performance, they are changed by their new relationships to one another and to the texts they have worked with. A’Ness (2011) was able to gather *post hoc* data from her participants several years after the conclusion of her theatre project, effectively collecting real-world data of the sort I obtained speculatively in interview 3 when I asked my participants to reflect on what they thought their participation would mean to them several years down the road. A’ness achieved a rather astonishing 90% participation rate (9 out of 10 students replied to her questionnaire more than two years after their participation in her course). She notes that

when asked what adjectives they would use to describe the class the most oft-repeated words were: creative, exciting, thoughtful, challenging, collaborative, communal, cooperative, engaging, dynamic, innovative, inspiring, worthwhile, educational, and fun ... many of the students still feel that what they produced for the class was useful and important. (p. 158)

She also comments that

Not surprisingly, what the students remembered almost three years later about the class were not the primary texts we had read or specific facts ... but the learning process itself and the feelings, ideas, and memories this had generated, both positive and negative ... many still remembered how much they enjoyed being part of a community of learners working together with both their

bodies and minds on something that felt important beyond the requirements for the class ...

Overall, they remember the class teaching them to think, communicate, and share their ideas in multiple ways for reasons that felt important and made them proud. (A'ness, 2011, p. 159)

### *Affordances*

The next section of this chapter examines the participants' reports of their experiences through the lens of van Lier's (2000, 2004, 2010) ecological framework and the concept of affordances.

The participants of this investigation made a number of observations about their own learning and how they grew, changed, and developed over the course of the project. These remarks are organized under the thematic category "New Understandings and Meaning-Making," with a sub-category, "Problems and Problem-Solving." The concept of affordances within an ecological framework is helpful for understanding the ways in which participants encountered and identified learning opportunities within their individual experiences and made use of them over time, developing new understandings and insights through engaging with the text, their peers, and the various objects and activities that formed part of the entire target-language theatre experience.

One of the primary affordances was the opportunity for participants to engage with the material through metaxis. Although metaxis has already been explored as a facet of the carnivalesque dimension of the experience, this section briefly examines the opportunity to suspend one's identity and assume a fictitious one from an ecological perspective.

Affordances within an ecological learning environment also help to illuminate the final thematic category in the analysis, "Finding the right fit." Participants described their amazement at how well the chosen text suited their class as an ensemble and how well everyone portrayed their individual roles. Viewed through the lens of affordances, however, this aspect of the experience becomes a bit less astonishing, albeit no less beneficial for the participants. As each participant adopts an individuated role with a unique set of responsibilities within the larger framework of the performance, s/he finds and avails

him-/herself of affordances that assist in the accomplishment of his/her objectives and the successful execution of his/her role. This is a dynamic process in which advances and improvements by one participant can inspire, encourage, and possibly yield new affordances in their turn to other participants: the environment is gradually enriched by the accretion of successive contributions by group members.

*The affordances of new understandings, meaning-making, problems, and problem-solving.*

Essif (2011) elucidates how target-language theatre gives rise to a dialectic between learners, their gaps in their own knowledge, the assumptions they derive from their home culture, and the source culture of the text. Target-language theatre participants must grapple with their own lacunae on the macro and micro levels, learning the meanings of words and expressions they may have previously glossed over in their reading and realizing that “getting the gist” is only the first step: in order to create a successful performance, they need to move past the gist and understand the text’s subtleties and nuances. They then need to explore how they can collaboratively create an accessible interpretation of the text, incorporating their new knowledge into a communicative act. They need to put flesh on the bones of the text and realize it in performance.

Working on the production reins in two potential tendencies of students as they read the text during the first half of the semester. On the one hand, some students may not be able to envision its performance at all, or very poorly and with significant misunderstandings due to considerable gaps in their comprehension of the text’s language and content. Putting it into performance serves as a corrective that leads these students to fill in what was lacking in their earlier readings. Heidi noted that she “didn’t even understand half the play when I first read it ... one of the perks of having it be in the theatre, is, like, you’re visually seeing it, people are acting it out”. (H2) The other possible tendency of some students may be to envision a cinematic, unlimited elaboration. Students have to work with real material limitations (the size of the stage; budget constraints; available resources for costumes, props, set pieces, sound, and lighting; the actors individual abilities and limitations) and make the show happen within

those parameters, rather than imagining idealized characters in an idealized setting. Felicia commented on this, noting that she tended to imagine what she read “more as a movie” (F2) and remarking that it was illuminating for her to work within the logistical limitations of a stage performance to better understand how to read dramatic texts, in addition to improving her understanding of the script’s content. Putting a text into performance obliges participants to pay closer attention to details, to the paratext, and to the practicalities of realizing an imaginary scenario. As David noted, it “sort of shows how much ... it’s hard to really imagine what a play is like while you’re reading it.” (D2)

One surprising but ultimately useful source of affordances to participants was the experience of making errors. Participants derived many benefits from finding useful props, costumes, gestures, interpretations, inflections for their lines, and the like, but part of this process involved trying and discarding many options that proved to be ill-suited or incorrect. However, even though these mistakes, errors, and possible-but-rejected options were not a part of the final production, they were an integral part of the overall experience of target-language theatre, and they often proved useful, affording insights to participants through the process of experimentation and weighing of options. Felicia, for example, spoke about her task of evaluating music for the play’s intermission. Among other, more conventional Latin American folk songs and indigenous drum and flute music, she and the director considered Billie Holliday’s “Strange Fruit,” a jazz song in English from 1939 full of allusions to racism, lynching, and the American South. Although ultimately they chose something else, Felicia spoke about how she initially thought the suggestion was very strange and unrelated to the theme of *La obra absurda*, but upon closer examination she was astounded by the connections between the indigenous people’s experience under the Spanish Conquest and that of African Americans in US history, and by the way the song and the juxtaposition of images highlighted these similarities and revealed a dimension of potential relevance to English-speaking US audiences. Thus, a song that was not in the target language and that was eventually

rejected for the final production nonetheless yielded a rich affordance in terms of helping a participant make connections between aspects of her home culture and the target culture.

Another aspect of the target-language theatre experience that lends itself to interpretation through an ecological framework is the participants' growing awareness of the need to respond to others' lines and the totality of the dramatic situation in order to execute their own roles well. They come to understand that just as real-world communication depends upon understanding and responding to others' utterances in addition to generating one's own, the mimetic representation of this communication on stage obliges them to understand and respond to other characters' lines as well as reciting their own. David, in particular, articulated how eye-opening it was for him to realize that although he played a character with very few lines, his attention to what the other characters said and did and his consequent nonverbal reactions were essential elements of building a successful production. This realization leads participants to derive affordances not only from their own roles and lines, but from the words and actions of other characters. Throughout her interviews (and particularly in the second one, "The Details of Experience") Gail frequently made reference to "a lot of little discoveries." (G2) These little discoveries Gail encountered through her minute analysis of the text amount to affordances that became useful for her learning process.

Additional affordances were derived from the participants' work on and with the material aspects of the production. Their understanding was deepened by meeting the demands of finding or designing and creating appropriate costumes, props, and scenery to create the visual interpretation of the text, and by experimenting with music, sound effects, and lighting to enhance the setting and reflect the mood and tone of the various scenes. These interactions with the production elements were extremely helpful to students in their capacities as actors and as crew members. One participant, David, made a series of particularly insightful observations about how he perceived the need to develop his own productive stage business for scenes in which he was on stage but had few or no lines. He experimented with props and

found a way of making original and meaningful contributions to the show and adding to its humor. These individual contributions of a prop or costume idea, moreover, often represented personal touches that the participants found especially valuable, as Emily noted in some of her comments about her work on the costuming and Heidi mentioned when she related the story of how she created the “corn dollies” she and Susan used in one of their non-speaking roles.

A further affordance for the participants was the relationship they established with the live audience in the performances. Many of them spoke in their final interview about how enlightening it was for them to see and hear the public’s responses to their work during the performances. For example, when the audience laughed, some participants reported that they understood and appreciated the humor in a certain line for the first time. They recalled that some of the jokes had mystified them when they were only reading them; in rehearsal, they had gained an intellectual understanding that the jokes were supposed to be funny, but it was only when they witnessed the audience laughing at the jokes during the performance that they actually grasped the humor in the scene.

In conclusion, the target-language theatre learning environment proved to be rich in affordances derived from problems that the participants solved in order to define their characters, develop their interpretations, and determine how to stage the plays. The target-language theatre experience also yielded new understandings and opportunities for meaning-making that constituted affordances of the learning environment. Participants interacted with their classmates and the director, the texts, and myriad artifacts that formed part of the process of bringing the play into production, and the relationships established through these interactions facilitated productive engagement with the linguistic environment that led to greater understanding of the texts, the culture that produced them, and interactions with other participants.

#### *Metaxis.*

A second important locus of affordances in the target-language theatre experience was the opportunity to engage in metaxis. Metaxis has already been explored in some detail as one of the primary

ways in which carnival is manifested in target-language theatre. However, the unique function of metaxis cannot be discounted within an ecological view of this learning environment, as it provides learners the opportunity to establish relationships on the footing of an assumed, fictitious identity that frees them to interact in ways they would be unwilling or unable to otherwise. These constitute an important affordance of the L2 theatre learning environment, and are discussed briefly in this section.

Marchenkova (2005) cites Bakhtin's (1986) concept of *outsideness*, the need to maintain one's own identity and cultural perspective in order to be able to productively engage in dialogue with another. Marchenkova notes that "Bakhtin viewed intercultural understanding as simultaneously entering another culture and remaining outside it. . . . Moreover, Bakhtin viewed outsideness not as a limitation but as an incentive toward the broadening of one's perspective." (p. 178) This characterization of Bakhtinian outsideness resonates with Boal's (1995) definition of metaxis as simultaneously belonging to the fictitious world of the play and remaining outside it. Viewed ecologically, metaxis is an affordance that allows participants to maintain enough critical distance to analyze and evaluate the text, the L2, and the target culture, even as they assume the guise of their characters. They do not totally disappear into their role; even though they strive to create the appearance of having done so, metaxis entails balancing critical distance with identification. Gail's aforementioned transformation from the shy and somewhat languid student of the Phase I classroom into her *músico* role, and her reflections on the process and what she perceived in the text through her analysis and thought process in developing the character, reveal how metaxis brings about affordances that participants are able to utilize.

Metaxis is heightened through interaction with the material artifacts of the play. The effect grows stronger as the performance nears, more elements are added, and rehearsal substitutes are supplanted by finished products. It is a truism of theatre production that actors experience a remarkable boost to their investment in their roles when they begin to rehearse in costume. A recent article by Adam and Galinsky (2012) from the field of social psychology sheds light on the way metaxis functions as an affordance with

specific relationship to the effect of costuming. They introduce the term *enclothed cognition* to describe the systematic influence that clothing exerts on the psychological processes of the wearer. Adam and Galinsky note that “identity scholars have long theorized that wearing clothes means assuming a particular identity that elicits corresponding behavior from the wearer” (p. 918) and they argue that just like physical experiences, the experience of wearing clothes triggers associated abstract concepts and their symbolic meanings. In particular, we posit that wearing clothes causes people to “embody” the clothing and its symbolic meaning. Consequently, when a piece of clothing is worn, it exerts an influence on the wearer’s psychological processes by activating associated abstract concepts through its symbolic meaning - similar to the way in which a physical experience, which is, by definition, already embodied, exerts its influence.

... In enclothed cognition, the link between a physical experience and its symbolic meaning is indirect, as it is the clothes that carry the symbolic meaning. In other words, the symbolic meaning is not automatically embodied because it stems from the clothes - so it is not realized until one physically wears and thus embodies the clothes. (p. 919)

The authors hypothesize that wearing a piece of clothing triggers associated psychological processes that lead the wearer to embody its symbolic meaning, and they note that “there seems to be something special about the physical experience of wearing a piece of clothing, and this experience constitutes a critical component of enclothed cognition.” (p. 922)

Adam and Galinsky’s insight about the the way clothing can lead the wearer to embody symbolic meaning sheds light on the way that costumes constitute a rich affordance for participants in a theatre production. Many of the participants noted the powerful effect that wearing their costumes exerted on them, triggering (at least in part) their rapid improvement in the final few days of rehearsals. Seen through the lens of van Lier’s (2000, 2004, 2010) ecological framework, the wearing of costumes constituted an



affordance for participants by facilitating their embodiment of the costumes' encoded meanings through metaxis in combination with encloded cognition.

*Finding the right fit.*

The final theme in the present investigation's findings, "Finding the right fit," contains participants' reflections on the way they gradually progressed from confusion and uncertainty about many aspects of the play upon their first reading, through growing familiarity with the text and with their roles, until finally as the performance approached, participants felt that the texts had been extremely well-chosen for their particular groups, that everyone suited their roles beautifully, and that the entire project had come together amazingly well. Anne and Brad marveled at the insightfulness of Prof, in the case of the French 555 production, choosing such a perfect text and casting it so well when, at the time of its selection, he did not yet know exactly who would be in the course. The Spanish 555 participants recalled how difficult *La obra absurda* had seemed at the beginning and how, even though they had chosen it for themselves by popular vote, they had not anticipated how well it would turn out.

Such sentiments are actually quite commonly expressed by many participants in many theatre productions, and, in point of fact, there are many scenarios in which directors select plays with little or no prior knowledge of who might show up to audition. The ultimate success of a production is worthy of celebration and admiration, but the amazement so many participants express at how well everyone fulfills their roles is, perhaps, akin to that of spectators watching a magician: it is the astonishment of noticing only the result of a process, because attention has been directed elsewhere. Magicians use misdirection and sleight of hand to accomplish their illusions; in the case of theatre, the participants are (entirely appropriately) distracted by their own tasks and responsibilities and do not have a big-picture view of the entire process coming together. However, when viewed through the ecological framework, this phenomenon can be understood much more readily. The entire process of putting on a target-language theatre production is directed toward helping participants succeed in their roles and responsibilities.

Directors use what they already know or can perceive about participants, as well as what they can infer or intuit about their potential, to assign them appropriate roles. Participants find and utilize affordances that help them build, develop, and improve their performances. They reinforce one another synergistically in a dialogic process, the interpretations taking shape as a series of gradual accretions that influence one another throughout the rehearsal period. As a general rule, participants “grow into their roles” over the course of the project, rising to the expectations set for them, facilitated by the collaborative assistance of their peers and the affordances they encounter in the learning environment. Lutzker (2007) comments on this aspect of the target-language theatre experience when he notes:

In considering many of the personal developments that occurred, one can also draw another and more radical conclusion: to a striking degree, it appears that many pupils made exactly those steps that they most clearly needed ... This highlights the significance of ... a fundamental educational responsibility – providing possibilities of individualized learning ... the possibilities of working within individual zones of proximal development, utilizing multiple intelligences, working in an intuitive mode of learning, building a community of learners – must be considered as instrumental in having created a broad range of learning opportunities which pupils individually sought and pursued. Moreover, those dimensions of experience which educational drama [*theatre*] offers in encouraging forms and degrees of physical, emotional and mental openness, generally not called for, or even perhaps possible in traditional schoolwork, must also be considered as decisive in creating new possibilities of self-directed, individualized learning. All this provided the basis for learning experiences which were viewed by the pupils in a strikingly enthusiastic vein. Their developments were clearly perceived as resulting from their own self-directed efforts, in learning processes for which they had assumed responsibility and which, appropriately enough, in the end led to deep feelings of pride in what they had individually and collectively accomplished. (pp. 433-434)

The participants noted that the final week or so of rehearsals, leading up to and including the performances, comprised the richest and most rewarding phase of the experience, when they made major strides in both their understanding of the text and their execution of their roles. This observation, likewise, is interpretable within the ecological framework as a logical result of the accretion of affordances as the process approaches its culmination. As the performance draws nearer, more and richer elements are gradually added to the context. Costumes are assembled and actors begin wearing them; rehearsal props begin to be replaced by the real pieces that will be used on stage; substitute set pieces and furniture give way to ever more elaborate scenery as it is designed and built; sound and lighting are gradually added. By the final dress rehearsals, all of these elements are in place and the rehearsal is held in the theater itself. The “semiotic budget” (van Lier, 2000, p. 252) of the environment is deliberately enriched as the production takes shape and the rehearsals progress toward the fully realized performance.

*Conclusion to affordances.*

In conclusion, van Lier’s (2000, 2004, 2010) ecological framework for language learning and the concept of affordances are useful interpretive tools that allow us to see target-language theatre as a learning environment with a rich semiotic budget of affordances. Theatre productions also entail an inherently individuated set of tasks for the various participants. The rehearsal process is by nature iterative, and comprises the gradual accretion of affordances as participants engage with the text, explore interpretations of lines and scenes, and add production elements such as props, costumes, sound, and lighting. Likewise, the nuances and insights that each participant brings to his or her role may, in turn, become affordances for others in the group. The environment reaches a state of peak semiotic richness when it culminates in performances before a live audience, as participants experience the consummation of their work, with the full complement of production elements and the interaction with spectators and their real-time response to the participants’ performances. Participants use affordances throughout the rehearsal process through the activity of identifying and solving problems, which leads them to new

understandings and meaning-making. The metaxis that allows participants to inhabit the imaginary world of the play and assume a fictitious identity is one of the most important affordances theatre offers, making it possible to maintain critical distance and approach a text as an outsider while simultaneously inhabiting the role of a cultural insider. Finally, the entire target-language theatre endeavor depends on assigning appropriate roles and/or production tasks to individual participants based on their unique qualities and potential, and helping them work toward successful execution of their responsibilities. Thus, it constitutes a framework that helps participants to grow into their parts over the course of the production, such that (if it is successful) by the time of the performance the actors enjoy a sense of individual and collective self-efficacy, feeling that the text and the group are excellently suited to one another.

#### *Limitations of Study*

As is the case with all research, this investigation is limited and needs to be understood in the context of what it is, as well as what it is not. It seeks to answer certain questions, and does not claim to answer others; it reveals certain things about participation in target-language theatre, while others remain outside of its scope. In this section I acknowledge the study's limitations.

#### *Sample Size*

As a qualitative study using an interview-based methodology, this investigation entailed an inherent practical limit on the sample size. However, within those parameters, it would have been desirable to have participation from all of the eligible undergraduate L1 English speakers in the two courses. In Spanish 555, I succeeded in obtaining the participation of all but one of the members of my population of interest. With the French 555 pilot study, however, my investigation would have benefited from more participation.

Additionally, my participants are the antithesis of a random sample. They self-selected into the theatre courses by registering for them as electives, and they subsequently chose to participate in my investigation. This, however, does not invalidate the study. Target-language theatre in university FL

departments is in nearly every case an elective course or extracurricular activity; therefore, studying it as such is entirely justified. Choosing to participate in a target-language theatre production is part of the essence of the experience that a phenomenological investigation seeks to elucidate.

#### *Single-interview Protocol Used in Pilot Study*

The purpose of a pilot study is to test one's methodology, discern its strengths and ascertain its weaknesses, and formulate modifications to address those weaknesses. The single-interview protocol I used for the French 555 pilot study served this purpose. I was able to gather much useful information from my single *post hoc* interviews with Anne and Brad, but as I reviewed the recordings I also became aware of questions I had not thought to ask and statements I had not invited them to elaborate on. As a result, I adapted my methodology for the main investigation and adopted Seidman's (2006) three-interview series. The single interview protocol used for the pilot study is thus a limitation of the study, but one which led directly to its overall improvement.

#### *Modes of Investigation*

This research project drew primarily on interview data originally gathered via audio recording of face-to-face interviews and subsequently transcribed into text. These documents are supported by participant observer notes and various artifacts from the French 555 and Spanish 555 productions. Some of the study's limitations derive from the choice of data sources, and the decision not to use others. For example, video recordings of the interviews and (perhaps) rehearsals could have been an alternative or complement to the audio recordings and could have provided useful paralinguistic information about the participants' use of gesture and intonation. However, the potential advantages of videotaping interviews must be weighed against the potential disadvantage of making participants more self-conscious and the interview itself more stressful. Baranowski (2010) used video recording in a pilot study on the use of process drama for the professional development of non-Francophone French teachers and, finding it to be stressful for her participants, eschewed it for her main investigation. Participants' comfort with the

interview procedure is of primary importance in phenomenological investigation, to facilitate them opening themselves to the interviewer and sharing their experiences fully and candidly, so I chose to use audio recording only, as a less obtrusive means of capturing the interview data.

Another possible data source, recommended by Ryan-Scheutz and Colangelo (2004) and Ryan-Scheutz (2010), is participant journals. I could have asked my participants to complete introspective journals of their learning experience throughout the semester, or throughout Phase II, and drawn on these as either a primary or supplementary data source. The advantages to journal entries as data are: they can be recorded on a continuous basis, as opposed to the periodic interview series; recall is more immediate if participants are journaling their experiences the same day they happen; a journal has the potential to record a very frank, candid, and self-reflective conversation, as opposed to a conversation with another person in which the other's presence invariably impacts the exchange. However, there are also several significant drawbacks to relying on journals (especially as the primary data source). Unless journal-keeping is one of the course requirements, it can be difficult to guarantee compliance. Participants may not write regularly, and they may not write as much as one would hope. It can also be difficult to obtain data that can be compared across participants. On the one hand, when participants are free to write whatever they choose, they will select the aspects that are most important and essential to them, which is useful to know. However, that also means that the researcher loses the opportunity to ask all participants to reflect on common aspects of the experience, and to ask follow-up questions. There is an advantage, then, in using a three-interview series that allows some consistency across the data and some interaction between participant and researcher to facilitate a deeper, more thorough examination of topics of interest. A combination of interviews with free journaling may be recommendable for future investigations.

#### *Generalizability vs. Extrapolation and Validity vs. Trustworthiness*

Phenomenology does not emphasize the objectivity and the disinterested gaze of the researcher that is central to quantitative epistemology; rather, it entails establishing enough of a relationship with

participants that the researcher earns their trust and willingness to share their stories and experiences. Furthermore, as a result of its small number of participants and the nonrandom nature of their selection, this study does not meet the generally accepted criteria for generalizability. However, this is not the goal of the present investigation or of phenomenological research in general. I do not seek to identify factors and quantify variables to account for the findings. Within the qualitative paradigm, the goal is to establish *trustworthiness* (Johnson *et al.*, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that I have reported and interpreted my participants' descriptions of their experiences accurately and completely, and that my conclusions are sound and justifiable in light of the data. It is then the reader's responsibility to decide to what extent s/he can extrapolate my findings to other contexts, weighing their relevant similarities and differences.

In my quest for trustworthiness, I rely on two principal tools: thoroughness and transparency. I have included extensive passages from my participants' interviews, quoted nearly verbatim. As much as possible, I have sought to write this research report in heteroglossic fashion, allowing my participants to speak through it in their own voices. I have also striven to describe my own participant observer position, make clear my preconceptions, consciously set them aside through bracketing, and acknowledge ways in which my findings obliged me to reevaluate them. My goals in conducting this investigation are to provide insights into the target-language theatre experience that university FL educators and administrators can use to assess the potential role(s) of target-language theatre in their institutions' curricula, and to shed light on aspects of the experience, namely the perspectives of undergraduate participants, that have not been adequately represented in the research literature to date. I believe that by pursuing trustworthiness through thoroughness and transparency in this qualitative investigation, I have achieved what I set out to do. At the same time, I freely acknowledge that my perspective in this investigation is limited and partial, speaking to a particular context, and that individual readers will have to determine for themselves to what extent my findings can be extrapolated to other situations.

#### Part B: Implications Beyond the Scope of the Present Study

### *Implications for Future L2 Theatre Courses*

The present investigation has described in detail the reports of undergraduates participating in mixed-level target-language theatre courses taught at the 500-level in the FL curricula of two language departments at a large, Midwestern public university in the United States. The courses were substantially similar in their organization, with some finer-grained differences in their organization and in each instructor's approach to the rehearsal process.

Moving beyond these specific courses in their particular contexts, the present study can offer some insight into the wider implications of various course models and their possible positioning within the curriculum at other institutions. Options include exclusively undergraduate courses, courses with a greater or lesser performance component relative to the literature phase, and courses that experiment with performing scenes or a selection of one-act plays rather than a single larger work.

#### *Undergraduate-Focused Courses*

In institutions that do not offer graduate work in the foreign languages, mixed-level courses are, of course, nonexistent, and target-language theatre, if it is offered at all, will be at the UG level by default. Even at institutions with graduate programs, the possibility exists to offer segregated target-language theatre courses just for UGs, possibly alternating or co-existing with graduate-level courses. As the present study has demonstrated, there are potential benefits and very good reasons for offering mixed-level courses, but a case can also be made for exclusively UG target-language theatre. One argument is its potential usefulness for assisting students in making the transition from the study of language to literature, generally around the fifth semester. Matthias (2011) notes that “the benefits of a combined bodily-kinesthetic, affective, and analytical approach to literature and literary criticism are especially valuable for inexperienced readers” (p. 68) Another reason is to facilitate UGs' access to the potential benefits of playing roles with a substantial amount of text. As my participants noted, in an all-UG course they would have had an opportunity to play the larger speaking roles, whereas in the mixed-level courses most of the



main roles went to GSs and only a handful of the most experienced UGs won large speaking parts. David remarked that

I suppose if you think about limitations of the class, being mixed, grad students and undergrad students, is that the grad students did get the major parts in the play. And the grad students do do most of the talking about whatever play we've just analyzed. So, at some point, it's really good just to be inspired and to see how this works, but at another point there's no way that I'm going to legitimately win the part of Corona as an undergrad student. (D3)

David balanced this comment, however, by reflecting on how the presence of GSs raised the bar for the UGs and inspired them to push themselves to greater levels: "Well, it's a hard balance to cut, because you do want to be inspired, and then, anything in that play that I did sort of brought up to the level of intensity that these other people are setting the standard for. You know, 'cause I wonder, if it was all undergrads, if you'd ever get into the play that much" (D3). David's point was that having the GSs as pacesetters helped set a standard to which he and his fellow UGs could aspire.

It is an open question whether the presence of GSs motivated the UG participants even more than the act of participating in the play itself. In a small group of people, the effect of peer influence largely depends on the individuals themselves. It is entirely possible that a fully UG cast would still be motivated enough to produce a high-quality production. However, the UGs undeniably benefited from exposure to the GSs' higher level of language skills and the opportunity to interact with them as peers. Furthermore, it is an open question whether an all-UG course would demonstrate the same carnivalesque flattening of hierarchies during Phase II. Many participants cited the changed relationships to the GSs as one of the most profound facets of the overall experience. Perhaps future research will reveal whether interpersonal relationships change as profoundly in exclusively UG target-language theatre courses.

*Relative Weight of Literature and Performance Phases*

A variety of models can be conceived in which the literature-based Phase I and the performance-focused Phase II are weighted differently (both in terms of contact hours devoted to each and the relative weight of the final grade). French 555 and Spanish 555 divided the semester in halves, conducting Phase I prior to the midterm break and Phase II afterward, but other variations are certainly possible. A course could be designed to focus primarily on literature, with an abbreviated production at the end of the semester. Alternatively, the literature phase could be shortened to allow more time for rehearsals.

Whatever model is to be adopted, Ryan-Scheutz (2010) notes the importance of identifying and prioritizing clear learning options among the many possibilities, and of adopting coherent and effective assessment strategies that can reliably measure individual progress distinct from the overall group achievement. A target-language theatre production course can potentially have many overlapping goals relating to language proficiency, linguistic and communicative competence, literary and cultural analysis, and L2 confidence, in addition to the artistic success of the production. The amount of time devoted to various activities should reflect an accurate understanding of the course's priorities as well as a realistic view of how much time is necessary and reasonable to accomplish each goal. Likewise, participants' grades may be calculated based on various factors including participation in class discussion; writing assignments of varying length and content, including (but not limited to) creative writing assignments, response papers, analytic papers, and research papers; written exams; memorization of lines; active contributions to the production; creative projects, such as drawings and designs for costumes and props; rehearsal journals; and successful execution of the final performance(s). The components included in the grade and the weights assigned to them should reflect the course's overall goals and priorities.

Whatever model is chosen, the organization of rehearsal time should also be tailored to accurately reflect the course's learning goals and priorities. Key components of this organization include a coherent plan for the phases of rehearsal (improvisation, blocking, scene work, full runs, dress and technical rehearsals); a timetable for line memorization; decisions about whether to require all students to attend all

rehearsals, or to organize some with smaller groups; and whether and how to incorporate improvisational warm-up activities in some or all rehearsals. Again, many variations of these elements are possible and will depend in large measure on individual circumstances, although I can recommend some best practices based on the insights from the present study as well as from the published literature.

Participants from both courses offered reflections on their expectations and preferences for line memorization. Anne, who had the least experience in theatre of all the participants, particularly appreciated the one opportunity that the French 555 students were given to hold a group rehearsal to work on their lines ahead of the pre-established deadline. Anne found the collaborative aspect of the rehearsal very helpful. She also appreciated the opportunity to connect the other characters' names to the actors playing them. Anne mentioned that for her, running lines with the group was much more facilitative of memorization than trying to learn them on her own. In the Spanish 555 course, there was no single pre-established deadline for memorization; instead, Profe asked participants to complete it on an *ad hoc*, scene-by-scene basis. Cassie mentioned that she would have preferred a single, common deadline.

Cassie also made valuable observations, identified opportunities and offered suggestions for how the actors in supporting roles could have benefited from intensive small group work to better understand how to interpret them. She also made some perceptive comments about incorporating improvisational warm-up activities more consistently:

If we had done more - I mean, we did some, you know, warm-ups, but, I think had we done, like, one or two every time we had class, it would have helped people who were uncomfortable on stage be more comfortable, too, you know, and not, like, ... certain people who, you know, were always kind of nervous and, like, just like ran away after they said their lines, would probably help them, you know, not be so scared of their own voice ... just making people feel comfortable around each other, you know? (C3)

Cassie followed up on her comment by recounting an anecdote about an ex-boyfriend and another friend of hers who were both members of a campus improvisational comedy club. The club was large enough that it was divided into several teams. The ex-boyfriend belonged to a team that consisted of a group of best friends who had been doing improv together for approximately five years, and Cassie noted that they had an almost uncanny ability to read one another and play off of what the others were doing. The other friend belonged to a team in which the members really didn't like one another and, consequently, didn't spend much time together. Their performances were never anywhere near the level of those of the other team. Her point was that the improvisational activities and the affective bonds of the group were recursive and mutually reinforcing. Frequent improvisational activities are important for strengthening connections among a group of people, simultaneously helping them to become better performers. Cassie speculated that incorporating more regular improvisations in rehearsal might have promoted bonding among the classmates and might have helped her to feel more comfortable with socializing with them. It is an open question whether this would have been true or not - and whether it would have applied to all participants equally, or mainly to Cassie, who continued to feel a greater degree of inhibition around her classmates when other students seemed to have largely overcome it. Her larger point, though, was that although improvisational warm-up activities are time-consuming (the main reason why they were only used intermittently in Spanish 555), the participants accrue significant benefits from their consistent use.

While I agree with Cassie's comments about a memorization deadline, more intensive work with small groups, and improvisational warm-ups at the beginning of each rehearsal, in the spirit of devil's advocate I offer two observations regarding her points. Based on my participant observation, I noted that the undergraduate participants in the project benefited from being present for full-cast rehearsals even when they did not spend much time on stage. As language learners, they accrued some benefits from overhearing the entire show multiple times over the course of the rehearsal period (as opposed to hearing just their own scenes multiple times). It is an open question whether they would benefit more from

concentrated, scene-specific rehearsals with less exposure to the scenes they did not participate in; future research may be able to address this. In any event, being present during the full-cast rehearsals and witnessing the others working on their scenes allowed all the actors, at various times, to engage in what Lave and Wenger (1991) termed *legitimate peripheral participation*. Theatre-based learning need not only occur when a participant him-/herself is acting; it can also take place through observation, by being present in the social milieu and witnessing the actions of peers.

My second observation about Cassie's critiques is that she, as the participant with the most extensive theatre background, had more pre-established expectations than many of the other participants, and more opportunities to make comparisons to other (L1) productions she had worked on. Target-language theatre is similar to L1 theatre in many ways, but it also has some clear differences that may require different approaches and timetables. It may also become a site of mismatched cultural expectations, as practitioners from different backgrounds and traditions may have different preferred methods. The less experienced participants seemed to have an easier time embracing the instructor's approach, because they had less of a basis for comparison. For instructors contemplating implementing their own target-language theatre productions, it is important to be aware that participants with prior theatre experience proffer valuable contributions, but they may also bring more specific expectations about how rehearsals should be organized and may have more difficulty adapting to the unique requirements of a target-language production.

#### *Philosophical Considerations Vis-à-vis L2 Theatre's Role in the Curriculum*

In trying to produce quality theatre while simultaneously attempting to privilege the language learning needs of students, might we not be trying to serve two masters? Koerner (2004) asks the equally important question, "How can the principles of communicative language teaching be upheld in a class that consists primarily of the rehearsal of a play, in which the students receive roles and memorize them for performance?" (p. 73) Ryan-Scheutz (2010), in her discussion of appropriate assessments for L2 theatre,

articulates the need for each practitioner to clarify for him- or herself the objectives and priorities of the course:

It is essential to begin by having a clear idea of its primary and secondary learning goals and where exactly it fits in the language program and curriculum. For example, it is necessary to decide whether the ITW is primarily an Italian language course, focusing on aspects of grammar and syntax, diction and pronunciation, proficiency and fluency in Italian. Or whether it is primarily a literature course that maximizes the potential depth and breadth of textual analysis through the production of a play. Or whether it is mainly an innovative, interdisciplinary course, combining language study with the arts as well as personal talents and creativity (acting, directing, and design). (pp. 299-300)

The primacy of linguistic, literary, or theatrical considerations is an important determination that each instructor must consider carefully. Essif (2006) offers a trenchant perspective on the question of what ends the L2 theatre production ought to serve, noting that theatre used for purely instrumental purposes does a disservice to all involved:

When we as professionals focus too closely on the speech component of the project, both the real instruction to the students and the *mise-en-scène* will suffer. The ultimate effect the project produces on the student-actors as well as on the audience will not reach a sufficient level of aesthetic, cultural, and critical awareness. To be sure, despite the emphasis on the purely verbal component of culture, the traditional, language-based approach to the theatre practicum can help not only language acquisition but cultural awareness. If the teacher is tenacious and organized enough, the process will prove effective as a language-learning tool, especially since the greatest energy is spent on the memorization and recitation of foreign text. However, my focus in this type of course has never been on the language content per se, but rather on the theatrical context, on the material and spatial imagery (first visual, then aural) through which a story is told, and on

immersing the students as completely as possible in creative performance technique ... the role of the foreign language is merely instrumental to the theatrical context of the performance project, a uniquely comprehensive kind of context ... foreign language theatre production can mean so much more for the student-actors and the audience if we step back from the obsessive focus on reproducing the language of a fixed text and begin to realize that theatrical art comes to life through the added contextualization of the language, and it begins to breathe more freely and deeply as it bridges the gaps between language, literature, and culture ... By emphasizing the material, spatial, psychosomatic and gestural performance of the language and around the language, we can elevate our play projects to the level of *real* (emphasis original) theatre; only then can we properly attend to two other very important dimensions of theatrical production by students, the critical and the artistic, which are enlightening, enriching, and otherwise instructive for the acting participants and the spectators alike. (pp. 8-9)

Essif expresses a rather different understanding of the primary objective of L2 theatre than some of the other practitioners in the field. Paradoxically, we may be able to offer students a better, richer learning experience by focusing *less* explicitly on the language learning component of the project and privileging the artistic goals of L2 theatre production. Huber (2003), translated and quoted in Lutzker (2007), echoes this observation:

Though drama [*theatre*] is a medium for developing competence in the foreign language, it only serves this purpose in an optimal way when it is not used didactically as such, or made accessible or domesticated, but rather when it becomes an autonomous medium. The lessons then become in the widest sense communicative, when they challenge each individual to develop joy in acting, makeup, costume ... when they enable the actors to develop something from the diversity of their individually acquired role-play potentials within the foreign language and involve them as

*dramatis personae* in a double sense; as persons with multiple role competences who are involved in a many-sided social and aesthetic theatrical event. (p. 234)

However, for many FL professionals, especially with respect to policy decisions about curriculum, the primacy of artistic considerations in L2 theatre productions is not uncontroversial. All would agree that L2 plays should be “good” productions, but exactly what that means is up for debate, and whether artistic concerns should take precedence over linguistic and pedagogical concerns is not at all clear for many practitioners. Much more research into theatre-based language learning is needed. Essif and Huber’s remarks, together with Ryan-Scheutz’, reflect that L2 theatre may be conceived of in various ways by different individuals. The student participants, too, may have artistic, instrumental, personal, and social goals distinct from those of the instructor.

#### *Conclusion to Implications for Future L2 Theatre Courses*

Target-language theatre is clearly a powerful learning environment with the potential to offer participants transformative and enriching experiences with the language and culture as well as with a peer group of fellow learners. It offers a valuable complement to the rest of the FL curriculum in its embodied, kinesthetic situating of language and its in-depth investigation of a single text. It offers a multiplicity of possible learning goals, ways of organizing the course, and assessment options for evaluating students. It is important, however, that goals, organization, and assessment are chosen in light of one another so that the course is structured in a coherent fashion.

#### *Implications for Other Courses Within the L2 Curriculum*

This dissertation has argued that target-language theatre is a valuable addition to the FL curriculum, supplying opportunities and affordances that are often lacking in more traditional classroom courses and complementing the standard sequence of literature courses. However, this experience also offers insights that can be applied to more traditional, classroom-based courses in language, literature, and linguistics. This section of the dissertation discusses approaches, strategies, and techniques derived from



the target-language theatre environment that are applicable, with certain adaptations, to non-theatre-based courses.

Much of what made Phase II of the semester a transformative experience for the undergraduate participants had to do with the social dimensions of interaction. The course became less hierarchical during the theatre-based portion, and the professor, graduate students, and undergraduate students collaborated as peers. Some of these changes flowed from the nature of the activity and would be difficult to replicate in a non-theatre context, but many of them could be adapted to language, literature, and linguistics classrooms by drawing on the insights of group dynamics. Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) and Ehrman and Dörnyei (1998) offer a series of recommendations that were explicitly realized in the French 555 and Spanish 555 contexts and could be more widely employed in other FL courses to improve the social dynamics of the L2 classroom. The first is that the members of the French 555 and Spanish 555 formed groups according to Ehrman and Dörnyei's (1998, p. 72) criteria: they perceived themselves as members of a distinct unit *to which they demonstrated a level of commitment* (emphasis mine); they shared a purpose and a goal for being together; the group endured for a reasonable period of time; they manifested a salient internal structure with a division of group roles; and they were held (and held themselves) accountable for the members' actions. As evidence for the demonstrated level of commitment to the group, I offer David's comments on an incident when a misunderstanding caused him to arrive late to one of the rehearsals:

I thought it was at two and really it was at one, so I was an hour late ... when I got there, having been an hour late, and they called me, like, ten minutes before I got there, saying "where are you?", um, and it wasn't so much that, like, if you, if you showed up to class an hour late you'd feel bad, you'd feel, like, afraid of the professor ... but I felt bad more that I might have missed something as far as the play was concerned, and, and whether Profe was mad or not was sort of a secondary issue ... it really demonstrates well, as a - as a student it's sort of hard to understand

how much power you have to change what's going on in the classroom, but it's really apparent as an actor, how much power you have to change anything you want, because you have to do it when you're on stage. (D2)

David explicitly contrasts the feeling of powerlessness experienced by many students in many classrooms with the sense of responsibility he felt toward his peers and their common project. I suggest that at least some of this sense of responsibility and belonging can be replicated in classrooms by deliberately employing insights from group dynamics to create more cohesive classroom communities.

The first of these insights is to foster successful group formation by building intermember relationships and promoting mutual acceptance. One of the most basic techniques for achieving this is to ensure that all members of the classroom community learn one another's names. Many language instructors work at learning their students' names, but they do not always prioritize ensuring that their students learn the names of their classmates. This, according to Dörnyei and Murphey (2003), is a significant missed opportunity to build group dynamics, especially in a language classroom. Where language is both the object and medium of instruction, there is an obvious assumption that students should *use* the language in order to learn it, and one of the primary means of using the L2 is by talking to one another. However, there are two potential complicating factors in most FL classrooms that impede this goal. The first is that by asking students who (generally) share a common native language to interact in an L2 in which they lack proficiency, we are imposing upon them an inescapably artificial task, no matter how much real-world context we manage to incorporate. That is simply an unavoidable part of language teaching. However, the second, avoidable complication is that we ask them to practice the language by *talking to strangers*. In most higher education contexts, the members of any given class are brought together more or less arbitrarily, by the vagaries of the registrar, and there is no guarantee that any of them will know one another. Anonymity in the classroom is a barrier to participation, and the reluctance to interact in the L2 is exacerbated by an understandable aversion to talking to strangers. An

important first step toward removing this obstacle is to ensure that students are not only encouraged but made responsible for learning their peers' names. Additional techniques include using "icebreaker" activities that require the students to employ the target language to learn about one another and promote affiliation, and ensuring that students move around the classroom and interact with everyone in the group, not only the people they happen to already know or who are seated next to them. All of these principles were visibly illustrated in the transition from Phase I to Phase II of the target-language theatre courses in the present study. Classroom interaction in Phase I was limited in comparison with Phase II; the students tended to remain in their seats and work with the same few people, and they knew one another by sight but not necessarily by name. During Phase II, the participants were obliged to get to know all of their peers and collaborate on different scenes and projects. They were no longer mired in their seats, and improvisational warm-up activities had an icebreaker effect.

Another insight from Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) is that effective groups are bound by cohesiveness stemming from common interest in a shared task or goal. Cohesiveness, furthermore, is often heightened when the group shares the experience of facing a common challenge or threat. In the case of target-language theatre, the common interest and shared tasks and goals obviously stem from involvement in the production, with the attendant challenge of successful performance before an audience. Instructors of other FL courses can make use of this insight by incorporating project-based assignments that appeal to students' shared interests in their course design.

A final, often overlooked aspect of group dynamics is the importance of an appropriate closure to the group experience. Certain closure rituals are built into the experience of putting on a play: the project culminates with the performance(s), followed by the shared labor of "striking" the production: dismantling the scenery; cleaning the theatre space; returning props and costumes to storage or, in the case of borrowed/rented items, to their owners; and disposing of items not to be saved. Typically this is followed by a celebration and opportunity for shared reminiscence in the form of a cast party, often

including the screening of a film of the production. The end-of-semester rituals governing the classroom are usually procedurally focused: preparing for and taking the final exam, and distributing graded homework and papers. Classroom instructors can improve their students' perceptions of them and the overall classroom experience by taking a bit of time to acknowledge and the end of the group's time together and affirm its achievements. Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) note that "an appropriate closure offers opportunities for a great deal of teaching/learning and motivating to take place that would be missed out on if we did not include some affirmation of what has been achieved." (p. 160)

Aside from applying group dynamics to foster peer interaction within the classroom, another principal bit of wisdom to be gleaned from this study is that there are important benefits to having UG students interact with their instructors and GSs outside the language classroom, especially in contexts that allow the UGs to demonstrate expertise. This may be brought about through such extracurricular activities as a [French/Spanish/Other Language] Club or Conversation Table. Organizers can arrange for UGs to be in charge of presenting a demonstration on a relevant topic. Examples include teaching a dance lesson or giving instructions on preparing a recipe from a target culture's cuisine. Students interested in film might choose a target-language film for screening and lead a discussion afterward. Recent returnees from travel abroad might give a presentation on their experiences. Other possibilities include field trips; excursions to attend cultural events such as film screenings, museum exhibits, plays, operas, and dance presentations; or a visit to a restaurant that serves the cuisine of the target culture. All of these activities give students an opportunity to interact with their instructors on a more informal footing outside of the classroom.

Another insight from this study of target-language theatre is the value of facilitating peer interactions across levels, bringing together less-proficient students with their more-advanced peers. In many FL departments in institutions of higher education, students spend most of their time interacting with classmates at more or less their same level of proficiency, and they often have relatively few opportunities to work in mixed-level courses. One of the important benefits of fostering interaction across

levels is that it allows up-and-coming aspiring learners to get to know their more advanced counterparts as role models. Departments stand to benefit from this in terms of recruitment and retention: students in the beginning language sequence may be more likely to envision themselves as language majors by getting to know students who have declared such a major, and more advanced UGs are better able to envision themselves undertaking graduate study when they are acquainted with GSs on a peer basis, not just in the context of student-instructor relationships.

Evaluation is another arena in which insights drawn from target-language theatre can be applied to more conventional courses. One of the strengths of theatre-based L2 learning is the way that a theatre production fosters, and indeed requires, students undertaking differentiated and often highly individuated course tasks within an overarching common project. Roles are cast and responsibilities assigned based on the instructor's knowledge and/or intuition about individual students' strengths, capabilities, skills, and potential. Consequently, students are assessed with individuated evaluation criteria based on their unique responsibilities. By contrast, students in more conventional classrooms are usually assessed by a common standard against which their shortcomings are demonstrated. Lutzker (2007) points out that one of the great strengths of the theatre-based model is that students are able to find a niche for their individual contributions so that they can be evaluated on what they do well. It is possible to draw inspiration from the target-language theatre course model and find ways of balancing fairness with offering students unique, individuated assignments, particularly project-based ones that allow them to demonstrate leadership and expertise. Miccoli (2011) recommends strategies such as having students create portfolios and offering students lists of options from which they select assignments to complete. Depending on the level of the course, they might, for example, prepare a presentation with a vocabulary lesson related to a topic of personal interest or expertise and be responsible for teaching it to their classmates; they could be asked to generate dialogue for a silent film or a muted film clip; they might be given the opportunity to research a cultural topic and present it to their classmates; they could even be assigned the task of

producing a short film, including writing and revising the script, filming it, editing it, and publishing it to YouTube or to a class website. Such project-based evaluations need to be carefully planned and sequenced according to explicit language-learning goals, with well-developed assessment criteria, but it is certainly possible to move beyond the tests-and-papers paradigm that dominates so many FL courses and incorporate more project-based assessments in the curriculum.

The target-language theatre courses also amply demonstrate the value of collaborative work in addition to individual and individuated tasks. Indeed, responsibility to the group was a significant driver of motivation to excel in individual responsibilities, as David's aforementioned quote demonstrates. Teachers of classroom-based courses can use this insight to develop project-based assessments that allow for individuated tasks within the context of a group effort, such as the short film described in the previous paragraph. Such a project requires a variety of artistic, creative, presentational, organizational, compositional, and technical skills in addition to competence in the target language, and can be employed to play to the strengths of various group members in a way that is both collaborative and individuated.

Given that the overarching goal of language teaching is to prepare our students to function independently in the target language, another theatre-based strategy worth adapting to the conventional classroom is the regular use of improvisational activities, to give students an opportunity to generate extemporaneous speech in a wide variety of (imagined) L2 situations. Language learners often master the academic discourse of the classroom relatively well, but report difficulties in transferring their L2 competence to other domains. I have stated elsewhere that metaxis is the characteristic that sets the target-language theatre course apart from other courses in the FL curriculum. Instructors of other courses, especially intermediate-level conversation courses, could take advantage of the freeing effects of a fictitious identity by exploring improvisational activities with their students, creating imaginary contexts and encouraging their students to come up with spontaneous conversational interactions under the guise of an assumed identity. Occasional roleplays would be very unlikely to achieve the same level of metaxis

as a sustained theatre project, but, as a consistent classroom practice, improvisation could conceivably be harnessed as a productive means of diversifying the communicative situations that students are afforded the opportunity to practice.

#### *Suggestions for Future Research*

The present study adds to the small but growing body of research into theatre-based language learning. It also points toward several directions for possible future lines of inquiry investigating theatre-based language learning and its role within the wider FL curriculum. This particular study examines the target-language theatre experience from the perspective of one specific group, undergraduate L2 learners, within the context of mixed-level courses comprised of UGs and GSs, NSs and NNSs of the target language, collaborating in a learning community. Additional research remains to be carried out on other contexts and configurations. There are many fascinating questions yet to be investigated on the learning experience in exclusively UG and/or exclusively L2 learner-populated courses, as well as the learning experience of GSs participating in target-language theatre and its potential influence on their pedagogical development as graduate teaching assistants and future professors. In all these contexts, opportunities exist for both positivist and ecologically-based research; the profession at large is likely to demand positivist research to justify the resources required to include theatre-based language learning in the standard curriculum, while ecological research approaches can supply a deeper, more nuanced, and holistic perspective on how target-language theatre fits into the larger picture of language education.

On the linguistic front, empiricists would appreciate studies demonstrating participants' gains in global proficiency in the L2, gains in the mastery of specific L2 structures, and the acquisition of L2 vocabulary. Ryan-Scheutz (2010) offers some excellent suggestions on how such investigations can be designed, although she and Colangelo (2004) note that as a tool for assessing gains in global proficiency, the standard Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) using the ACTFL scale may not be fine-grained enough to detect the degree of improvement many students are able to attain within a single semester.

Ryan-Scheutz (2010) does note, however, that during their posttest OPIs the participants in her study demonstrated greater confidence and improved strategic competence compared with the pretest. The role of L2 confidence in target-language theatre participation is ripe for further investigation. Rubinfeld *et al.* (2006) linked L2 confidence to sustained motivation to learn the L2. This, in turn, is linked to engagement, interpersonal relationships, and L2 identity as a member of a group. Martin and Dowson (2009) suggested that “the concept of relationships provides an organizing framework for considering theories, issues, and practices relevant to achievement motivation” (pp. 327-328) and they proposed that “the greater the connectedness on personal and emotional levels (also referred to as *relatedness* and *relational processes*) in the academic context, the greater the scope for academic motivation, engagement, and achievement.” (p. 328) Theatre-based language learning creates a unique environment wherein the entire group is collaboratively engaged in a creative endeavor, but the relational aspect of the experience has been little studied, in part because of the infrequent opportunities to do so and the tendency among practitioners of L2 theatre to sacrifice research to the more practical concerns of the endeavor (see Marini-Maio, 2010, p. 239, for relevant comments). Other possible directions for future research include the potential relationship between participation in target-language theatre and the integration of culturally appropriate gesture with L2 speech; comparisons between the experience of target-language theatre and study abroad; and investigation into the relationship between target-language theatre participation and L2 writing.

These areas of research, additionally, may be amenable to study within an ecological as well as a positivist framework. Van Lier (2000) acknowledges the challenges of researching contextually-embedded phenomena and departing from the widely-accepted assumptions of empirical research. He states that “by studying the interaction in its totality, the researcher must attempt to show the emergence of learning, the location of learning opportunities, the pedagogical value of various interactional contexts and processes, and the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies.” (p. 250) He further acknowledges that at



present there are no established research procedures for this type of endeavor, but he recommends Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993; Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994) bioecological model, that describes learning contexts with an integral focus on person, process, context, and time. (van Lier, 2000, p. 255)

One of the constituent components of the target-language theatre experience is the use of improvisations and theatre games as warm-up activities. This particular area of activity merits further in-depth study for its potential to help participants develop communicative competence in extemporizing spontaneous speech. The previous section of this chapter suggests that improvisational activities may be a useful addition to non-theatre, classroom-based courses as a means of broadening students' interactional competence. However, very little research has been done on this particular topic. Research is needed to substantiate this claim and develop effective approaches and recommendations for integrating improvisational activities in FL classes.

Another domain that holds promise for future research is the development of interactive digital drama for language learning. Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based digital participatory dramas are a recent technological innovation that facilitate participant role-playing through an interactive drama scenario with a non-linear narrative. Lombardi (2012) describes how one such game application, *Façade*, has been used with ESL learners. Another model in use at the University of New Mexico is *Mentira*, a game that blends online and real-world content using the Augmented Reality Interactive Storytelling (ARIS) platform. ([www.mentira.org](http://www.mentira.org)) These games are different from target-language theatre in the sense that they do not involve performance for an audience, but they do share some of the important characteristics afforded by L2 theatre, namely the opportunity to absorb oneself in one's role and engage in metaxis. *Mentira* also incorporates collaborative and social aspects, as participants form teams and interact to solve the mystery that serves as the premise for the game. Future research into technology-based applications such as these may allow educators to infuse some of the advantages of the theatre-based learning environment into

other learning contexts, allowing a broader cross-section of students greater access to the affordances of role-playing and metaxis in the target language.

A final insight from the present investigation that can be applied to more conventional L2 classroom courses is the need, as articulated by Polio and Zyzik (2009) and Magnan *et al.* (2012), to undertake research into student perspectives on their learning environments and experiences in order to better understand the effects of curricular modifications, and to gain a clearer idea of how students perceive course and program goals. Such research can facilitate the successful implementation of curricular initiatives, which risk complications and even outright failure when student perspectives are not well understood and do not converge with instructors' points of view.

### Conclusion

This phenomenological investigation of participation in target-language theatre productions by undergraduate students in mixed-level courses has sought to elucidate the essential experience of this specific population within this specific learning environment. By interviewing my participants and analyzing their aggregate responses, I have identified a number of common themes that constitute essential facets of the French 555 and Spanish 555 experience for the UG participants.

The research questions that guided this investigation were:

- What is it like to be a participant in a mixed-level target language theatre course that includes undergraduates, graduate students, and native speakers?
- What benefits and limitations do learners experience when engaged in theatre production with more advanced peers?
- What do undergraduate second language learners experience as a result of taking this course alongside graduate student and native speaker classmates?

In answer to the first question, a mixed-level target-language theatre course that includes UGs, GSs, NSs, and NNSs is a unique experience that exposes its participants to stimulation and interaction on

many levels: cognitive, social, emotional, psychological, intellectual, kinesthetic, personal, and interpersonal as well as linguistic. The individual details of the experience vary widely according to an individual's unique positioning, encompassing his/her particular developmental level; the specific duties, responsibilities, and opportunities that flow from his/her role in the project; the matrix of peer relationships that develops with other participants; and the affordances that the individual encounters in his/her environment. Below the surface differences of individual experience, however, runs the common thread that target-language theatre is a challenging endeavor that obliges participants to engage with the L2 in unaccustomed ways and participate in activities distinct from those of the traditional classroom. It is a fundamentally different experience from other academic courses in the type of learning that is demanded of participants, the type of endeavors they engage in, and the type of peer relationships they develop with their classmates and instructor. A key component of the target-language theatre experience is the opportunity to assume the identity of a cultural insider through metaxis when playing one's role. Participants reported perceiving the powerful impact of metaxis even when playing non-speaking roles.

The second research question focuses on the benefits and limitations to less-proficient learners who participate in target-language theatre with more-proficient peers. These participants derive linguistic and social benefits from the opportunity to develop peer relationships with more-advanced classmates. Initially, the presence of more-proficient classmates has an inhibiting function. Participants reported feeling intimidated and self-conscious about their linguistic limitations, which caused them to limit their participation in class discussions. They did report some benefit from witnessing the exchanges of their more-advanced peers, but initially they also felt less confident about their own participation by comparison. Once social relationships were established, their more-proficient peers served as resources and role models during the second phase of the project. This was facilitated by the change in environment and the new types of activities undertaken during Phase II.

The third research question focuses with greater specificity on the experience of UG NNS

participants in the context of the mixed-level course. UG NNS participants reported feeling more at ease socializing in the target language outside of “official” class time once they had gotten to know their GS and NS classmates by name and on a peer footing during Phase II. It had once felt artificial to speak the target language when there was no institutional expectation to do so, and social pressure encouraged them to switch to the L1. During Phase II, however, a social environment was established wherein the target language existed alongside English as a *co-lingua franca* for the community, and it was the preferred language of some of its members. This encouraged the UG NNSs to orient to it as a social as well as an academic language. UG NNSs also reported their appreciation for coming to know their GS and NS classmates as role models who motivated them to improve their language mastery and to consider the possibility of future graduate study. Additionally, they appreciated their GS and NS classmates’ willingness to assist them with linguistic difficulties.

The primary drawback of the mixed-level course design was the limited opportunity for less-proficient UGs to play the larger speaking roles in the production. Most of the lead roles were given to GSs and/or NSs, while the majority of the UGs played multiple smaller roles. This afforded them both advantages and disadvantages. Although most of the UGs did not have to memorize a substantial amount of text or engage in a deep level of character development, they did receive the opportunity to learn by observing their peers through legitimate peripheral participation, and to engage in a wider variety of activities.

The dominant themes that emerged from the analysis had to do with social, emotional, experiential, intellectual, and kinesthetic as well as linguistic dimensions of the experience, and they can be interpreted in various ways. Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogized heteroglossia (1981, 1985) and carnival (1965/1968) and van Lier’s ecological framework for language learning (2000, 2004, 2010) are useful interpretive tools for understanding the relationship of these themes to the overall experience.

The social dimensions of participation in these courses were unique within the FL curriculum and

constituted one of the most important aspects of the experience. Participants described how their initial intimidation gave way to a sense of full group participation on a peer footing as the course transitioned from Phase I through Phase II, hierarchies were flattened, and the UGs felt themselves more able to make valuable contributions to the project. They also articulated their achievement of new understandings, often through problem-solving. They reflected on the sense of interdependence that the project fostered: they felt connected to the rest of their classmates and responsible for the project's success, and they perceived connections between the play and diverse elements of the wider social and curricular context. A spirit of carnival freedom and camaraderie (Bakhtin, 1965/1968) pervaded the second half of the course.

Participants also responded strongly to the experience of adopting an L2 identity through metaxis and embodiment. They experienced a sense of liberation in temporarily setting aside their quotidian identities to explore the affordances of their roles. They also felt liberated from some of their cognitive burdens by interacting through the preordained utterances of the texts, allowing them to focus on other aspects such as pronunciation. Dialogism, heteroglossia, and double-voiced discourse illuminate some of the dynamics of these linguistic dimensions of the experience. (Bakhtin, 1981, 1985).

An additional finding was that UG participants in these mixed-level courses eventually came to value the presence of their GS classmates as potential role models. Interacting with GSs on a peer basis through French 555 and Spanish 555 made graduate study seem more familiar and accessible to the UG participants, and some of them reported that they had begun to consider graduate school as a future possibility for themselves.

Finally, a universal aspect of the experience was the sense that *L'oeuvre absurde* and *La obra absurda* had suited their respective groups excellently well, roles had been brilliantly cast, and it was difficult to imagine how any aspects of the shows could have superseded what the productions achieved. While it may be tempting to attribute this sensation, commonly experienced at the culmination of a theatre project, to euphoria or mysticism, van Lier's (2000, 2004, 2010) ecological framework offers a

more coherent explanation: within the learning environment of the L2 theatre production, learners seek out and avail themselves of affordances as they interact with the text, with one another, and with the material resources that form part of the production. Within the overarching common project, individuals are able to attend to their own specific needs, respond to their classmates, and take advantage of their unique positioning to grow into their roles. L2 theatre is both collaborative and highly individuated and, at its best, offers participants a rich and supportive environment within which to flourish.

This research has illuminated important and heretofore unexplored facets of target-language theatre and its potential to enhance the undergraduate FL curriculum. By creating a space within academic language study that explicitly encourages a leveling of hierarchies and social relationships; engagement with target-language texts in a dialogized, heteroglossic, and embodied way; collaboration on various highly individuated tasks that contribute to an overall common project with a built-in cathartic final experience of successful resolution; the opportunity to assume the role of a cultural insider through metaxis; and the organization of an ecological instructional design that takes advantage of multiple affordances within a rich semiotic environment, we encourage our students to engage with the target language in ways that rarely occur in more traditional FL classrooms. It is my most cherished hope that this research will encourage more university FL departments to implement target-language theatre productions within their curricula and make this extraordinary learning environment more widely available to greater numbers of L2 learners.

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## APPENDIX A: Institutional Review Board Notice of Action

**Notice of Action**  
**University of Wisconsin–Madison**  
**Institutional Review Board (IRB)**

**Principal Investigator:** Francois V Tochon, PhD  
**Department:** Curriculum and Instruction  
**Co-Investigator:** Kelly C Kingsbury  
**Protocol Title:** Phenomenology of L2 Theatre  
**Protocol Number:** SE-2010-0001  
**IRB:** Education Research IRB (Contact: Mike Bingham, 262-9710)  
**Committee Action:** Qualifies as Exempt from IRB Review (46.101(b)(2)) as of: **January 06, 2010**

**Special Notes or Instructions:** Participants in this study will be interviewed about topics such as their experiences in theater and in foreign language classes. Questions are benign and any disclosure of the responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation. Therefore, this protocol is determined to be exempt pursuant to 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

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**INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES:**

Annual review is not required for this protocol since it was determined to be exempt. However, any changes to the protocol, including but not limited to changes in procedures, subject population or recruitment of subjects, must be reviewed by the IRB before the changes are incorporated to insure they do not change the exempt status of the protocol.

Any new information that would affect potential risks to subjects or any adverse reactions must be reported immediately to the IRB contact listed above.

## APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form

**UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
Research Participant Information and Consent Form**

**Title of the Study:** Phenomenology of L2 Theatre

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Francois Tochon (phone: (608) 263-7570) (email: kingsbury@wisc.edu, ftochon@education.wisc.edu)

Student Researcher: Kelly Kingsbury (phone: (218) 791-9539)

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

You are invited to participate in a research study about the experiences of students participating in theatre productions in a foreign language.

You have been asked to participate because you are a university student enrolled in a target-language theatre and drama course, and this semester you will be experiencing firsthand what it is like to be a part of a theatre production in a foreign language.

The purpose of the research is to develop an understanding of the experience of participating in theatre in a foreign language from the point of view of students engaged in learning the language.

This study will include university students of French and/or Spanish enrolled in theatre and drama courses (French 595 and/or Spanish 564) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The research will take place in a quiet, public location conducive to interviewing and convenient to the participant. The study space in Memorial Library and/or the Memorial Union will be used for the purposes of conducting interviews.

Audio recordings will be made of your participation. The researcher and interview participants will be the only individuals who will hear the audio recordings. The recordings will be kept for seven years in a secure location before they are destroyed.

**WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to meet with the researcher for three interviews of approximately 90 minutes each. In the interviews, you will be asked to talk about your previous experiences with theatre and with language-learning. You will also be asked to talk about your participation in the production for your French 595/Spanish 564 course. All interviews will be conducted in English.

Your participation will last approximately 90 min. per session and will require 3 sessions which will require about 4.5 hours in total.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

The overall risk to participants is low. The research presents no physical or economic risk, and participation will have no bearing whatsoever on your grade for the course. In the interviews, you may choose to discuss difficult, challenging or painful past and/or present experiences with language learning and/or theatre. As a student concurrently enrolled in a course and involved in a play production, your reflection on the experience in the interviews may have an impact on how you perceive your own participation in the course. If you choose to participate, you will be given the opportunity to review the data to assure that it fairly and accurately represents your experience. Additionally, appropriate steps will be taken to anonymize the research report in order to protect your privacy.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

Participation in this research will give you the opportunity to reflect upon your own learning processes and develop a deeper understanding of your language learning experience. You may find that participation enhances your individual educational experience in French 595 and/or Spanish 564.

**HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

Your confidentiality will be protected by the use of pseudonyms in the research reporting. Additionally, the play's title, names of characters and relevant plot details will be disguised in order to shield participants from indirect identification.

If you participate in this study, we would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow us to quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

**WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator Dr. Francois Tochon at (608) 263-7570. You may also call the student researcher, Kelly Kingsbury at (218) 791-9539.

If you are not satisfied with response of the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education Research and Social & Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.et

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study it will have no effect on your grade in this class.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature

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Date

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.