**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

**FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**School of Humanities**

**Social Structure, Agency and Second Language Learning:  A study of the impact of contextual conditions on the desire to invest in language learning amongst undergraduate students in Cancun**

**By**

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# ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

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SOCIAL STRUCTURE, AGENCY AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING: A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS ON THE DESIRE TO INVEST IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONGST UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN CANCUN

By Magdalena Avila Pardo

The interrelationship between social structure and agency is relatively unexplored in second language acquisition research, although it has been extensively studied in the field of social science. SLL has focused on agency from a postructuralist and sociocultural perspective linked to other constructs such as identity and power relations within different discourses. Agency is recognised as being creative and responsive to the sociocultural context, but also difficult to define. As a result, there has been a call for interdisciplinarity for a better understanding in SLA research (Sealey and Carter, 2004, Vitanova 2010, Norton, 2013, Block, 2013; Block, 2015). Following such a call, this study attempts to link language learners' accounts to various layers of context and social structure as proposed by Block's (2015) model of structure and agency.

It explores and seeks to explain how structures can work as enablements or constraints in second language learning in a transnational touristic destination. Significantly influenced by Daniel Block's writings, the psychological angle is included. This research is underpinned by Roy Bhaskar's realist philosophy of social science and uses Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) and Margaret Archer's (1995, 2000, and 2007) key concepts to understand better what makes students shape or resist their access to EFL. These theories are deemed suitable for a study which seeks to understand how students take decisions regarding language learning.

The research participants were 11 students in the undergraduate programme of Sustainable Tourism and International Business at a government university in the city of Cancun. Data sources included language learning biographies, comments, the researcher field notes and knowledge of the context.

With regard to social structure, it was found that the relevance of English in Cancun contributes to students' desire to learn it. They cannot however, easily practice the language in the city until they insert themselves in the job market. Parents are seen to invest in their children's English language learning regardless of their socio-economic status given that Mexican government education is considered deficient. Students negotiate their participation in different contexts in the form of social relations, either face to face or through physical objects and digital devices, thus exercising their agency. The study also found that students deal with economic and family situations that constrain their choices. The findings suggest that students' agency is the combination of past experiences, perceived linguistic competence, and the attributed importance of English to their present and future lives, which involves interests, aspirations and expectations that relate to their identity, who they are and who they want to become.

# Table of Contents

# List of Figures

# List of Tables

# Declaration of Authorship

I, MAGDALENA AVILA PARDO,

declare that this thesis entitled

SOCIAL STRUCTURE, AGENCY AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING:  A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS ON THE DESIRE TO INVEST IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONGST UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN CANCUN

and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. Parts of this work have been published as: [please list references below]:

Signed:

Date:

x

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My 11 participants whose accounts form the basis for this study.

# Abbreviations Used

CoP    Communities of Practice

CR    Critical Realism

EFL    English as a Foreign Language

ELT    English Language Teaching

ESP    English for Specific Purposes

L1    First Language

L2    Second Language

SAC    Self-Access Centre

SLA    Second Language Acquisition

SLL    Second Language Learning

# Chapter 1: Introduction

*'Language has simultaneously a public and a private face. On the one hand, it is the most subtle means for our classification of the world, our clarification of our own ideas, our establishment of self-identity. On the other it is the major means of communication.....and thus has to fit in with the conventions that other people has collectively accepted.'*

(Brumfit, 2001:55-56)

This research draws on Block's (2013:23) claim that in language and identity research, attention should be paid to 'what structures are, how they might be important and how they work as constraints on and shapers of agency.' As Brumfit notes above, using a language entails agency, as it is how individuals relate to the world, however such relation can be either facilitated or constrained by their contextual conditions. Language learners are viewed as active agents influenced by their personal histories and by the range of settings in which they interact (Benson, 2011; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Block, 2003; Mercer, 2011; Mercer et al., 2012; Ushioda, 2009). This view suggests that language learners do not operate in isolation or of their own free will. Agency is conceived as 'constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with society at large' (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001:148). However, scholars have not given much prominence to or elucidated the role that social structure plays in second language learning. Therefore, this investigation follows Block's (2013:11) call to clarify 'the interrelationship between individual agency and social structures', as well as the potential benefits of including a more psychological angle in language and identity research, that is, taking into account 'notions of personhood and causality' of the participants which are 'historically and culturally produced' (Frank, 2006:282).

This study uses an ethnographic approach to investigate the reasons why students at a Mexican university choose to shape or resist their access to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as well as how, where, and with whom they use English. The research took place at a government-funded university in Cancun, Mexico. Participants were eleven undergraduate students of the International

Business and Sustainable Tourism degrees enrolled in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, which are the highest level of English courses offered at the university. In addition to other opportunities to engage with English speakers in this city of tourists, all the students use the university's self-access language centre (hereafter SAC) which is conceived as a 'social space' for using and practising English (Murray et al.2014:81). Most of the students in the university start at Level 1 (CEFR A1) or Level 2 (CEFR A2), despite having studied English for at least five years, with the exception of those who come from bilingual schools. Only a few have travelled or lived in an English-speaking country.

## 1.1 Rationale of the study

This enquiry was motivated by my personal observations and experience as a teacher of EFL classes offered to undergraduate students, and as a SAC counsellor. Given the fact that Cancun is the main tourist destination in the country, being proficient in English would seem to be more imperative for the students' professional development than in other parts of the country. English is valued in Mexico (Despagne, 2010:69), especially in Cancun where employers require graduate students to demonstrate at least a CEFR B2-level proficiency in English. To meet these needs, the university has made the study of English compulsory, and work carried out in the SAC is linked to the English courses taken by the students, including regular conversation sessions.

In the SAC, learners normally work independently, but students may approach SAC counsellors at any time to receive further help and explanation as well as to have conversation sessions. As a SAC counsellor, I have had the opportunity to observe and interact with students from all the academic programmes, particularly during conversation and counselling sessions. It is during such sessions that students have expressed their awareness of the importance of learning English, saying that it helps them to have access to better job opportunities, travel and meet people from other countries. However, students' outcome suggests that they are not making as much progress as is expected by the institution and is ultimately required by future employers. Therefore, there seems to be a mismatch between the learning outcomes, the students' discourse and the alleged importance attributed to English. This study looks at the social phenomena behind this mismatch. I could not understand why students were not

that interested in learning English, given its relevance in Cancun, the most popular destination of the country in terms of tourism.

My interest in researching the impact of social structure and agency in second language learning was also based on my own experience. I also learnt English as a foreign language and was a foreigner in English-speaking countries when I lived twice in England, the first time for ten months, the second for six months; and then in the United States. I have also been a teacher of EFL in Mexico City and Cancun and an international online postgraduate student at a British university.

Surprisingly, Cancun is the place where I have felt most challenged as a language user. Working with native speakers and well-qualified English teachers at the university makes me feel anxious about my language proficiency, which has ultimately led to a degree of thought and self-conscious questioning of my identity as an English teacher. The way my particular beliefs and traits shape my mode of social being have made me question my competence as a language user, producing the feeling that I need to be up to the challenge posed by my colleagues.

On the other hand, having lived in several places has made me aware of cultural differences. Some societies tend to operate more as collectivities reproducing the social structures, e.g. the social condition or 'habitus' that Bourdieu describes as 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977 cited in Block, 2009:221). Meanwhile, other cultures seem to favour conditions that allow for individuals, thus there is more divergence at the socio-cultural level and 'they may choose to conform to, modify or abolish' the practices or positions 'through their actions' (Archer, 1995:176 cited in De Souza, 2014:145).

I started to reflect on the extent to which contextual conditions impact on language learning because the number of students who come from private schools has increased steadily at the government university. I began to teach the ESP business course eight years ago. At that time, all the students were from public schools, not only from within Cancun but also from towns and communities nearby. Those students did not seem to care much about their English proficiency, and they did not have many expectations for their future life beyond Cancun, as they did not seem to have much contact with the world outside Cancun. However, every year more and more students enrol who have

studied at bilingual schools. They are more proficient in English and also have more ambitions and plans for their future. I have realised that interaction between these students and those who come from public schools, as well as the use of technology and internet, has encouraged the latter students to use English and has broadened their minds. As a result, they have more desires and expectations for their future, in which English seems to be a must. Nevertheless, not all of them manage to learn as much as they say they would like to. Hence, I was intrigued as to what caused and influenced students' dispositions and decisions regarding language learning, as from my perception, contextual conditions seemed to be playing a preponderant role.

Ever since Rubin's (1975) article, "what the Good Language Learner Can Teach Us", a large number of investigations have examined why some learners are more successful than others when learning a second or foreign language. At that time, research in SLA was based on linguistic and cognitive psychology focusing on the individual learner. However, after Firth and Wagner's (1997) article, in which they argue that language is not only a cognitive phenomenon but also a social phenomenon, there has been 'a general trend to open up SLA to social theory and sociological and sociolinguistic research' (Block, 2007:863). Firth and Wagner (2007:803) were influenced by the sociocultural turn in the study of language to social science, education and psychology, as well as by the socioculturally focused scholars in SLA, e.g. Block (1996), Kramsch (1993), Lantolf (1996), Rampton (1987), and van Lier (1994).

As a result of this turn, according to Zuengler and Miller (2006:37), over the last decades there have been various approaches that foreground the social and cultural contexts of learning. Sociocultural perspectives view language use in real-world situations as fundamental, not subordinated, to learning. These are: Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory, Language Socialization, Communities of Practice, Bakhtin's Dialogical perspective, and Critical Theory. Based on these views therefore, research has focused on the influence of the learner's environment in shaping learning behaviours and language learning outcomes (Hourdequin 2012:133).

Regarding agency, Mercer (2012:3) explains that due to the arrival of communicative language teaching and learner centre-centred approaches, there

has been a growing interest in learners as active agents. Research therefore, has started to focus on learners' needs, expectations, goals, motivation and beliefs. Consequently, agency, one of the most fundamental characteristics of human behaviour, has generated considerable interest in various studies in SLA and realist approaches. These studies suggest that learner agency is closely interrelated with other learner and contextual factors, playing an essential role in facilitating autonomous, self-regulatory and goal-oriented strategic learning behaviours (Benson, 2007; Gao 2010; Mercer, 2011; Huang, 2011; Yamaguchi, 2011; Duff, 2012). For example, Duff (2012, see 2.2.1) defines agency as 'people's ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal or social transformations' (p. 413). She also points out that agency can either enable people to actively participate or resist certain behaviours or practices, while realist approaches consider that humans as agents (agency) and structure (social relations and macro features of society) interact with each other, causing new properties to emerge from their interaction (Sealey and Carter, 2004 see 2.3.1).

Mathews (2000 cited in Block 2007:865) argues that a range of identities are available due to access to international media and advanced technology. Not everyone however, is able to adopt such identities, given that social structures, in which people live ----state governments, peer groups or educational systems-, constrain their choices. He comments that this happens mostly in societies ruled by traditions that do not permit individuals to make many choices, which are often also a product of the material and economic constraints in developing countries. Moreover, the postmodern models of language and identity contend that second language learners should not be studied in isolation from the power structures (McKay & Wong, 1996; Peirce 1995; Norton and Toohey, 2001). Consequently, there seems to be 'a need to investigate SLL from a social stance' (Norton and Toohey, 2001; Block, 2003; Swain & Deters, 2007). In other words, to understand the extent to which context has an impact on them, individuals should be studied as embedded in their social context. This perspective includes giving more prominence to social practices in the language learners' contexts and the ways learners exercise their agency in forming and re-constructing their identities in such contexts.

On the other hand, there are hardly any studies focusing on agency per se in SLA, as this has usually been researched in combination with another construct, and the context has been considered as a factor or variable. Examples include, strategic learning: the role of agency and context (Gao, 2010); learner autonomy as agency (Yamaguchi, 2011), spatial imagination, agency and academic culture (Torres-Olave, 2011), language socialization research placing an emphasis on identity and agency (Morita, 2004; Kobayashi, 2004; Duff, 2007; Hourdequin, 2012), understanding learner agency as a complex system (Mercer, 2011), self-regulatory strategies and agency (Brown 2009), agency and power (Canagarajah, 2013). Hence, as many scholars have agreed on the relevance of the concept of agency, it might be worth learning more about it in terms of how language learners' agency is related to the social structure they live in, and in which they exercise it.

## 1.2  Aims of the present study and research questions

The research seeks to offer empirical evidence concerning the relationship between agency and social structure in SLL, in an attempt to understand how social structure interrelates with agency; that is, how social properties influence students' actions and the links between language learners' subjectivities and their social origins.

The aims formulated in the research questions examine how Mexican language learners, who are also SAC users, exercise their agency by resisting or shaping access to learning English which is provided by the environment. Various layers of Mexican social structure are considered and looked at through the lens of critical realist philosophy. Corson (1997:169) suggests critical realism is suited to applied linguistics, 'as a philosophy that gives ontological status to human sign systems themselves' so that this is 'better equipped to deal with the sociocultural transformations' of the new century. Block (2013:38) explains that a critical realist approach conceives language and discourse as social realities, while also recognising that there is a material reality out there which exists regardless of language and discourse. In other words, there is a 'real world' which exists independently of our ability to perceive and understand it (emphasis on original), i.e. beyond the language classroom. Therefore, the lens of critical realism allows us to look at the learner as a whole, by linking contingent relationships and

unpacking complex multi-layered associations in order to identify the underlying structures and mechanisms responsible for learners' choices to shape or resist their access to EFL.

This research enquiry gives rise to the following research questions.

Research Questions:

1. Why do language learners choose to shape or resist their access to EFL?

1a. What is the nature of learners' dispositional formations towards English?

1b. To what extent are learners' actions dependent on existing social and cultural orders?

1c. In what ways do contextual conditions co-determine the EFL students' desire to invest in language learning?

The real interest at the heart of this research is the main question, which seeks to understand the causes that influence the students' behaviour towards language learning. In order to try to answer this question, sub-questions 1a, 1b, and 1c look at different elements, which have never been established in language learning literature to any large extent.

The reason for research question 1a is that this study draws broadly upon both sociological and psychological perspectives to gain some insights of the language learners' dispositions towards English. This is based on the perspective that students' beliefs and dispositions influence their decisions in language learning, which might be common to individuals engaged in similar activities in similar settings, drawing on Bourdieu's (1990) habitus (see 2.4.2) and/or Layder's (1997:2-3 cited in Carter and Sealey: 2000:7) psychobiography (see 2.4.4). The aim of this question is to find out where the dispositional formations come from and link them to relevant structural influences and events that cause them.

Research question 1b follows Block's (2013) suggestion to consider agency and social structure on the same plane; thus, language learners are looked at as 'active shapers of their reality', and social structure 'as constraints at every juncture in their activity' (p. 27-1). In other words, language learners' actions are explored in the light of their own purposes, as well as the experiences and

choices open to them (social structure), and the properties of language itself (culture), that modify or maintain some aspects of social reality (Sealey and Carter, 2004:123).

Research question 1c stems from the understanding that students find themselves placed within an antecedent distribution of material and cultural resources that affect them. These are the material circumstances in which the students must act, and which make them behave in a particular way. Thus, material and cultural resources in which the students' social location places them, and how they respond to these resources, are examined.

It is hoped that by providing answers to these questions this research may contribute to a better understanding of the extent to which social structures may impact on second language learning in the city of Cancun. Learning a language is, after all, fundamentally developed in social participation within specific settings and using particular practices.

## 1.3 The research context

This section sets the context for my study located in the city of Cancun, a tourist city in southeast Mexico, on the northeast coast of the Yucatán Peninsula, in the state of Quintana Roo.  I introduce Cancun as a global city dependent on tourism and foreign investment to sustain its economy. It hosts a population of socially mobile national and transnational migrants including the highly skilled, academics and service sector workers, as well as unskilled migrants escaping poverty. It is a new urban environment of increasing diversity due to increasing social mobility. I will describe the particular situation of languages in Cancun, which is where the participants live, although it is difficult to get actual data on language use. However, I will attempt to do so in order to contextualise my data collection and analysis. In addition, I will refer to the SAC, which is not the object of my study, but cannot be ignored, as it exerts an influence, being part of the students' life, as well as my own. It is against this backdrop that the eleven participants of this research are situated.

### 1.3.1   The city of Cancun

Cancun is an entirely pre-planned and human-made destination, created in 1970 on the Caribbean coast of Mexico. At that time, it was a deserted sand spit (see

somewhere offshore, near a little fishing village called Puerto Juarez, and was an uninhabited region sparsely populated by workers who extracted chicle tree sap for two American chewing gum manufacture companies of chewing gum.  Kan-kun, meaning 'nest of snakes' in the Mayan language, was chosen to fill the void left by the withdrawal of Cuba from the tourist scene. It is therefore the product of a development strategy promoted by the Mexican Central Bank, Banxico (Lambroise, 2012:3) for an' abandoned space' on the border, which needed to be 'settled, employed and occupied' (Hayter, Barnes & Bradshaw, 2003 cited in Redclift, 2009:41).

The Mexican government created Cancun as a master-planned resort, given the beauty of its beaches, the extent and biodiversity of reefs, islands, lagoons, cenotes, estuaries and the wide variety of flora and fauna (Fonatur, 2010), as well as several archaeological sites. The project Cancun was based on the premises that tourism is the main generator of foreign exchange, jobs in the country, and productive activities in the region; and as a result, the tourism industry has an impact on regional development (García Fuentes, 1979:82 cited in Arteaga, 2013:76-1). However, the project neither integrated it with the national plan nor considered the needs of the region to be developed.

Redclift (2009:40) points out the myth which has developed around the Mexican Caribbean, quoting a popular tourist guide:

 *'Cancun, until very recently, was an unknown area. Formerly it was a fishing town but over a period of thirty years, it evolved into a place that has become famous worldwide. It is located in the southeast of Mexico with no more 'body' to it than the living spirit of the Mayas, a race that mysteriously disappeared and who were one of the great pre-Columbian cultures in Mexico. The only thing that remained was the land transformed into a paradise on earth'* (Everest Tourist Guide, 2002)

Redclift (Ibid.) explains that the previous extract illustrates the myths that guide the 'Mayan World' tourist discourse today. Cancun was uninhabited when it was discovered; it embodied the spirit of the ancient Maya (who mysteriously disappeared); and the few remaining mortals who survived had the good fortune to be in possession of 'paradise'.

According to Vargas Martínez et al. (2013:17) hotels were built directly on the dune strip to offer private beaches , 'so the main avenue was

built behind the hotels not allowing ocean view or access to the beach'. They point out that this model is similar to that of Miami, in which the tourist who visits the city does not have much contact with the resident population. The resort was designed in two sections: the hotel zone or tourist area to the east, and Cancun city or '*el Centro*' (downtown) to the west.

Nowadays, the city of Cancun is divided into three different areas. These are clearly separated in terms of landscape, services and use of languages: the hotel zone, which is offered and sold to tourists; the '*supermanzanas*', wholly urbanised and residential areas, and the '*regiones*', 'irregular settlements that have steadily become regular properties, but not all of them have services installed' (Reyes, et al., 2014:186). The hotel zone is a highly dynamic urban development that 'has steadily increased for the sole purpose of fulfilling tourist desires', where English is a must for tourism and catering to the mass market (Preble 2010:40). This area consists of hotels, tourist agencies, water sports and activities, handicraft shops, classy shopping malls, gourmet restaurants, trendy cafes, fun bars and popular nightclubs. Thus, tourists can (and typically do) comfortably spend their time in the hotel zone moving from luxury hotel to beach, to restaurants, to luxury malls with curio shops, to dance clubs (Kay, 2006:69) (see appendix 1.1).

Unfortunately, violence has increased in Cancun due to drug cartels who extort money from business owners, ultimately murdering them or fire- bombing the business, killing customers, if they do not pay. Drug cartels attack rivals in urban areas and murders have taken place in tourist areas. They are not targeting the tourists, but may fight a cartel rival if they see them out in the shops, or eating and drinking in tourist areas. Cops are trying to protect tourist destinations like Cancun, Playa del Carmen, and Cozumel (Beal, 2019). However, the government suppresses the seriousness of the violence because the economy depends on tourism (see appendix 1.1 photos 9 & 10).

The downtown area is located in the '*supermanzanas*' – a section formed by several blocks, or '*manzanas*' (see appendix 1.2). It consists of the normal institutions of daily life, banks, schools, hospitals, supermarkets, restaurants, producer services for tourism enterprises, and middle- and upper-class housing (see appendix 1.4). English is spoken, especially in shops and other

establishments, as some tourists venture out of the Hotel Zone to experience where *'Cancunenses'* eat and shop.

A tourist would have to be horribly lost to end up in the *'regiones',* as they are regarded as dangerous areas. Locals describe the '*regiones'* as the 'ugly face' of Cancun. This started as a squatter settlement, and continues to be an area filled with poor housing, irregularly provided with public services. Most people who work in the hotel zone and city centre live here and commute more than an hour-long bus ride to get home.

> *'The human experience of a person who leaves at dawn a zone without electricity, without water or drainage, traveling on a rocky road to wait for transport to go to a hotel zone where he works in an environment of grand tourism luxury, makes an impression, and cannot lead toward stability'* (p. 2, quoted in Aguilar Barajas 1995:28 cited and translated Kay, 2006:71)

Residents of the regions say they live in 'ugly' neighbourhoods, referring to both visual and political aspects [(see appendix 1.3)](). They blame the dishonourable 'political system of low wages, government neglect, and compromised democracy' (Kay, 2006:70).

 The '*supermanzanas'* and the 'regiones' are mainly Spanish-speaking areas, but there are also speakers of indigenous languages. The fact is that as a Mexican there is no need to speak English in the city, unless you work at a place visited by tourists. Nevertheless, as a foreigner, the chances are that if you need something, a Mexican might be able to help as it is not difficult to find somebody who can speak English. Even in the regions, at the periphery of the city, people who work in the hotels may know English, but do not necessarily speak it in that area. Thus, the city is highly polarized between luxury resorts and the periphery developments, a clear reflection of the social class division of the society.

Oehmichen (2010:30) raises the point that the urbanisation of the city clearly shows the difference in the economic and cultural capital concerning how space has been divided. Bourdieu (2004) suggests that spatial organisation is a reflection of social structures, with more or less distortion, in a physical space. In Cancun, the division of urban space is a clear reflection of the social class division of society [(see appendix 1.4)](). The different social classes come in contact for working reasons, as employer and worker, as well as a hierarchical instrumental

relationship: employees who are devoted to work and tourists whose goal is to be entertained. Therefore, they are in contact, but do not mix.

The population has grown dramatically in 48 years. In January 1970, there were only three resident caretakers of a coconut plantation and 117 people in the fishing village and military base, yet by 2015, the population of Cancun was 743 626 (INEGI). Reyes et al., (2014:186) state that the reasons for migrating 'vary from person to person, but these have to do with economic circumstances, that is, 'poverty, few or lack of opportunities for employment' in their regions of origin. For this reason, in over four decades, the city has received a large and increasing number of immigrants attracted by the idea of a job in (over four decades). In the 1970s, these included construction workers, mainly from the States of Quintana Roo and Yucatan, and qualified workers who tended to originate from Mexico City and other states. In the 1980s there was a massive migration of Mayan farmers due to the economic recession in timber and henequen production, and also in the gum industry. Moreover, every time new workers settled down in Cancun, they started bringing their relatives (Castellanos and Paris, 2001; Sierrra Sosa, 2007).

In terms of indigenous population, Chávez (2008 cited in SECTUR, 2013:31-33) states that Cancun has the second largest indigenous population in the country, after Mexico City, acting as a magnet that attracts indigenous people from all over the country, particularly from Chiapas and Yucatan. 80% of the 63 officially-recognised indigenous languages in the country are located in Cancun and 61 190 inhabitants represent 11% of the total population in the country (INEGI, 2010). The most common indigenous languages are Mayan and Totzil among the indigenous population. Most of the indigenous population speak Spanish, and only 218 people (1 %,) can only speak their indigenous language.

Castellanos' (2010) longitudinal study with a Mayan community, whose young people migrate to Cancun, reports that indigenous workers constitute a visible manifestation of service given their dispositions as migrants who have left their villages to cater for tourists in low-skilled jobs alongside the Caribbean coast of Mexico. On the one hand, tourism creates jobs, but the bulk are low- wage, short-term and dependent on global tourism, providing no greater security than

agricultural work. On the other hand, indigenous culture is used as a spectacle, prop and entertainment in the tourism industry.

Concerning language use, indigenous workers speak Spanish at work, their native language between themselves, and some English to communicate with foreigners. Migrant Mayan families, in their new social scenario, promote the transmission of social and cultural practices, norms and values, to the new generations who are in constant tension with the surrounding touristic social context of tourism (see appendix 1.5).  They teach Spanish to their children to make things easier for them, and young people may not learn or may even refuse to speak their indigenous language, which seems to be regarded a low-class language in the tourist destination. Consequently, their cultural practices such as language and forms of socialization are disappearing,

Reyes and Cazal (2010:34-35) state that since the 1970s, people from diverse parts of the country and the world have moved to Cancun, attracted by a new place with great potential to cater for the needs of the tourist industry and the city where locals reside. Most 'Cancunenses' are from Yucatán and other Mexican states, and a growing number are from the rest of the Americas and Europe. Thus, Cancun is highlighted as being a city of immigrants, in which the motley social and political life, as well as social relations and their structure are in the process of being defined, with both positive and negative repercussions for life in the area. Tourism has operated as an economic instrument for specific public and private interests (De la Torre, 1990; Jiménez, 1993; Castillo, 2005; Macías y Pérez, 2009 cited in Vargas Martinez et al. 2013:16). The main languages used in the city are Spanish, English and Mayan, although they are spoken by different sectors of the population and for different purposes (see 1.6).

On the other hand, locals refer to Cancun as '*Gringolandia'* because of the abundant and varied patterns of language, businesses and road signs in English, as well as constructions that reflect cultural landscapes associated with tourism, particularly American ones.  "When one walks through the hotel zone, one feels as if one were in any city or amusement park in the United States, such as Las Vegas or Disneyland" (Fernández de Lara, 2009:198). Torres and Momsen (2005:314) explain 'Gringolandia' is a term that reflects 'the circus-like spectacle' of a resort, 'embedded in a region deeply divided by uneven development and the

ensuing unfair power relations'. This is due to the powerful sustained flow of tourists, large numbers of American expatriate settlers, strong American businesses and the significant Mexican elite population who mimic American consumption patterns [(see appendix 1.1).](see appendix 1.1).

Cancun is consolidated as one of the major cities of the country and the most popular Mexican tourist destination with influence throughout the Southeast. It has 145 hotel facilities and 30,608 rooms (SECTUR 2013) that generate thousands of jobs related to tourism. According to SECTUR (2013), the Ministry of Tourism reports that Americans are by far the largest number of visitors who come to Cancun, 1,690 991; Canadians are in second place with an average of 217 874 visitors, and Brits are in third place with 97 220 visitors per year. Many tourists choose Cancun because it offers more activities, shopping centres, discos, restaurants, water sports and things to do. There are also people from all over the world, such as Russians, Japanese and Chinese, and regardless of the nationality of non-English speaking tourists, English is the language for communication between different nationalities.

Tourists, particularly American and Europeans, such as the British, Italians, and French, gradually began moving south of Cancun to the coastal area opposite Cozumel, to places like Playa del Carmen, Akumal and Tulum. Arguing that they prefer a more natural, quieter environment. In places like these, some foreigners have decided to settle or buy a vacation house, thus introducing other languages in the areas. Boxill (2002) studied the relationship between tourism and the transformation of language in a popular tourism destination. He analysed 130 signs and advertisements used in Playa del Carmen, and his findings revealed that the aim of using various types of hybrid texts and expressions is to attract tourists' attention (p. 47). He asserts that:

> '*English and other languages have challenged the hegemony of Spanish, as the dominant language of the workers and inhabitants, because Playa del Carmen is now fully inserted into global capitalism, through tourism. This insertion requires that Mexican workers and businesspeople respond to the demands of tourists by communicating to them in languages which they, the tourists, understand and may also prefer to speak.'  (Boxill, 2002:47).*

As a result, English and other languages have taken privilege over Spanish, which has implications for employment, survival and culture. In other words, monolingual Mexican workers 'are marginalised at the workplace, and as most

16

migrants are poor and uneducated, and the situation has led to a large underclass' in the area (Ibid. 58).

To sum up, tourism is the main industry in the region as there are not many resources apart from natural beauty, and certain industries are restricted given that they would be to the detriment of the tourism. The real estate business is the second most important industry, followed by companies involved in foreign trade and enterprises devoted to commercial activities. Hence, English is highly valued in Cancun as it is the dominant linguistic mediator of communication in the tourism industry and business, and to be fluent 'is a requirement for most professional and upper-level positions' (Castellanos (2010:72). However, the findings of a study carried out by private company Education First, in 2013 (Sierra-Galan, 2016:97) are that the state of Quintana Roo obtained a low score, together with another 27 regions where English is not as important as in Cancun. In short, to be proficient in English is of paramount importance for a good insertion in the job market in the different commercial sectors. However, people in the region have a long way to go regarding the use of English for working purposes.

The next section introduces the Self-access centre set up to help students develop their English skills and meet the language requirement in the job market.

### 1.3.2 The SAC

In Mexico, SACs started in the 1990s when 33 self-access centres were opened in the government universities due to a national agreement between the Ministry of Education (SEP) and the British Council, as a consultant (Grounds, 2002). Castillo Zaragoza (2011:94) argues that SACs were developed to meet the demand for language competency, as a result of the NAFTA (North America Free Trade Agreement). These centres are regarded as an important innovation to complement classroom language learning by providing flexibility and expanding the language learning service (Acuña et al. 2015), since in many cases, the SAC might be the only place where students are exposed to the foreign language. Currently, there are over 250 self-access centres across the country (Chávez, 2010). Initially, SACs offered only English, now there are other languages (Castillo Zaragoza, 2011).

The self-access centre (SAC hereafter) in this study attempts to act as a bridge (Crabbe, 1993; Cotterall and Reinders, 2001) between the language learners and the real world, in other words, English-speaking visitors or employers settled in the city. It is linked to the English courses to complement classroom instruction given the requirement of spoken English in the tourist destination.  It is located in a two-storey building in the central area of the university and the English Department is within the premises of the SAC. There are ten full-time teachers (including the head of department), who are also SAC counsellors, and their stations are placed within the SAC, in an open plan system. Teachers/counsellors are permanently available for users, so it is a meeting point for language teachers and students from all the academic programmes.

The SAC opens from 7 A.M. to 9 P.M. on weekdays and from 9 P.M. to 2 P.M. on Saturdays. It serves approximately 1600 students per semester. Students can arrive at any time and choose from the wide range of activities. All the material is within reach, students are free to explore and use it and there are no security systems to limit access (see appendix 2).

The SAC follows a humanistic approach, provided for real people, by real people, given that the way it operates has evolved according to learners' needs (Murray, 2014). It is a friendly space and the only rule is that students should speak English. According to Acuña et al. (2015:315-318), conversations were originally run by teachers and a British language assistant and were very structured, but it was gradually found that students responded more to unstructured and more personalized conversations. Nowadays, either a teacher, a British language assistant or a peer-student can lead the conversation sessions (see appendix 2 photographs 43-48).  Then, when there is no one available for conversation, students are used to organising for the speaking-based practise among themselves. Sometimes, conversation leaders' English proficiency is not much better than their peers is, but they are students who, through their sustained participation in the SAC community, have become either more fluent or confident. Thus, the students' 'agency may come to life spontaneously in the on-going interactions acting collectively in the social formations' in the social environment (Block, 2015).

Moreover, the SAC has students as helpers, who carry out their *social service*, as part of their academic programme, and they are encouraged to offer suggestions to optimise the service. They are often extremely enthusiastic and creative leading conversation sessions, helping with homework, and organising activities for special occasions, thus providing another source of peer learning in the SAC. Their work greatly enhances the atmosphere, bringing social energy, engagement and imagination to our community (Acuña et al. 2015:317)

Acuña et al. (2015:317) note that in the SAC 'you can see how students promote and benefit from peer learning, as they work collaboratively: read from the same book, do homework, or develop projects together'. Holmes (2015) suggests that 'this support system lowers student anxiety, increases motivation and interest and helps the students to have a more positive attitude to language learning'. Students share ideas, resources and information naturally, using English in a relaxed setting, so knowledge is formed, maintained and transmitted (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Hence, language learning is in collaboration with others, contrary to the way most self-access centres operate, where learners engage in practices and materials on their own 'in cognitive isolation' Pennycook (1997:41).

Therefore, the SAC resembles a social centre, a community space with the common theme of practicing English (Holmes, 2015:1), in which free interaction among students from different academic programmes takes place. They can gather to relax and talk freely whenever they want, and they do so even after they have met the English requirement. It is a source of lively, informal and much sought-after interaction among peers. The students enjoy meeting people and report looking forward to visiting the SAC, which in the surveys, has always been the favourite space on campus. There are also students who have completed their English courses and keep attending as conversation leaders or SAC helpers, thus exerting their personal agency because they 'actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their own learning' (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001:45).

The notion of the SAC as a social centre invites open dialogue and different levels of participation by granting them the freedom to bring up their own topics of interest, encouraging less structured activities and roles, mixed-level participation and, in general, emphasising less enforcement and administrative procedures and more creativity and resourcefulness. Hence, students choose and negotiate their

participation, non-participation and belonging to the community through their engagement and alignment (Wenger, 1998:178). Thus, students can develop their identity not only as language learners but also as language users through, sustained participation and interaction in the SAC (Avila and Holmes, 2018).

For most of the students, the SAC is the only place where they can be exposed to and practise English, and where the expert and the non-expert are fully accepted. Many of the students come from relatively low-income families with limited resources, and from minority ethnic backgrounds. A good number of students work full-time or part-time, and some of them are married with children, so they must cope with studies, work and family. These students are more inclined to focus their energies on work and other academic subjects rather than English language study. There are also limitations within the English department that do not favour the proper conditions to facilitate language learning. For example, large classes (up to 35 students), problems with the internet connection, lack of enough equipment for digital literacy in the classrooms, and lack of funding to buy new material and resources for the English department and the Self-Access Centre. Thus, the SAC acts as a bridge between the students and the real world, by allowing them the freedom to choose when, how and with whom they wish to practice their English, which in return, can help foster the development of their autonomy.

## 1.4 Structure of the thesis

This section presents the structure of this thesis.

Chapter 2 is concerned with a review of the relevant literature regarding the different perspectives of human agency; the postmodern and sociocultural approaches to agency in the field of SLA, which underpin this research, as well as the different ways that the notion of social structure has been defined in social science and the different positions on the structure and agency debate. Furthermore, the model of structure and agency and critical realism, as proposed by David Block, are dealt with extensively as the theoretical framework for this research. Following this, theories to interpret data are presented: communities of practice, field and habitus, psychobiography, and identity. The chapter ends by addressing why this framework is considered suitable for the study.

Chapter 3 details the rationale and justification for the selected research approaches which are: critical realist and qualitative in nature and also partly ethnographic, and which are considered suitable for dealing with the complex, multi-layered concepts of social structure and language learners' agency. The research questions that guide this investigation are then presented, followed by the methods of data generation and analysis. The final sections include some ethical considerations, a summary and conclusions of the methodology chapter.

Chapter 4 presents the participants' profiles, the thematic analysis from the fieldwork and two of their stories. The results link the contingent relations and unpack the complex multi-layered associations, in order to identify each type of entity that gives rise to the language learners' dispositional formations which seem responsible for learners' choices to shape or resist their access to EFL. These results relate to research question 1 and sub question 1a.

Chapter 5 examines the complex interaction between students and structure to provide causal explanations and determine whether such interrelationship leads to the reproduction or transformation of existing socio-cultural orders. These results relate to research question 1 and sub questions 1b and 1c.

Chapter 6 brings together the findings and further discusses the central issue of the study in relation to the broad question: the reasons why language learners choose to shape or resist their access to EFL and sub question 1c, on how their choices are co-determined by contextual conditions.

Chapter 7 presents the conclusions drawn from the study highlighting the major contributions and limitations, and implications for ELT.

# Chapter 2: The interrelationship between students' agency and social structures in second language learning

## 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review relevant literature to provide the theoretical basis of the study. This chapter also describes its philosophical stance as it is important to state the ontological and epistemological views that provide the basis for explaining the social phenomena of this investigation. It starts with a historical overview of human agency, and the concept of agency in second language acquisition (SLA) is discussed. This is followed by the ongoing debate between agency and structure in social science and how this relates to SLL. Then, the philosophical approach and David Block's (2015) model of structure and agency is described, as well as the rationale for using it in this research. Following on from this, the concept of identity is presented, since it is inherently linked to agency according to many scholars and researchers.  In addition, a summary of the empirical research concerning agency and social structure in SLA is provided, followed by the concept of autonomy as a social construct.  The chapter ends with a summary.

## 2.2 Perspectives of Human Agency

This analysis of key work in the area of agency is influenced by a review of relevant theories by Vitanova et al. (2015, ch. 1).  These authors state that the concept of human agency has caused great interest across various disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and anthropology, and they have produced different definitions of agency (p. 1). However, Eteläpelto et al. (2013:46) raise the point that the concept of agency has not been clearly defined, as it has been loosely related to 'active striving, taking initiatives, or having an influence on one's own life situation'. The following presents some definitions and the disciplines they represent:

- 'the power to originate actions for given purposes' and 'beliefs of personal efficacy constitute the key factor of human agency' (Bandura, 1997:3 cited in Martin, 2004:138) - Educational Psychology.

- 'it is more than voluntary control over behaviour' and 'it also entails the ability to assign relevance and significance to things and events'. (Lantolf and Thome, 2006:143) - Applied Linguistics and Second Language learning.

- 'the ability to take action in the light of a conscious assessment of the circumstances' (Layder, 1997: 35) – Sociology.

- 'the socioculturally mediated capacity to act' (Ahearn, 2001) - Linguistic Anthropology.

All the authors argue that agency is concerned with the ability or power to act either explicitly (Bandura, 1997; Layder, 1997; Ahearn, 2001) or implicitly (Lantolf and Thorne), although the various perspectives focus on specific issues. Bandura (Ibid.) links agency with the individual's given purpose and his self-efficacy beliefs, while Ahearn (Ibid.) and Layder (Ibid.) argue that contextual conditions influence the individual. Moreover, Layder includes a careful evaluation of personal conditions present prior to action being taken. Similarly, Lantolf and Thorne suggest that the individual assesses the situation before acting, which suggests that agency involves more than the willingness to do something. In short, depending on the discipline, agency relates to the individual to a greater or lesser extent, and some authors make the relevance of contextual conditions clear.

The roots of the concept of agency are linked to the self. According to Vitanova et al. (2015:1-4) the notions of agency and the self-have been naturally interwoven, but the concept of agency has been difficult to define. Agency is regarded as one of the many facets of the self and thus is mainly determined by the influential models that explicate the self. Vitanova et al. (Ibid.) state that there are at least four different models of selfhood that have been significant in terms of what constitutes both subjectivity and agency. They explain that these models are:

1) The traditional understanding of self (see Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) represented in myths and rituals to help humans understand the most

significant events of their lives, such as birth and death. In this model, body and spirit are viewed as two separate entities, the latter considered as superior.

2) The modernist conception of self was strongly influenced by the Enlightenment era views, manifested by Hermans-Konopaka (2010:87) as 'an unprecedented autonomy' because of its different forms of individualism. The self was seen as independent and rational and the elements of choice and action (strongly related to agency) were included, as well as self-consciousness (Korsgaard, 2009) and reflexivity (Kogler, 2012). Consciousness has been related to agency, for example, Korsgaard (2009:19) defines self-awareness for agency as self-conscious on the grounds of how we act by being in control, deciding who we are and what we will be. In psychology, the relationship between subjects, actions and experience is seen as naturally driven. However, it is highlighted that not all acts are an example of human agency because these acts should be done deliberately and consciously, so reflexivity emerges as another important component of agency (Kogler, 2012).

3) Postmodernism, also known as post-structuralism, considers the self is decentralized and unstable, so in terms of agency, as lacking personal autonomy. For example, Weedon's (1997) feminist post-structuralism uses the term subjectivity instead of identity, giving more prominence to 'the discursive, language nature of selves' employed in applied linguistics because of its focus on how discourses offer various positions for subjects. That is, the understanding of the self through language (Foucault, 1972; Lacan, 1977), in which power structures underlie human relationships. Hence, this view seems to play down the prominent role of human actions and experiences in favour of the power structures to determine human relationships and subjectivity.

4) Sociocultural perspectives focus on the complex interactions between individuals and communities, on the one hand, and human cognition and experience on the other; thus, conceiving selves and agency as the result of inter-subjective processes, that is, shared by more than one conscious mind, instead of individual or autonomous phenomenon. These perspectives have highlighted the mediated essence of agency based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) and Bakhtin's dialogism (1981, 1984). This approach stresses the relevance of sociocultural forces.

These views try to explain the self, the way a person is and behaves. The concept of agency emerges when the self is seen as independent and rational, and it is because of these features that the elements of choice and action are included as well as consciousness and reflexivity, which are considered inherent human abilities. Later, the fact that individual choices are constrained by power structures was contested; this was criticised because it left the role of the individual unclear. Finally, selves and agency are claimed to be the outcome of conscious minds in interaction with other individuals, experience and human cognition. Thus, it is suggested that explaining the self and agency is much more complex because there is a complex interaction between the context, individual experiences and cognition.

As a result, scholars from different disciplines, drawing on the sociocultural perspective, suggest that human action is mediated by the sociocultural context, relationships, and symbolic intermediaries, such as language and other tools (Wertsch, 1993; Ahearn, 2001; Holland et al., 1998). According to Sullivan and MacCarthy (2004:293-2) the attention paid to mediated agency shows that it is a powerful tool to understand the social and cultural bases of agency. They cite Wertsch (1991):

> '*A sociocultural approach to mind begins with the assumption that action is mediated because it cannot be separated from the milieu in which it is carried out... most of the existing studies...involve some kind of explicit comparison between historical epoch, institutional settings or cultural contexts' (p.18)*

For Werstsch's (1993) socio-cultural analysis, agency is instrumental since the relationship between agent and means is one of mastery, and mastery of mediational means is associated with power; the mastery of English, for example, can be empowering. This kind of socio-cultural analysis offers insights into people's institutional relationships, such as participation in education (Lave and Wenger, 1991), ordinary everyday actions such as typing (Wertsch, 1991), the production of discourse (Harré, 1998, Shotter and Billing, 1998) and cultural conflicts (Hermans, 2001). To put it more simply, the individualistic role of agency has been challenged and redefined in terms of the role played by other humans and symbolic intermediaries.

To emphasise the relevance of mediation in agency, psychologists Wertsch et al. (1993) appropriate Bateson's (1972) famous statement that 'agency extends

beyond the skin' because it is frequently a property of groups, and involves 'mediational means' such as language and tools (Wertsch et al., 1993:352 cited in Kobayashi, 2004:48). Likewise, Vitanova et al. (2014:3) state further that like cognition, socially mediated agency is conceived as being developed in social groups. Language is regarded as intrinsically social and as one of the key mediational means, along with the processes of language learning.

Cultural anthropology and linguistic anthropology have also followed the sociocultural perspective. In cultural anthropology, Holland et al. (1998:27) adopted this view to explain identities and agency: 'identities are socio-historical constructions and the symbols of mediation that humans use that are produced in active collaboration with other actors'. Linguistic anthropologist, Laura Ahearn (2001:108-23), proposed a provisional definition of the concept: "agency refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" as "all action is socioculturally mediated, both in its production and its interpretation" (p. 112). This definition implies that language plays a central role in agency since linguistic anthropology views language as a type of social action. However, she recognizes that her definition does not specify where agency is located and whether agency must be human, individual, collective, intentional, or conscious.

For Vitanova's (2010:5) point of view, the capacity to act with a purpose and reflect emerges when people engage in relationships with other individuals, making them re-invent their own positions or re-imagine how they can act. Vitanova et al. (2015:4) suggest that this perspective seems to be the most influential belief for contemporary scholars. Kobayashi (2004:46) however, argues that 'the relationship between people and their physical and social environment is bidirectional; in other words, their actions shape and are shaped by the environment (Ahearn, 2001a; Norton & Toohey, 2001; van Lier, 1996, 2000; Vygotsky, 1997). From this view, social relations and the environment mediate individuals' actions. Thus, identity is linked to agency, emphasising the interrelationship between people and their contextual conditions.

However, Eteläpelto et al. (2013:54) note that scholars following the sociocultural approach disagree on 'how the social and individual exist, or how they are related'. They have different conceptions on the nature and existence of agency (Edwards, 2005; Holland et al., 2003; Hökkä et al., 2012; Lipponen &

Kumpulainen, 2011; Miell & Littleton, 2004; Sannino, 2010; Stetsenko, 2005; Valsiner, 1998; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2011; Wertsch, 1997). What the different views of sociocultural approach agree on is in the relevance of socio-cultural contexts, including the tools and objects that mediate human activities, although they differ in the analytical separation of contextual and social aspects of reality.

On the other hand, in sociology, Emirbayer and Mische (1998:963-964) reconceptualise human agency as 'a temporally embedded process of social engagement. Given the fact that agency is informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities), and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)' (p. 963). Hence, they situate agency within the flow of time, in which the structural contexts of action are themselves *ways of ordering time* toward which social actors can assume different simultaneous agentic orientations (emphasis in original).

This section provided an account of how human agency emerges from the models that explicate the self and the human capacity to act.  It has been recognised that agency is firmly and naturally interrelated with identity and regarded as one of the many aspects of the self. The sociocultural model has been the most influential, from which different theories in different versions have emerged that differ on how they see the ontology of human action and learning. Nevertheless, contemporary scholars in several disciplines - philosophy, anthropology, linguistics anthropology, psychology, sociology and applied linguistics- share the assumptions that human agency is not only an individual feature that people can have, but what individuals do, as a process of social engagement within a socio-cultural context. The researcher agrees with the view that human agency is mediated and co-constructed with others through social activity within the context. Hence, this study is heavily influenced by the socio-cultural perspective that '[t]he human mind is formed and functions as a consequence of human interaction with the culturally constructed environment', with agency itself 'socially and historically constructed' (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001: 146). Thus, it is aligned with 'the social turn' in language learning (Block, 2003; Firth and Wagner, 2007) and Ahearn's (2001: 110) that conceives 'language as a form of

social action, a cultural resource, and a set of sociocultural practices. In the following section, a review of agency and SLA is presented.

## 2.2.1 Agency in Second Language Acquisition

According to Vitanova et al. (2015, ch. 1), the postmodern and sociocultural approaches to agency, identity and the self have been echoed in the fields of applied linguistics and SLA. The view of language learning has moved from the simplistic individualistic perspective to one which sees language acquisition as 'complex embedded phenomena' (Ibid.). Although the term agency was not explicitly addressed, it was implicit in early research when it was argued that 'learners can act purposefully and exert control over their own learning' (Ibid.). They state that Rubin's (1975) model of the Good Language Learner and research on motivation describes successful learners as possessing intrinsic motivation and autonomy (Ushioda 2003).

SLL research has followed the postmodern models of language and identity claiming that SLL, like other activities, is a socially mediated process. The hierarchy in power relations within different discourses is emphasised, thus in this perspective second language learners should not be studied in isolation from the power structures in which they live (e.g. Mackay & Wong, 1996; Pierce, 1995; Norton, 2000; Toohey & Norton, 2001) (Ibid.). These scholars explore how second language learners negotiate social positions and power through their use of discourse instead of focusing on motivation or individual differences. For example, Norton (Norton Pierce, 1995 cited in Norton and Toohey, 2011:420) introduced the construct of investment instead of motivation to illustrate the language learners' commitment to the target language, as well as how they constantly reconstruct their identity and relate to the social world (see 2.5). She rejects the term motivation because she says that language learners are unable to choose either the conditions under which they interact with members of the target language or their access to a particular community. Thus, from this perspective the active use of discourse and addressing power relations through language is considered a sign of agency (Ibid.).

Huang (2009:33) proposes that 'agency, including learner agency, entails action', and often suggests action that arises from deliberation and choice (see also Allison & Huang, 2005). He suggests that a conceptualisation of agency can help

28

understand how language learners are able to respond to the constraints and opportunities in the particular context and see beyond teaching situations. Gao (2010:21) however, accounts for the role of agency from the sociocultural perspective, through its theorisation of activity. Human activities, namely learners' learning activities are at three levels of abstraction: (1) the level of activity, related to human behaviour linked to motives; (2) the level of action that is goal oriented; and (3) the level of conditions, in which a goal-oriented action is carried out (Lantolf, 200; McCafferty et al., 2001). Thus, depending on the learners' goals the same activity may mean something different to them.

In the sociocultural approach, Lantolf has developed the concept of agency. First, in Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001: 148), agency is defined as 'a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large'. They suggest language learners should not be viewed as 'processing devices', but as people or 'agents" who 'actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their own learning' (2001:162). Then, Lantolf and Thome (2006:142-145) argue that agency 'is about more than voluntary control over behaviour', that it also 'entails the ability to assign relevance and significance to things and events', and it 'can be exercised by individuals as well as by communities'. Hence, the authors argue that language learners' agency involves more than will, it has the element of choice, it is co-constructed, and it can be individual or collective, which stresses the role of the context because it is a social event.

In line with the previous perspectives, theorists in SLL understand the active role of the leaners. They are conceived as 'social agents in active pursuit of language-related competence and non-linguistic objectives' (Norton Pierce, 1995, Norton 2000); while learning is regarded as a social act and not only as an individual metacognitive activity (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Oxford, 2003; Thorne, 2005; Watson-Gegeo, 2004). Learners' learning activities are regarded at three levels of abstraction: (1) the level of activity, human behaviour in the general sense associated with motives; (2) the level of action, which is goal oriented and linked to consciousness; and (3) the level of conditions under which a goal oriented action is carried out (Lantolf, 2000; McCafferty et al., 2001). The social nature of language learning is recognised due to the multiple ways learners engage in it, for various reasons, and under diverse conditions that influence their degree of

commitment. Agency is then, related to motives, goals, intentions, needs, consciousness and context.

Research findings also point to the significance of beliefs system, motivation, self-regulation and affect which contribute to the understanding of the nature of learners' agency.  Gao (2010) investigates how learners exercise their agency in their selection and use of strategies within a range of contexts, combining a sociocultural framework and a realist perspective. He regards agency as the will and capacity to act (Giddens, 1984), and highlights the relevance of context. His findings are that one of the most critical parts of learner agency is the learners' motive/beliefs system (p.155). Mercer (2011) however, examines agency through the lens of complexity theory, in which several components operate as a dynamic complex system. She argues learners' agency exists as a latent potential to engage in self-directed behaviour, but that how this is used depends on the learners' sense of agency. This sense involves their belief systems, motivation, affect, and self-regulatory skills, as well as abilities and affordances, actual and perceived, in specific settings (p. 435). Concerning learners' beliefs and attitudes to language learning, Harré and Gillet (1994:123 cited in Lantolf and Pavlenko, 1995:10) assert that 'dispositions arise from motives culturally constructed and discourses that organise their world according to certain meanings and no others.' Consequently, the notion of agency is understood as being influenced by individual traits or activity, but it is constructed and renegotiated with others in specific settings.

Swaim and Deters (2007:820) highlight the increase in SLA research and theory that prioritizes sociocultural and contextual factors in addition to acknowledging individual agency and multifaceted identities. They explain that this view draws upon four major sources: sociocultural theory of mind, situated learning, dialogism and post-structural theories. They also say that the Vygotskian, Bakhtinian, and post-structural perspectives have in common the acknowledgment of the social and historical construction of meaning through discourse. Swaim and Deters (Ibid.) conclude that L2 learning is a highly complex activity in which human cognition and human agency develop and multiple identities are co-constructed through interaction with others, the self, and the cultural artifacts of our environments. Thus, language learners are regarded as

agents who operate with mediation means and agents with a will who struggle between a single identity and the acceptance of multiple identities (p. 831).

Accordingly, Miller (2012, 2014) adopts the mediated and relational aspect of learner agency, drawing on Vygotsky's notion of semiotic mediation and Bakhtin's concept of dialogic mediation. Miller's (2012) explorations focus on agency as constituted in language and interaction, and the agency of spaces that is created by these interactions, as well as the kinds of linguistic acts in these spaces. Her aim is to explore the mediating effects of language ideologies for learner agency, while Vitanova (2013:42) follows Bakthin's (1981) dialogical perspective to explore how agency is constituted in everyday contexts. Her work, on the analysis of narrative as a genre, is based on the experiences of adult immigrants and second language learners, suggesting a discourse-centred approach. In this view, agency "is illustrated as creative, responsive and even ethical understanding of one's sociocultural realities" so the need for interdisciplinarity is emphasised for a better understanding of agency in SLL research.

Duff (2012:15-16) proposes a comprehensive definition: agency "refers to people's ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal or social transformation" (p. 15). She maintains that a sense of agency is what empowers people to take actions to achieve their goals while the lack of agency enables them to resist particular practices or behaviours. Moreover, she agrees with the view that agency, power, and social context (structures) are closely related because learners who feel they have 'control over their lives, choices, and circumstances also have the power - the human, social or cultural capital and ability - they need to succeed' (p.16).  She quotes Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) who claim that ultimate attainment in SLL is dependent on agency, which seems to give the learner the full responsibility of his or her learning:

> *'..ultimate attainment in SLL relies on one's agency... While the first language and subjectivities are an indisputable given, the new ones are arrived at by choice. Agency is crucial at the point where the individuals must not just start memorizing a dozen new words and expressions but have to decide on whether to initiate a long, painful, inexhaustive and, for some, never-ending process of self-translation' (p. 169-170).*

Hence, even when language learners may seem to have little control over their L2 learning and just meet the requirements, they still make some effort to reach

more advanced levels. This effort entails, "concerted effort, sustained and strategic practice, and opportunity -all manifestations of personal and social agency" (Flowerdew & Miller, 2008; Gao, 2010 cited in Duff 2012:16). These authors acknowledge the essential role agency plays in language learning.

Vitanova (2015, ch. 1) indicates learner agency is recognised as an essential construct in language-learning processes and for language learner identities (van Lier, 2008). This great interest in learner agency demonstrates a change of view to one conceiving learners as complex individuals who use the second language, including the meaning of their use of the language and actions as being mediated by their social and cultural worlds. Van Lier (2008) emphasises the difficulty of ''locating agency'' (p. 164), noting that relevant mediating factors of our sociocultural -historical contexts are not ''immediately visible'' in naturally occurring talk, or are at best, only ''[ambiguously] locatable'' (emphasis in original) (pp. 175–176).

Van Lier (2008:189) summarises the existing research in SLL and agency, suggesting three central features of agency in language classrooms: the learner's ability to self-regulate, the socially mediated nature of sociocultural context and an awareness of one's responsibility for one's own acts. However, Vitanova et al. (2015, ch. 1) raise the point that Van Lier does not address directly, that of ethics or moral responsibility and how this is an important part of both the modern approaches to agency and Bakhtin's (1984) dialogical framework of the self. Moreover, Vitanova et al. (Ibid.) emphasise that agency does not always imply active participation by learners in the classroom as Canagarajah (1999) reports the way students resist discourse in a Sri Lankan classroom by deciding not to actively participate as a form of resistance. Hence, there are different views on how agency is manifested in language learning. For most scholars, language learners' agency implies taking an active role and making choices, but others consider that as learners can choose; then, agency can also be exerted to resist particular practices or behaviours, while Duff (2012) understands language learners' resistance to particular practices or behaviour as a lack of agency.

Accordingly, Vitanova et al. (Ibid.) suggest that although agency started to be a focus of attention some decades ago, there are diverse understandings of learner agency and approaches. For example, Gao (2013:227), based on Archer's (2003)

theorization of 'internal conversations', conceives language learners' agency as a precondition to learners' efforts to take charge of the learning process. Gao's view rests on the assumption that agency is 'the root of autonomy' (see Benson 2007, p.30) so he regards agency 'as a defining attribute of agents that places them in the position of being subjects who can think, desire, and act'. He contends that agency is associated with individual agents' self-consciousness, reflexivity, intentionality, cognition, and emotionality (Giddens, 1984; Sealey and Carter, 2004) and connected with power (Giddens, 1984). Archer (2000) however, claims that it is because of causal powers related to agency that people can reflect upon their social context and act reflexively towards it through critical reflection and by creatively redesigning their social environment. Hence, Gao suggests promoting and examining language learners' reflexive/reflective thinking in order to learn how agency enables learners to recognise and consider their concerns, desires and visions within their contextual and structural conditions (p. 235). Thus, Gao's view is aligned to Archer, who claims reflexivity is necessary for individuals to act under their given contextual conditions.

Therefore, Vitanova et al. (2015, ch. 1) point out that it seems impossible to come to an agreement with a single definition of agency. They support Joseph (2006:39) who advises researchers to find out who has it or who lacks it, in what contexts, and then, to devise ways of restoring it to those most deprived of it (Ibid.).

To sum up, this section has presented the different understandings and approaches of what agency entails in the field of SLA. Research findings show that language learners' agency relates to motives, beliefs, motivation, goals, and choices leading to personal and social transformation; thus, the growing consensus is that agency is linked to identity and the self. Overall, there is ample support for the claim that agency is mediated through interaction with others and the context as a socially mediated process, which emphasises the role of the contextual conditions. Therefore, these facts suggest that there is a need for a more thorough study to find out the extent to which social structure shapes or constraints language learners' agency. The next section presents the notion of social structure, the ways this has been defined by authors and its relevant typologies in social science.

## 2.3    Social Structure in Social Science

The social factors that influence individuals' behaviour are known as social structure, so this concept is widely used and thought of as self-explanatory in social science. However, Lopez and Scott (2000), whose work on social structures has been highly influential, describe it as a 'strikingly nebulous and diverse term' (p. 1). In Elder-Vass's (2010:77) opinion, the reason is that thinkers seem to have in mind different kinds of social structure when working on their theories, so the term can refer to normative institutions, organisations, class, gender, the capitalist system or demographic distributions. Theorists focus on different kinds of structure and therefore, sometimes their theories may seem irreconcilable. As a result, there is much disagreement about what social structure is and how it can affect individuals.

Regarding the word structure, Lopez and Scott (2000:3-5) put forward that in other disciplines, it is mainly used to describe the organisation of social life and as structural thinking e.g. chemical phenomena, structural analyses of physical phenomenal, social phenomena, etc. In the history of sociology, the institutional structure and the relational structure were notions that coexisted for a long time until these authors presented the embodied structure as a third conception of social structure. For them, social structure involves the three interdependent aspects of the organization of social life: the institutional, the relational, and the embodied.  Institutional structure consists of the cultural or normative patterns that define the agents' expectations and behaviour that organise their relations on a large scale e.g. marriage, property and contract, and of day-to-day existence, such as queuing or turn taking in conversations (Lopez and Scott, 2000:23). The relational structure is based on the social relations themselves and patterns of interconnection and interdependence.

As for the embodied structure, Lopez and Scott (Ibid.) say that there are scholars who disregard the fact that the previous concepts of structure are implicit in each other; however, others such as Giddens, Foucault and Bourdieu seek to link institutional and relational structure. Bourdieu and Foucalt, for example, conceive the idea that the concept of structure is contained within people, 'bodies are seen as the carriers of relational and institutional structures' (Ibid. 98). As a result,

Lopez and Scott introduced the embodied structure as the third conception of social structure (Lopez and Scott, 2000:17-18):

> '........Embodied structures are found in the habits and skills that are inscribed in human bodies and minds and that allow them to produce, reproduce and, transform institutional structures and relational structures.' (Lopez and Scott 2000:4).

The authors consider these three facets not to be distinct, but rather complementary of social structure. Elder-Vass (2010:79) states that the embodied structure seems to be the link between institutional structure, relational structure and individual agency. The habits and skills in the individuals' minds are the ones that produce, reproduce and transform both institutional and relational structures.

However, according to Elder-Vass (2010:79-83), to make sense of the three facets (institutional, relational and embodied structures), the relationship of each one of the collectivities and its social powers should be understood (Elder-Vass 2008b). He claims that neither the institutional nor the relational traditions clarify what the entities are and how they acquire social powers, which are external to them. As for the embodied tradition, this describes one facet of the operation of how social structure works, which should be supplemented by an analysis of those facets that cannot be embodied. Thus, Elder-Vass (Ibid.) asserts that in order to make sense of social structure, this must be considered 'as a whole and identifying the social entities that possess causal powers….. structured by structure-as relations' (p.82). He defines social entities as structures at an intermediate level between individual and society that can have more specific effects and supports Mouzelis' (1991) view. The latter scholar argues that complex hierarchy actors can provide a link between individuals on the micro-level and systematic incompatibilities on the macro-level.

Furthermore, Elder-Vass affirms that the different typologies of social structure lack ontological clarity since social structure is not an abstract concept or a monolithic concept of society but refers to specific groups of people with social power. From his perspective, structures are entities or things with causal powers, because real groups of people constitute higher-level entities with emergent powers, as a result of the interaction of their members. Consequently, he regards social structures as 'things with causal powers of their parts', in the sense that

'they are dynamic things whose powers depend on the activities of the people' (p. 196).

On the other hand, Layder (2006:4) states that he uses the notion of structure to refer to social relationships given by the contextual conditions under which people act. The referent of structure for this definition are the objective features of social life, such as social organisations, institutions and cultural products including language knowledge. Nevertheless, he recognises that these are rather subjective because they are inevitably intertwined with people's motivations and reasons for acting. He states that some other meanings of structure relate to different aspects of social life. An example of this is Giddens' definition of 'rules or resources' as the medium of our activity, which enable us to do things and to have intentions. From this perspective, structure in social life is both the medium and outcome of social activity (Giddens, 1976 cited in Layder, 2006:166).

Sealey and Carter (2004:6-7) summarise the views on structure as follows:

> *'[S]ociologists have employed the term in two senses: to refer to normative institutions (the legal system, ideological system and so on) and to relational groupings (capitalist and proletariat, for example). Relational structures and institutional structures are connected but distinct aspects of structure and irreducible each to the other...structures are always 'macro' features of society, which persist over time; however, for some..., the term refers primarily to social institutions- such as the economy, schooling and so forth- while for others the emphasis is on social relations such as employer-employee, teacher-pupil and so on.'*

They offer an understanding of the two concepts but stress the fact that they are equally important and connected to each other. However, Sealey and Carter do not include the embodied structure that Elder-Vass suggests might be the link between institutional structure, relational structure and individual agency.

Therefore, as Elder-Vass and Lopez and Scott have suggested, the notion of social structure remains a blurred one, given the different interpretations of the authors. The common ideas are that structure relates to macro features of society that persist over time and that it involves the relationship among social groups. This fact suggests that social structure can be 'best understood as the emergent causal powers of specific social entities', as proposed by Elder-Vass (2010:205); in other words, the emergent powers resulting from the relationship among groups of people and the way they interact and compose higher-level entities,

namely social structures.  The present study follows Elder-Vass's perspective and seeks to identify the social entities (parts) at play and their emergent powers related to SLL. The structure and agency debate will be presented in the next section, which illustrates the different views over the years and the position taken for this investigation.

## 2.3.1    The Structure and Agency debate

Sealey and Carter (2004:15) claim that the structure and agency debate has been a major concern in trying to establish the relationship between human beings and the social context in which they operate to achieve what they want (their intentions, aspirations needs and desires). Layder (2006:296) however, suggests that the agency-structure dualism might be a reformulated version of the individual-society problem, though agency may relate to either individual or collective agents (social groups). In recent decades, there has been an increasing interest in the structure and agency dilemma, so several schools of thought or approaches and individual authors have offered different perspectives.  Ahearn (2001:109-1) explains this to have been a result of the social movements from the 1960s to the early 1990s in central and eastern Europe, which led scholars to articulate their ideas about human agency and social structure. Consequently, academics started researching participation actions aimed at transforming society that 'can either reproduce or transform the very structures that shape them' (p.110).

Similarly, Archer (1982:455) states that linking human agency and social structure involves dealing simultaneously with those who constitute society and the social formation of human agents. Thus, the structure-agency debate has been concerned with the relationship between micro and macro levels of analysis, voluntarism, and determinism or individuals and society (Bakewell, 2010:1689 cited in Block, 2013a:2). The successive theoretical developments have moved either towards an over-socialized (macro) view of agency determined by structure of society, or a view of an overly individualized agency free from social constraints; that is, one element dominating or subordinating the other depending on the different schools of thought. There have been however, some attempts to reconcile these positions and find a balance between them in the last decades.

The following is a review of the four major positions on the individual agency and structure debate, drawing mainly on Sealey and Carter (2004:6-11), but including other authors' views on them:

1) The structuralistic position states that human beings are determined by social relations; hence the role of structure is stressed over agency as a shaper of human behaviour.  Examples of this are: cultural codes (as in the work of Levi-Strauss), relations of production in deterministic forms (Marxism), discourses (as in many forms of postmodernism) or system needs and socialisation process (Parsons). Furthermore, the element of choice is neglected, as well as the exercise of individual power in the light of contextual constraints (Gao, 2010:26).  Collins (2006:65-68) says that even Berger and Luckmann's dialectical model in which language plays an essential role is deterministic.

2) The voluntarist position, in which the role of agency is emphasised and social structures are seen as derived from people's thoughts (idealism, various forms of interpretivism), or from their habits and conversations (social constructionism, ethnomethodology). Some representative scholars are Mead (symbolic interactionism), Foucault (the problem of power and domination) and Butler (performative theory) (Layder, 2006). Thus, the contextual conditions are identified as one variable (Gao, 2010:27).

3) The structuration theory tries to eliminate the dualism of agency and structure by seeing them as two interdependent constructs produced and reproduced through their mutual interaction (Giddens, 1984:292; Giddens, 1987:645). For Giddens, structure in social life (rules and resources) is the medium and outcome of social activity and, at the same time, the medium of our activity that enables us to do things and have intentions (Giddens 1976 cited in Layder 2006:166). Hence, structure and agency are mutually constitutive and can only be examined in conjunction.

4) The realist position asserts that agency and structure interact with each other and have emerging properties from such interaction. Structure is historically anterior, and agency is associated with the use of the power of self-consciousness, reflexivity intentionality, cognition and emotionality (Carter and Sealey, 2000; Carter & New, 2004).

Power is also considered a structural property and a precondition for individual agency, so agency must be understood as a multi-dimensional combination of forces (Layder, 2006:284). Realists claim that it is because of agency that social agents 'reflect upon' and 'seek to alter or reinforce' the fitness of the social arrangements they encounter for the realization of their own interests (Sealey and Carter, 2004:11). Therefore, social actors operate within the supporting features and constraints of contextual conditions by making choices.

Regarding language learning, Carter and Sealey (2000:3) suggest that realist social theory can be related to sociolinguistics, given the fact that "language can be seen to have a different significance, depending on the researcher's area of interest".  They support their argument by offering the key tenets of a sociological realism, based on Margaret Archer's morphogenesis- exploration of analytical dualism- and Derek Layder's (1997) theory of social domains.

Archer's (1982:455-3) morphogenetic approach is an approach to the structure and agency dialectic where both structure and agency have autonomy in interaction, since morphogenesis is 'a process of the complex interchanges that produce change in a system's given form, structure or state', with an end product of the elaborated structure (p. 458). In other words, agents are shaped by social structures and transformed by them but at the same time, these structures change as a result of the activities and choices of the individuals. Layder (1993 cited in Carter and New, 2004:15) however, suggests studying social reality as comprising four analytically separable social 'domains': psychobiography, situated activity, social setting and contextual resources. The first two comprise different aspects of agency and the last two relate to structures. Layder's model aims to capture the social and temporal distancing of social relations from lived experience, maintaining that every lived experience is embedded within these domains.

On the other hand, social theorists and researchers under social realism have aligned with the critical realist paradigm. This philosophy emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of the post-positivist crises. Critical realism involves a series of philosophical positions on a range of matters including ontology, causation, structure, persons, and forms of explanation. Critical realists maintain that this position refines and improves knowledge about the real world over time

given that it makes 'claims about reality which are relatively justified, while still being historical, contingent, and changing' (Archer et al., 2016).

To sum up, over the years, the ongoing debate regarding the nature of agency and structure has evolved and several schools of thought have been developed in an aim to understand it better. These have moved from giving more weight to either structure or the individual, to ones conceiving them to possess emergent and causal properties. Thus, for the given purposes of this study, the realist position seems to offer a thorough approach to the exploration of language learners' agency by considering the causal properties of social structure and their impact on second language learning.

## 2.3.2 Critical Realist Philosophy

Critical realism is a philosophical position that started with the British philosopher, Bhaskar's (1978, 1979) writings. According to Archer et al. (2016), there are several perspectives, which share various commonalities that may overlap in different ways (Archer, 1982, 1995; Bhaskar, 1975, 1979; Elder-Vass, 2010; Lawson, 1997; Steinmetz, 2004; Porpora, 2015; Sayer, 2000). Critical realists do not have knowledge of specific structures but seek to provide a meta-theory - the ontological, epistemological and methodological presuppositions at work- to offer some guiding precepts about structure and agency (Cruickshank, 2003; Steinmetz, 2004; Bhaskar and Danermark, 2006). Structures are to be defined as emergent properties, and the elaboration of particular theories depends on the topic being researched. The human being is conceived as a person, social agent and social actor. The individual, through interacting in social reality, is influenced by pre-existing social structures, and 'a sense of social agency (social self) and individual reality (personal self) can be sustained without contradiction' (De Souza, 2014:148).Thus, critical realist research is about gaining knowledge of a reality that exists independently of researchers' representations of it.

According to Block (2015, ch. 2), critical realism urges us not to simplify complex situations based on regularities in human sciences. For Bhaskar, social sciences imply 'the direct study of phenomena that only ever manifest themselves in open systems [in which] invariant empirical regularities do not obtain' (Bhaskar, 1998:45) as these are 'characterised by both plurality and multiplicity of causes'

(Bhaskar, 1998:87).  The two key metaphysical dimensions of critical realism are ontology - reality under research - and epistemology - the origin, nature and limits of knowledge and methods; that is, what we want to know about and how we might come to know about it.  Given Bhaskar's views over ontology and epistemology, he defines society and its status vis-á-vis structure and agency as follows:

> '...society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so. Society does not exist independently of human activity (the error of reification). But it is not the product of it (the error of voluntarism) ...Society, then, provides necessary conditions for intentional human action, and intentional human action is a necessary condition for it. Society is only present in human action, but human action always expresses and utilizes some or other social form. Neither can, however, be identified with, reduced to, explained in terms of, or reconstructed from the other. There is an ontological hiatus between society and people, as well as a model of connection (viz transformation).' (Bhaskar 1998: 36-37).

Bhaskar illustrates the fact that individuals and society are intimately interwoven, and agency is crucial. Danermark et al. (2002:175) suggest that because of this connection, agency is restricted by existing structures but also that structures change or reproduce individual actions, whereby 'the ontological or intransitive reality of the social world is changed'. Thus, this perspective highlights the need to study the relationship between agency and structure in order to understand the social world.

According to Block (2013a:17), Bhaskar (2002) sees poststructuralism as an epistemological approach to the study of reality which; prioritises difference, relativity and pluralism; celebrates diversity; views life as a collection of experiences; defines the object of research (its ontology) as discursively constructed and often involves judgmental relativism, according to which it is impossible to provide a rationale for adopting one belief, action or practice over another.  Bhaskar (2002:223) suggests that postmodernists have 'thrown out the baby of unity with the bathwater of abstract universality'. A critical realist, however, understands that social reality exists with social reality itself. That is, regarding ontology is intransitive because it exists independently of the activity of individuals, whereas in the case of epistemology it is relativist because experience changes depending on conceptions of the studied world. Hence, CR

proposes a shared ontology and epistemology for the natural and social sciences (Sayer, 1992). That is, by combining and resolving 'ontological realism, epistemological relativism, and judgmental rationality' (Archer et al., 1998, p. xi); or in other words, shifting from judgmental relativism, the inability to take action to judgmental rationalism about what allows us to take action in our day-to-day lives (Block, 2015, ch. 2).

Bhaskar (2014: vi-xii) argues that the main difference between the experimental, natural and social sciences is the epistemological difference, since a social phenomenon only occurs in open systems and is determined by multiple mechanisms, thus such systems are characterized by complexity and emergence. These mechanisms cannot be explained out of their context but within their field of operation, that is, context, structure, mechanism and outcome (CSMO) (Ibid.).

Moreover, Bhaskar (1978 cited in Sayer, 2000:11-12) suggests reality is differentiated and stratified in three different domains of the social and natural world: the real, the actual, and the empirical. However, mechanisms, events and experiences are represented and overlap in the following three domains (p.12):

1) The real domain comprises whatever exists in the social world although we do not know or have no experience of it. It is in this, the 'realm of objects, their structures and powers' or mechanisms that things happen in the world.

2) The actual domain pertains to events or what happens when powers in natural and social objects are activated – what those powers do and what follows when those powers do what they do (Sayer, 2000; Collier, 1994; Danermark et al., 2002).

3) The empirical domain is made up of our direct or indirect experiences, and the observer may not experience all the events (Collier, 1994).

The Centre for Critical Realism (2013) observes that in an open system, events do not follow a logical order, so reality does not correspond to our experience of events. To put it more simply, what is happening now, has happened, or will happen, is not exhausted by our knowledge or experience, nor does it exhaust the categories and possibilities of reality. Reality is complex, temporal, and changing, thus it needs to contemplate history and social situations framing the differentiation of mechanisms from their exercise, and the occurrence of events

apart from our experience (or knowledge) of them. Bhaskar (2008:2) represents the distinct domains as follows:

Table 1: Domains of reality (Bhaskar's 2008:2)

|  | Domain of Real | Domain of Actual | Domain of Empirical |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mechanisms | X | | |
| Events | X | X | |
| Experiences | X | X | X |

Mechanisms are conceived as how things act, such as the structures, powers, and liabilities shaping an entity predisposition while they operate and interact, and may be applied without being noticeable (Bhaskar, 1975:14). Natural mechanisms and structures should be considered independent from events to understand their constant operation and persistence (Ibid. 20/02/2015).

Accordingly, Easton (2010:23) states that we just see the tip of the iceberg, but that the invisible is connected to what we see. He explains that empirical domain is where observations are made and experienced by observers. Events occur in the actual domain and these may be not observed at all or may be understood differently by the observer. There is a process of interpretation between the empirical and actual domains, so events occur as a result of mechanisms that operate in the real domain. Although the real or actual domains could also be observed, the fact is that these may not always be observable. Thus, observation is fallible, and it cannot fully disclose and lead to an understanding of any social situation as there is no definite criteria to judge the truth.

Regarding emergence, Mogashana (2015) points out that it is another essential feature, 'the way in which particular combinations of things, processes and practices in social life frequently give rise to new emergent properties' (Carter & New, 2004:6). She asserts that the new emergent properties involve more than the sum of the constituents and, as such, are irreducible to their properties. Learning a language at university for example, consists of learners, teacher and a teaching method, which have emergent properties that are distinct from the sum of all the properties of the three elements. There is no linear relationship between

cause and effect because 'what we observe in the domains of the actual and the empirical cannot be simply reduced directly to the mechanism in the real' (Case, 2013:40).

Then, realist ontology recognises that there are powers that may be present, which may exist but that are not yet applied. Therefore, realist ontology can allow exploration of language learners' agency within the domain of the real to discover the generative mechanisms and emergent powers from both learners and social structure that may cause or restrain language learners' agency.

Furthermore, Corson (1997:169-184) supports the view that critical realism is suited for applied linguistics, 'as a philosophy that gives ontological status to human sign systems themselves' to have this discipline 'better equipped to deal with the sociocultural transformations' of the new century.  He explains Bhaskar's (1986, 1989) calls for 'emancipatory social practice', that is, to reject the prejudices, errors, unsupported claims and philosophical false trails to 'reclaim reality'. Emancipation starts by interpreting the world with the reasons and accounts of relevant actors, although these seem rational, menthalistic or irrational for the researcher. Reasons and accounts are emergent phenomena as they really exist, thus they are the best means to understand the material or immaterial structural influences that provide important controlling mechanisms in people's lives, which can reveal how people perceive them. This theory includes as real entities the properties of the social world, especially things like the reasons and accounts people provide to explain social or individual behaviour or change. Corson (Ibid. 173) summarises Bhaskar's conception of critical realism as follows:

1. Human reasons and accounts are basic social scientific data

2. By consulting the reasons and accounts of relevant actors, people learn about the values, beliefs, interests, ideologies and 'material entities' that create important structural influences in the lives of those actors.

3. Because of the human capacity for second-order monitoring, people's reasons and accounts offer evidence not just about what their beliefs, etc. are, but also about what they believe about such beliefs, etc.

4. By confirming the reality of influential structural influences in actors' lives, using the reasons and accounts that actors offer as the most basic form of evidence, other people come to understand and explain the things that human actors do value, and also the things that oppress them.

5. Action to sustain wanted structures, or to replace unwanted ones (emancipation), is a morally binding response to social science data, because failing to sustain wanted structural influences is to ignore the real interests of actors, and leaving unwanted structures in place is to ignore real forms of oppression that are known to exist.

Therefore, examining language learners' agency (actions) and their social context through the lens of critical realism might help understand the rationale behind learners' actions in the context of their material and social environment (structures). In other words, given that language learning is an emergent phenomenon, the dynamic between language learners and the causal powers of a variety of entities (social structure) is explored to learn what influences their actions in language learning. The next section reviews Block's work, which has significantly influenced this research, given that his proposed model was selected to carry it out.

## 2.4 David Block's social turn in SLA

Block (2013a) supports Norton's (1995) call for 'a comprehensive theory of social identity that integrates the language learner and the learning context'. Ever since his (2003) book "The Social Turn in SLA", Block has discussed the need for SLA to move in a more interdisciplinary and socially informed direction. In this book, Block made the case for a 'broader, socially informed and more sociolinguistically oriented' view also including a psychological perspective. This implies taking into account 'the complexity of the context, the multi-layered nature of language and an expanded view of what acquisition entails' (p. 4).Thus, Block suggests looking at the language learner as a sociohistorically situated entity rather than only looking at an individual and his/her cognitive process. From this point of view, Block has developed his later work on the interrelationship between language learning, language use and identity and the interrelationships between multimodal resources and identity (Block, 2012a).

Block highlights three aspects of identity research in applied linguistics that he considers 'problematic and therefore worthy of further and more in-depth exploration' (Block, 2009:215): (1) identity itself and how this can be differentiated from subjectivity; (2) the tension between structure and agency; and (3) the prospect of a psychological approach to identity to complement the social orientation. He has thoroughly reviewed and discussed work from scholars in applied linguistics following the poststructuralist perspective and raised some interesting issues about the previous aspects, based on authors from social sciences. As a result, he calls for 'the need of greater thought and clarity', that is, on how 'researchers take on the interrelation between social structure and individual agency in their work' (Block, 2013:23).

In his work entitled 'Unpicking Agency' Block (2012 47-11) offers a tentative outline of four parameters shaping agency as emergent in social practices. These parameters, which draw on Sherry Ortner (1989, 2005, 2006) and Margaret Archer (2007) have conceptualised agency as an attempt 'to reconcile tensions at the crossroads of structure and agency' (p. 47).

According to Block, Ortner formulates the 'Practice Theory', as a model of social activity that includes identity formation and agency by extension. He also makes the different positions of Ortner and Chris Weedon clear in regard to subjectivity. For Ortner (2005:34), subjectivity is about 'cultural and historical consciousness and for Weedon (1997:34) subjectivity is about positioning vis-à-vis discursive fields, 'competing ways of giving meaning to the world and organizing social institutions and process'. Moreover, Block stresses the fact that the most important aspect of Archer's work consists of culture and history, and that she sees reflexivity as the link between structure and agency; that is, taking into account continuity and reproduction of socio-historically situated structures and discontinuities arising out of individual acts of agency. Thus, the sociohistorical structure is a mediator of activity when individuals are engaged in activities and reflect on their life projects.

Based on the above discussion, Block elaborates four parameters with the purpose of examining agency as 'accomplishment of [situated] social action' (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005:606) and not as an abstract notion. His starting point is the level of practice and participation in activity mediated by human subjects and

abstract material resources.  These parameters are: (1) temporal/historic frame to all acts of subject positioning, that is, interactions situated within larger life narratives; (2) cultural framing of agency, 'a created system of meaning and significance….of which a group of people understand, regulate and structure individual and collective lives'; (3) the way in which all acts of agency involve the assembling of semiotic resources in acts of communication; and (4) physical space and physical positioning in both macro spaces (nation states, cities, neighbourhoods and institutions) and micro space shaping practices (rooms and the proxemics of face-to face interaction).  Finally, Block applies the four parameters to a study carried out by Bashir-Ali (2006) with the aim of seeing beyond the scope of the original author. He points out that the study only focuses on Maria's present and that he was unable to relate it to her past in Mexico due to the lack of data (see 2.6). After this attempt to understand how agency operates, he continued reviewing relevant literature from different authors and developed his five-model structure.

### 2.4.1    The five-model-structure

In the light of the aforementioned considerations, Block (2015, ch.2) proposes the five-part model, taking into account the different types of structure, and Bhaskar's (1978, 1989) critical realism as an alternative framework to research second language identities. In this approach, identity emerges in localized, diverse and variable social activity, and the multiple subject positions that individuals inhabit and/or within sociohistorical and sociocultural contexts (Ibid.).

Block (2013:24) argues that 'the structure and agency nexus is a vexed and complicated one', because of his reviews and reflection on the interrelationship between structure and agency in social sciences and applied linguistics (see Block, 2009, 2012, 2013a). He agrees with Hall (2004:5), who claims agency 'has been at the centre of discussions of subjectivity for centuries' and it seems that this will continue for ever. Furthermore, Block reports that in the last decades, agency has been given more prominence over structure, arguing that research on language and identity has become 'over agentive' (Block, 2014, ch. 2) (emphasis in original).  He suggests structure deserves more importance and there is a need to reconsider epistemological bases, which implies moving structure to the first plane in research about identity subjectivities and agency (Block, 2013a).

Block (2015, ch. 2) contends that even when agency and structure are central in specialised literature, authors define agency but there is hardly any or total absence of reference to structure (Bakewell, 2010; Block 2013a). Regarding agency, he offers some examples from social science, linguistic anthropology, and applied linguistics (Ibid.):

> 'the ability to take action in the light of a conscious assessment of the circumstances. Layder, 1997:35)

> '[a]gency refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act'(Ahearn, 2001:112)

> 'people's ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal or social transformation' (Duff, 2012:413).

Nevertheless, he raises the point that agency is a blurred concept, as some definitions are rather simplistic, namely those of Ahearn and Layder. He therefore cites John Joseph (2006:241), who argues that agency is 'a true paradox, not a problem that can ever be solved once and for all'. Thus, he agrees with Vitanova et al. (2015) that agency has been at the centre of discussion for many years, but that there is still no agreement in terms of defining what it is in the different disciplines.

Concerning structure, Block (2013a:2-3) argues this term has been considered such 'an obvious backdrop' to any discussion of the social world that there is no clear definition of the concept.  According to Block (2015, ch. 2), 'structure is a slippery notion' and there is not much information, therefore, when it came to writing about structure he had to rely on Bakewell's (2010) article. He thus refers to Sewell's (1992) work:

> 'Structure operates in social scientific discourse as powerful metonymic device, identifying some part of a complex social reality as explaining the whole. It is a word to conjure with in the social sciences. In fact, structure is less a precise concept than a kind of founding epistemic metaphor of social scientific – and scientific- discourse.' (Sewell 1992:2).

Block highlights the fact that there is a lack of clarity because structure is described as a 'metonymic device', 'complex' and as forming part of a bigger 'whole' (emphasis in original) (loc. 529). He considers Sealey and Carter's definition (see 2.3) to be more thorough. Nevertheless, they did not include

embodied structure. He then introduces the three types of structure as proposed by Lopez and Scott (see 2.3) and explains them as follows:

- Institutional structure [which] is comprised by the cultural or normative expectations that guide agents' relations with each other.

- Relational structure [which] is composed of social relations themselves, causal interconnections and interdependences between agents.

- Embodied structure [which] play[s] a key role in reconciling and integrating the earlier institutional and relational views.

Block agrees with Marx's (1904) understanding of societies and how they work in terms of the economic structure of society as its real foundation, that is, the base and superstructure of societies. Additionally, Block claims that structures should be considered relevant because they can work as constraints or shapers of agency.

Furthermore, Block (2012, 2013a, and 2014) has also discussed 'the potential benefits of a more psychological angle when most language and identity research tend to be predominantly social' (Block, 2013a:11); and the need to examine class in terms of how different second language learners 'are positioned in society and.... act according to generative and dynamic Bourdieusian habituses' (Block, 2014:202) (see 2.4.2). He also recommends that research into class should include socioeconomic stratification, which is 'how social division and inequality exist in a long term', despite 'continuous reproduction in the form of activities at any given point in time' (Botero, 2005 cited in Block, 2013a:28).

On the other hand, Block (2015, ch. 2) adds that in applied linguistics, agency has been given more prominence to counterbalance the weight that social structure has as the determiner or shaper of an individual's life trajectories.  For example, De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg (2006b:7) state that structure positions individuals but they may choose how to proceed in life, resulting in an imbalance by giving more importance to agency. Moreover, Block recognises that in the analysis of the study presented in his 2006 book, 'Multilingual Identities in a Global City: London Stories', he acknowledges structural constraints but ends up being extremely 'over agentive' (emphasis in original). He says this might be because of the trend of social disciplines to move away from 'the concern on

larger structures to an interest in the individual agent' (loc. 620). In his critique on sociology, Tourraine (2006) argues this shift is a logical consequence of the debilitation of traditional structures and stable cultures that exhorts researchers to study actors, their relations, conflicts and negotiations.

Additionally, Block (2015, ch.2) contends that the trend in individualization, in which agency has been given more relevance, might be due to the generalised perception scholars have of individual and society. Over the years the positions have moved, from the ideas of Karl Marx (1973) who elaborates that society is constituted not by autonomous individuals, but by the practices in which individuals and collectives engage, to Ayn Rand (1967) who contends that there was nothing more important than the individual. Elliot and Lemert (2006) argue that individualism is a 'phenomenon in expansion, riding history on the way to virtual universality' (loc. 663). Nevertheless, Block states that this universal individualism is true for the privilege of the wealthy nations, and within wealthy nations, for the affluent more than the poorer citizens. On this topic, Beck (1992) observes that in wealthier countries individuals are less constrained by social structures than in traditional societies. This might be because in developed countries individuals have more opportunities to make choices and take decisions about their life, compared to developing countries where opportunities are more constrained by social structures.

Block highlights the fact that as a result, the idea that an individual's biography depends to a large extent on the same individual's decisions has become popular in social sciences, particularly in narrative research. For example, in the so-called narrative turn in the social sciences (Bruner 1986; Clandin 2007), where the turn is towards the individuals and their personal life, trajectories and culture are presented as an ever-emergent phenomenon (Baumann 1999).

As a result, Block (2015, ch. 2) provides the five-model structure based on Marx's view of the economic structure; the three types offered by Lopez and Scott; and the physical environment following the line of research in applied linguistics that considers physical locations and physical objects as shapers of language and other semiotic practices. He points out that this line of research focuses on notions such as landscapes, scales and space (Blommaert, 2010; Collins et al., 2009; Shohamy & Gorter, 2008), mobile language and cultural practices

(Canagarajah, 2013; Pennycook, 2012) and displacement (Baynham & De Fina, 2005) (Ibid.). Block's model of structure and agency is based on five realms:

(5) Sociocultural configurations which emerge in the ongoing interactions acting collectively in social formation, for example, field or location (Bourdieu 1984), CoP (Lave & Wenger 1991).

(4) Psychologically based, embodied dispositional formations, such as Bourdieu's (1977) habitus -internalised relationships and habitual expectations and relationships form, over time- or Layder's (2006) psychobiography or Lahire's (2011) 'embodied, individualised folds of the  social'.

(3) More concrete organizations and institutions (religion, education, employment and family) and the abstract discursive and concrete material constraints which they impose on thought and behaviour.

(2) The physical environment (geographical terrain, neighbourhood, furniture and other physical objects).

(1) The material, economic bases of societies and the legal, political superstructure emerging from this economic base (Marx 1904).

He maintains that economic structure, physical structure, social structure and psychological/embodied structure do exist before agency is exercised  so he asserts that it is in realm 5, sociocultural configurations, when agency is exhibited as the 'more immediate and spontaneous interactions in our lives' (Ibid.).  Thus, Block claims that in language and identity research, it is crucial to understand how language and identity interrelate with agency as well as how the structures interrelate with each other. Otherwise, agency would lack the support to be assumed 'as the exercise of intentionality, as self-conscious activity, as any number of aspects of individual subjectivity' (Ibid.).

To sum up, Block's arguments show that researchers have granted more prominence to individual agency over social structure, reality being described with language and culture as discursively constructed, relegating 'the material and how the real-world is' (Ibid.). Although identity and language researchers have recognised that learners cannot be studied in isolation, they have overlooked 'what structures are and how they work as constraints on and shapers

of agency', which Block relates to their philosophical perspective, namely poststructuralism (Block, 2015, ch. 2). Block (2013a:28) calls for a research analysis via an approach to identity, subjectivities and agency considering structure in the same plane, then he suggests critical realism as the best approach to study structure and its effects over time as a whole, given the fact that language learning and use are social, but there is a material reality apart from language or discourse. Thus, critical realism can help to see beyond learners' accounts and make connections with the stratified nature of reality; in other words, how the self is constructed and developed by social relations and practices, which involves a psychological angle and reflexivity.

With this perspective in mind, the social structure and agency of undergraduate students using a self-access centre at a Mexican university will be studied. Moreover, this study will rely on theories of social science and SLL to disclose the connection between the social forms and language learners' actions as an open system determined by multiple mechanisms, characterized by complexity and emergence (Bhaskar 2014: vi-xii). The theories that will be used are: habitus and field, communities of practice, psychobiography and identity, to find out the generative mechanisms that may shape or restrain Mexican students from learning English.

### 2.4.2    Habitus and Field

Elder-Vass (2010:110) reinterpreted Bourdieu's habitus and integrated it with Archer's reflexivity, in an aim to provide a coherent account of human action. He argues that our dispositions may sometimes be heavily and unconsciously affected by social factors, but that none of us are ever completely at the mercy of our habitus. Nor is our habitus the unmediated product of social structures, but rather the result of a lifetime of critical reflection upon our experiences, including our experiences of those structures. Reflexivity thus becomes a critical attitude towards the dispositions we have acquired from our past, as well as towards the contemporary social situation that we face.

Habitus and fields are two key constructs fundamental to Bourdieu's work to transcend the dualism between structuralist and agency-oriented views. Block (2010:338) suggests that from Bourdieu's (1984) perspective, individuals are seen to be embedded in multiple social spaces, or fields, in which they constantly

encounter unequal power relationships related to their access and their legitimate control over and use of different capitals. According to Di Maggio (1979:1462-1), Bourdieu's (1971a) field is a critical metaphor inspired in part by the vector psychology of Kurt Lewin. It relates to both the totality of actors and organizations involved in an arena of social or cultural production and the dynamic relationship among them.  Fields are founded on hierarchies conforming to similar laws and evolving ways of thinking and acting. Every field, such as education, the world of art or sports is an arena of conflict, in which actors struggle for positions of power either consciously or unconsciously, despite social structure constraints.

According to Zotzmann and Hernández-Zamora (2013:366), the positions and relations in the field are greatly influenced by the distributions of different kinds of 'capital' (emphasis in original) of social, cultural, economic and political origin rather than economic. Social capital defines entry to social groups, communities and networks to grant membership in the group as well as ability to participate in different social contexts, so it can be exchanged for other forms of capital. Cultural capital can be the typical emotional, cognitive and behavioural inclinations of a particular status group or the material goods they possess. Symbolic capital is the cultural and historical value conferred to objects that provide status to their owners, differentiating them from others. Institutionalised cultural capital however, is knowledge endorsed through credentials and degrees. Therefore, these social and cultural capitals or assets are invested with value in the given field so that members can obtain membership, and they do it through their 'habitus'.

Bourdieu's theory relies on 'habitus', the result of socialization that provokes 'in individuals a 'disposition' below the level of consciousness to act or think in certain ways; and on the network of objective relations between positions that agents or institutions occupy in the field' (Naidoo, 2014:458-459).  Habitus is conceived as a set of attitudes and values transmitted, starting at home.

Lizardo (2004:2) maintains that the habitus is 'a useful and flexible way to conceptualize agency and the ability to transform social structure'. He states that habitus is what permits Bourdieu to examine 'the social agent as a physical, embodied actor, subject to developmental, cognitive and emotive constraints and

affected by the very real physical and institutional configurations of the field' (p. 4). Since habitus is a dynamic structure that adapts itself to another dynamic mesolevel structure consisting of other actors, situated practices and durable institutions (fields). Thus, he says habitus links Bourdieu's representation of systemic structuration and individual action (King, 2000).

Lizardo (2004:7-1) distinguishes between two major components of habitus in Bourdieu's work: habitus as a perceptual and classifying structure, and habitus as a generative structure of practical action.

Akram (2013:57) on the other hand, claims that Bourdieu rejects the notion that action is "a sort of unprecedented confrontation between the subject and the world" (1977:73), and that agents operate through "mechanical obedience to explicitly codified rules" (1990:63). For Bourdieu, the key aspects of the social world are experienced as embodied. He illustrates the interaction between structures and agents with the analogy of a game, in which the world is 'the game 'and the agent is the 'game player'. Habitus is then, the 'feel for the game' suggesting that 'the "good player does at every moment what the game requires' (1990:63). Akram says that through the analogy of the game and the game player, Bourdieu eliminates theoretical concepts, such as rules and intentional action, that is, the process by which agents and structures interact. The process then, in many ways becomes seamless, mundane and ordinary, since habitus takes its form within different fields - settings in which agents and their social positions are located. Thus, she argues that she conceives 'habitus and the unconscious as aspects of agency which sit alongside notions such as reflexivity and intentional action' (p. 46).

According to Reay (2004:432-436), Bourdieu maintains that 'it is through the workings of habitus that practice (agency) is linked with capital and field (structure)'. In terms of the charge of determinism, Bourdieu (1990b:116) states that habitus becomes active in relation to a field, and the same habitus can lead to very different practices and stances depending on the state of the field. She explains habitus by analysing it in terms of the following four related aspects (Ibid, 432):

1) Habitus as embodiment was developed by Bourdieu (1977), to show the ways in which not only is the body in the social world, but also the ways in which

the social world is in the body. That is to say, expressed through ways of standing, speaking, walking and thereby of feeling and thinking (Bourdieu, 1990a:70); people's relationships to dominant culture are conveyed in a range of activities such as eating, speaking and gesturing (Bourdieu, 1984), so the social is inscribed in the body of the biological individual (Bourdieu, 1985b:113).

2) Habitus and agency, where Bourdieu conceives habitus as potentially generating a wide repertoire of possible actions, enabling the individual to draw on transformative and constraining courses of action. That is, as a system of dispositions to a certain practice, the effect of the habitus is that agents equipped with it behave in a certain way in certain circumstances (Bourdieu, 1990b). Although there is a tendency to behave in certain ways, there are no explicit rules or principles that dictate behaviour, that is, 'the habitus goes hand in hand with vagueness and indeterminacy' (Bourdieu, 1990b:77). The operation of habitus regularly excludes unfamiliar practices to cultural groups. For example, the working class will be likely to make a virtue out of necessity instead of attempting to achieve 'what is already denied' (p.54). These dispositions which make up habitus are the products of opportunities and constraints framing the individual's earlier life experiences; inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions (Bourdieu, 1990a:54). Thus, the most improbable practices are rejected as unthinkable and only a limited range of practices is possible (p. 433).

3) Habitus is a compilation of collective and individual trajectories- multi-layered concept, with more general notions of habitus at the level of society and more complex differentiated notions at the level of the individual. An individual's history is constitutive of habitus, but it is also the collective history of family and class from which the individual is a member. Bourdieu (1990:46) suggests a degree of uniformity between members of the same cultural group, but also differences that relate to the singularity of individual habitus, and to the fact that individuals' social trajectories diverge from one another. A collective understanding of habitus acknowledges that individuals contain within themselves their past and present position in the social structure, 'at all times

and in all places, in the forms of dispositions which are so many marks of social position (Bourdieu 1990b:82) (p. 434).

4) Habitus as a complex interplay between past and present- 'refers to something historical, it is linked to individual history' (Bourdieu 1990c:86). Individual histories are vital to understanding the concept of habitus. Habitus is permeable and responsive to what is going on around it and is a product of early childhood experience, especially in socialization within the family, continually re-structured by individuals' encounters with the outside world (Di Maggio 1979). Schooling acts to provide a general disposition, a turn towards what Bourdieu terms 'a cultured habitus' (Bourdieu 1967:344). Then, habitus reflects the social position in which it was constructed, but also carries within the genesis of new creative responses capable of transcending social conditions and is open to a range of possibilities regarded as a continuum. That is, habitus can be either replicated through meeting a field that reproduces its dispositions or transformed through a process that either raises or lowers an individual's expectations. This implies that dispositions do reflect the social context in which they are attained (p. 434-435).

Bourdieu's attempt to transcend agency structure dualism has been sharply criticised for being deterministic (DiMaggio, 1979; King, 2000). Layder (2006:289) contends that Bourdieu conceives the self as social creation 'with an over-socialised and over-constructed vision of social agency,' so habitus leaves no place for individual agency or individual consciousness (Di Maggio, 1979; King, 2000; Sullivan, 2002)). Nevertheless, other authors support Bourdieu's theory, arguing how individuals may or may not adopt new practices or perspectives conceiving habitus as linked with values, identity and self-worth, as well as able to be conscious and reflective individuals (Zotzmann and Hernández-Zamora, 2013: Akram, 2013).

Therefore, the researcher agrees with the latter position and considers the notions of habitus and field may help clarify the interrelationship between language learners' agency and social structure. In other words, habitus and field may provide a means to explain language learners' orientation to action and 'their impulse to move toward a self-investment' in language learning (Bourdieu, 1999:152).

### 2.4.3  Communities of Practice

Block (2015 ch. 1) claims that in realm 5, in the sociocultural configurations which emerge in the ongoing interactions acting collectively in social formations, such as communities of practice (CoP),  agency is exerted as the more spontaneous  interactions of our lives [(see 2.4.1)](). Wenger (1998:6-7) asserts that communities of practice (CoP hereafter) are everywhere and they are authentic, meaningful communities centred in specific practices in specific areas of life and learning, such as, at home, at work, at school, and in our hobbies.  In some groups, we are main members, in others we are more marginalised. The focus is on participation to understand what learning implies for individuals and for communities. Learning, for individuals is to engage in and contribute to the practices of their communities, whereas for communities, it is to refine their practice so as to ensure new generations of members. Thus, in the CoP old-timers 'model strategies, by doing the tasks, while the newcomers participate peripherally as 'apprentices, so they learn from both the old-timers and other apprentices (Cohen and Macaro, 2007:54).

Lave and Wenger's (1991) ethnographic studies of apprenticeship, such as the craft apprenticeship in West Africa and apprenticeship among Yucatec Mayan midwives aimed to articulate their learning process. Lave (1991:81) uses the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) to characterize it as 'a series of conceptual interdependencies among person, activity, knowledge, and world'. As a result, Lave and Wenger (1991:35) argue that learning is not just a situated practice but 'an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world'. Thus, they propose legitimate peripheral participation to describe the engagement in social practice as the integral constituent of learning.

Wenger (1998:12-15) states that CoP is a social theory because of its influences and contributions, in which philosophy, the social sciences, and the humanities converge. For him, learning as participation takes place through engagement in actions and interactions, but is embedded in culture and history. As a result, learning reproduces and transforms the social structure in which it takes place (p.13), since it provides a link between the individual, the group and place, as well as providing a setting in which linguistic practice emerges as a function of this link (Eckert, 2006:1).

Etienne Wenger (1998 72-83) claims that a community of practice defines itself along three dimensions: (1) mutual engagement of participants around what members are there to do; (2) joint enterprise understood and continually renegotiated by its members; and (3) shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, artefacts, vocabulary, ways of doing things, actions, etc.) that members have developed over time. Therefore, in the CoP, learning is understood as social participation 'combining personal transformation with the evolution of social structures' (Wenger, 2000:227), thus for learners it is both a kind of action and a form of belonging (Wenger, 1998:4).

Acuña et al. (2015:316-320) suggest that the SAC in this study might be considered a CoP, since what takes place there shows the three features mentioned above: (1) mutual engagement to practise English by talking, playing, helping peers; (2) joint enterprise, in improving English skills, and (3) shared mutual knowledge on the procedures of the activities and practices, and sharing their English knowledge on different levels. Moreover, it is through LLP that the newcomers integrate into the community of practitioners, adopting group language, practices and identities by virtue of informal membership. These practices have become the property of the community because it is normal to use English in the SAC, so a domain has developed which promotes language practice among a Spanish-speaking population. Therefore, language learners exhibit their agency in the ongoing interactions, acting collectively in the social formations of the SAC (Block, 2015).

### 2.4.4   Psychobiography

Block (2013:19-1) calls for a more psychological angle in language and identity research. He observes that although most language research and identity follows poststructuralist perspective, often linked to psychology, researchers have taken a social perspective of identity. Thus, he supports Layder, who argues 'it would be a mistake to think that the self is simply a social construct and that it has only an outer texture that is moulded and shaped by external social forces' (Layder, 1997:48).  Layder states that the former approach is a 'social constructionist fallacy' because of 'the tendency for sociologists to avoid examining the psychology of individuals for fear of producing explanations that are inappropriate or couched at the wrong level' (Layder, 1997:51). He also suggests

that individuals develop unique biographies in which 'personal feelings, attitudes and predispositions' contribute to a continuing selfhood, which is 'embedded in their daily routines and experiences' (Layder, 1997:2-3 cited in Sealey and Carter, 2000:7). Hence, he offers an approach to identity called 'psychobiography' that is the individual's 'life career', in which he conceptualises the self as a core of personal identity, with its own distinct history of negotiated control over its environment. This psychological profile of the individual traces the development of self as this emerges over time and space via activity from social involvements (Layder, 2006). It consists of more institutionalised experiences that are common to individuals who participate in similar activities and settings, so their experiences constitute what Layder calls a 'unique cluster of personality characteristics and typical behaviours' (Layder, 1997: 39 cited in Block, 2009:224).

Layder (1997:47 cited in Sealey and Carter, 2000:7) argues that individuals' behaviour functions below their level of consciousness so individuals cannot always articulate their motives or fully recognise their emotions. He attempts to go beyond, to a more psychological notion of identity to complement the social aspect, as people are not only cognitive, but also emotional beings who develop their self-identity over time. Self-identity therefore combines an individual consciousness and their set of emotional and psychological needs (Layder, 2004:28). Thus, 'the notion of psychobiography points to the development of the self as a linked series of evolutionary transitions, or transformations in identity and personality at various significant junctures in the lives of individuals' (Layder, 1997 ibid.)

Layder (2006:289) disagrees with Bourdieu who claims the individual is an 'entirely social creation' for his views about agency and habitus and how these are connected to practice and the reproduction of structure. From this perspective, individuals compete to gain advantage and superiority in whatever field they are in, with the aim of obtaining any or various kinds of capital – economic, political, social and or cultural-. He believes Bourdieu's interpretation of the self, motivations and dispositions and their relationship with the social order is too limited. For Layder, individuals have a relative autonomy from the social order because they are free to choose, although they do it in terms of their

context and available choices. This is why Layder's psychobiography establishes the relationship between the social and personal identity (Hearn, 2007:657).

Modern society is highly competitive and individualistic, but this is not the norm for everyone, which would imply determinism. People do not always act collectively because of their own situational and psychological interests; many sources, motivations and predispositions influence them. Their motives are complex, and their predispositions are not always the result of their social position or group interest. For Layder (2004a; 2004b cited in Hearn 2007:666-1), individuals have a fundamental need to control uncertainty and unpredictability in their social environment; emotions are a vital medium by which this is achieved, thus the result of adequate negotiations of control is a stable and well-adjusted sense of self and identity. People are continually involved in power, in the positive sense of empowerment, through acts of personal mastery to exert 'benign control' (emphasis in original).

Layder's psychobiography attempts to consider the personal and social dimension. Thus, psychobiography seems to be a feasible approach to researching the participants' trajectories in SLL in order to understand the development of the self or transformations in identity and personality to complement the social aspect. The next section presents relevant psychological concepts that can help understand the personal dimension of language learners.

### 2.4.4.1 The psychological angle

Budianto (2011:1) asserts that language learners' psychological conditions influence the foreign or second language acquisition as the language is organised in their mind, where 'language learning ultimately occurs'. He adds that the problem for language learners is often not a linguistic, rather a non-linguistic problem that can be physical, psychological or due to external factors, such as environment, school, family, etc. However, he explains that external factors have not been found to be as influential as learners' characteristics and affective variables (Stephen, 1987; Saha, 1983; Samimy and Tabuse, 1992). Likewise, Oxford (1995) suggests that the affective side of the learner is probably one of the most important influences regarding language learning success or failure, and Arnold and Brown (1999) provide that the relationship between affect and language learning is bidirectional. Thus, based on research findings, Budianto

(2011:67) concludes that students' psychological factors, such as anxiety, aptitude, attitude and motivation can significantly contribute to successful language learning.

According to Mercer et al. (2012:2-5), the interest in learner-related variables began with the good language learners' studies (Naiman, Frölich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; Rubin, 1975; Stevick, 1989) which were focused on features related to successful learners. Language learning psychology is concerned with the mental experiences, processes, thoughts, feelings, motives and behaviours of individuals involved in language learning. From these features, motivation has dominated research in SLA following its own agenda, however Dewaele (2005:367-368) proposes that SLA should incorporate work on 'relevant psychological variables not usually reported in SLA'. In the same vein, Dörnyei (2009: xii) highlights the relevance of psychology in the learning process, and McDonough (1981) stresses that psychology plays a vital role when it comes to understanding language learning. Moreover, Dörnyei's (2009) publication marks a shift towards studying learners' characteristics more holistically by focusing on contextualised individual learners.

### 2.4.4.2 Personality traits

According to Dewaele (2012:42-54), there is little research published on the effect of personality on SLA because 'the role and impact of personality factors are of less importance than those of some other individual differences variables such as aptitude and motivation' (Dörnyei 2010:10). Dewaele suggests that this might be because the researcher requires considerable theoretical knowledge and methodological skill in different disciplines such as psychology, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics. Moreover, it is very difficult to isolate the effect of personality among the cognitive, social and situational variables that contribute to SLA, as the effect of some personality traits may not appear in some situations. For example, in a relaxed conversation in the L2 there is not much difference between introverts and extraverts, but in an oral exam the introvert's fluency drops significantly. This fact implies that learners' characteristics are context dependent and vary over time.

He states that the Big Five Model is the most popular personality taxonomy. Costa and McCrae (1985) developed the NEO Personality Inventory based on the Big Five

Model to evaluate how people think, act and feel. There is ample evidence that 'super traits' (or 'higher order traits') and 'lower traits' determine behaviour, but it is not clear how much they affect SLA or L2 production. As the model originated in adjectives, listing adjectives is an effective way to describe them. The following is a brief description of the primary traits that have been considered in SLA based on Dewaele's (p.45-48.) and Dörnyei's (2005:15) reviews of Costa & McCrae's (1985,1992) NEO Personality Inventory.

- Extraversion: High scorers are sociable, gregariousness, active, talkative, person-oriented, optimistic, fun-loving, assertive, and affectionate; low scorers are passive, reserved, sober, aloof, and restrained. The common belief is that extroverts should be successful L2 learners, but introverts can be quietly determined, hard-working and more inclined to read, so they seem to follow different paths to success in the L2.
- Conscientiousness: high scorers are systematic, organised, reliable, hard-working, self-disciplined, responsible, neat, ambitious and perseverant; low scorers are aimless, unreliable, lazy, careless, lax, negligent, and weak-willed. This complex trait is sometimes called 'will to achieve' or 'character', reflecting a high desire at one end and a lower desire at the other.
- Openness-to-experience: high scorers are imaginative, curious, flexible, creative, moved by art, novelty seeking, original, and untraditional: low scorers are conservative, conventional, down-to earth, unartistic, and practical.
- Neuroticism: high scorers are worried, insecure, emotional, self-conscious, and feel inadequate; low scorers are relaxed, unemotional, hardy, secure, and self-satisfied. Very little research has included neuroticism.

The following are the low-order personality traits often linked to a high-order dimension, which have been the focus of SLA research based on Dewaele (2012:45-48):

- Risk-taking: The extent to which learners are willing to take risks in diverse situations.
- Self-efficacy: The person's belief in his/her capabilities to perform in the ways that give him/her some control over events that affect his/her life, which influences learners' effort, tenacity and achievement (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy is influenced by experiences and vicarious experiences.

- Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA): it is defined as 'a distinct complex of self-perceptions beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process' (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).
- Perfectionism: Perfectionists wish to avoid the trial and error stage of SLA. They are inhibited about classroom participation unless they know the right answer. (Gregsen and Horwitz, 2002). The authors found anxious learners were more perfectionist, more fearful of evaluation, set themselves higher performance standards, and were more inclined to procrastinate.
- Musicality: L2 learners with music skills may have an advantage as they seem to be better in distinguishing and producing sounds in L2.

In general, researchers have studied the effect of a particular trait on some linguistic variable to understand success in language learning. Nevertheless, a language learner's personality is also determined by biological and social factors. Dewaele (p.52) suggests applied linguists should investigate the effect of environmental factors on the learner's personality including the linguistic and cultural background in which the person grew up, as in the case of this study, where I have collected biographical information and interacted with the participants for some time to get to know them.  Although personality traits are not the main focus of this study, I agree with Dörnyei (2005:30) that 'they certainly shape the way people respond in the language environment'. The following section presents the self-concept that influences learners' actions.

### 2.4.4.3 Self-concept

Students' self-concept has an impact on their decisions to act in the foreign language (López González, 2010; Dörnyei, 2009; van Lier, 2010; Mercer, 2011; Arnaiz and Guillen, 2012). Van Lier (2010:x cited in Murray, 2011:6), in line with Harter (1999), defines self as 'basically anything and everything we call 'me' or 'I'', since the self is manifested in actions. Mercer et al. (2012:6) argue that the self should be understood as related to external contexts and other individuals, intra-personally (learner's psychology) and temporally (person's past experiences, ongoing present and future goals). According to Mercer (2014:10), self-concept allows for the connection of various dimensions such as motivation, affective attitudes, goals and strategic behaviour (Denissen, Zarret, & Eccles, 2007;

Marsch, 2006). Self-concept is everything we believe about ourselves, so it involves beliefs and an affective dimension. It is 'an evaluation of competence and the feelings of self-worth associated with the judgments in question (Pajares & Schunk, 2005:105). Then, it is multidimensional, with multiple interrelated self-concepts in different domains, such as a Mexican self-concept  or a student self-concept, which are different yet interrelated and connected as integral parts of a global self-concept network (Mercer, 2011a).

Mercer points out that in research there are constructs that are often confused with self-concept, such self-efficacy and self-esteem but that these differ in 'the degree of domain –specificity and the relative importance of cognitive and evaluative beliefs involved' (cf. Valentine & DuBois, 2005:55).  Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute a particular task in a specific context, so it is the most cognitive and domain specific of the three.  The most global and evaluative however, is self-esteem, which relates to a person's overall evaluation of their worth as a person (Harter, 1999). Thus, there is a general agreement that accepts self-concept as 'interrelated with sociocultural contexts and interpersonal interactions' that makes it dynamic across different settings (Neisser & Jopling, 1997).

On the other hand, Mercer (2011: 4) highlights that identity is also used interchangeably with self-concept, and although they are interrelated, these differ in their focus. Identity is an individual sense of self within a particular context, while self-concept relates more to the underlying psychological sense of self in a particular domain, which does not exclude the context, but has a different focus. She provides the following example to illustrate her point: learner identities are learners' sense of self as a language learner or user in relation to a particular linguistic community or learning context, whereas learner self-concept relates to their general sense of competence and related evaluative beliefs about themselves as language learners, not just in relation to a specific setting. Hence, self-concept and identity are interwoven in the process of language learning, and both need to be taken into consideration. The following section presents the situated construction of identity in second language learning.

## 2.5 Identity

In SLL, the concept of identity has gained prominence because language learning has been recognised as an inevitable social process.  Various scholars have influenced and shaped research on second language identity,  such as Bakhtin (1981, 1963, 1984), Bourdieu (1977, 1979,1984), Weedon (1997), Norton, (1995, 1997, 2000),  Norton and Toohey (2011), Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998); the sociocultural and the poststructuralist/feminist frameworks having been the most influential ones in terms of SLA.

According to Huang and Benson (2013:17), identity is based on perspectives of human learning in general, such as Taylor's (1989) concept of "the self" and Gao, Li & Li's (2002:95) "who one is". They acknowledge the contribution of theorists such as Lave and Wenger (1991), West (1992) and Cummins (1996) in the field of language education. Furthermore, Firth & Wagner's (1997: 285) call for an 'enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use' has also influenced the relationship between SLA and identity. As a result, there is a growing body of research that explores the multiple and intersecting dimensions of language learners' identity and these are concerned with institutional and community practices that have an impact on learning.

Norton and Toohey (2011:412-2) review reports that this increasing interest in identity in language learning over the last years is also due to Norton's (1995) article 'Social identity, investment and language'. The previous and subsequent articles published by Norton (1997, 2000, and 2001) relied on poststructuralist theories of language and identity. From Norton's perspective identity is "how a person understands his or her relationship with the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2013:45 cited in Darvin and Norton, 2015:36).

Block (2013a:17-19) points out that post structuralism in social science and applied linguistics conceive identity as a social process instead of a fixed product. That is, rejecting the position in which, 'the attributes and behaviour of socially defined groups can be determined and explained by reference to cultural and/or biological characteristics believed to be inherent to the group' (Bucholtz, 2003: 400 cited in Block, 2010:216). Poststructuralists embrace the social constructivist

perspective, which conceives identity 'is about the multiple ways in which people position themselves and are positioned, that is, the different subject positions they inhabit or have ascribed to them, within particular social, historical and cultural contexts' (Block, 2007a, 2007b, 2009; Duff, 2012; Norton, 2010; Norton and Toohey, 2011).

Van Lier (2007:57) stresses the fact that the relationship between identity and self is often confusing in SLA and in fields such as sociology, psychology and philosophy and that these two concepts have even been used as synonyms, such as the term 'self-identity' offered by Giddens (1991). For Van Lier, like Norton, learning an L2 involves a struggle to forge a new identity that is true to the self. He agrees with Kramsch (2006), who suggests that 'the core of identity is voice, which implies agency' (p. 47), since the L2 voice implies that the learner must be allowed to appropriate the new sounds and meanings and make them his or her own (Bakhtin, 1981; Rogoff, 1995). Block (2007:27) relates identity to agency when he says that 'individuals are perceived to be agents in the construction of their own multiple, dynamic identities, and the futures they imagine for themselves are perceived to influence their behaviour'. Thus, both van Lier and Block link identity with agency in the construction of new and dynamic identities.

Block (2009:216-219) points out that in social science there is disagreement regarding whether the term identity is appropriate as a cover-all term, which has not been stated in applied linguistics. Nevertheless, Block highlights that the terms identity and subjectivity have been used interchangeably by authors of both disciplines (2007, 2009, 2010, 2013), including himself, in previous work. Hence, based on relevant literature he makes the distinction between 'identity' and 'subjectivity'. Identity is seen as more permanent and subjectivity as more ephemeral (Hall, 1996, 2004; Weedon, 1997, 2004; Davies and Harré, 1999; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006 cited in Block, 2009:217-219). He argues that this differentiation 'makes possible the conceptual distinction between being a socially recognized birth right, affiliation or achievement and being as ever-emergent in ongoing activity' (p. 219). To put it succinctly, identity is about individuals and their lives and subjectivity helps understand how identity is constructed and recognised.

Similarly, Kramsch (2009) advises, from an analytical perspective, to keep identity and subjectivity separate, arguing that they come from different theoretical backgrounds. That is, subjectivity is understood as 'the construction of the self in process' (Kristeva, 1977), the students are subjects in process, and subjectivity is multilingual with an effect of multiculturality. Identity is fairly stable, can be changed and is not a fixed category, but is influenced by society or groups to which people belong, while subjectivity looks at perspectives and emotions that may change.

Furthermore, Block (2013a:20-23) supports Bendle (2002) and Layder's (1997) <u>(see 2.4.4)</u> call for a more psychological approach to identity. Bendle explains that the relevance and ambiguity of identity as a key construct suggests a crisis because this is related to' personal well-being and collective action, and a theorization of 'identity' …as something constructed, fluid, multiple, impermanent and fragmentary' (Bendle, 2002:1-2). This perception is the result of using a term borrowed from the field of psychology. Social science scholars, therefore, take a superficial approach to identity focusing on flexibility in social interaction and how individuals continuously adapt to the situations, thus disregarding the psychological. Hence, he suggests moving to more in-depth models, taking the prospect of the unconscious more seriously, that is, examining an inner core self which is not stable, but conflicted and is a constraint both on human development and ongoing participation on mundane activities. This perspective would ultimately view identity as fluid and unstable, not only as a response to an ever-changing environment but also as an effect of emotions. Similarly, in SLA Granger (2004) insists on a psychoanalytical approach, having investigated 'the silent period' in SLL (Krashen, 1981). Her findings suggest a parallel between what the infant and the L2 learners experience as uncertainty arises from destabilization and the loss of the 'love object', namely 'the first language self', that is,' the self that could make itself known, to the world and to itself, in its first language' (Granger, 2004:56).

On the other hand, Norton (2013 loc. 637) emphasises that much identity work has drawn on Bordieu's (1991) constructs of capital and habitus (see Albright &Luke 2007; De Costa 2010c; Heller 2008; Lam & Warriner 2012; Lin 2007; Norton 2000) but that there is not much research on social class. Block (2012) supports the view that language researchers should include social class in SLA

studies. He argues that language learning has been greatly influenced by the neoliberal discourses of consumerism, entrepreneurship and economic competitiveness, both inside and outside the classroom (see Block 2012; Heller 2011; Kramsch 2006; Morgan & Clarke 2011 cited in Norton, 2013 loc. 637). Furthermore, Block (2014) argues that social class is extremely relevant to a wide range of socio-psychological processes in which human beings engage.  He maintains that social class can help us understand issues related to access to different groups, and provide some insight into particular attitudes and dispositions of the language learners, to the extent to which social class 'embodied in habitus shapes learners' orientation and engagement with second language learning process' (Block, 2014b:154).

Block (2010) points out that the interest in identity has moved further than just language, to a multimodal approach including semiotic resources, such as body movements, gaze, clothing and space (Bloommaert 2005); that is, identity as discursively constructed and in a broad sense. Therefore, identity involves from body movements, gaze and clothing, to ways of relating to other people and interacting in a community.

Lave and Wenger (1991) on the other hand, conceptualise identity as socially and interactionally-produced through negotiating competence and position, that is, as an ongoing construction 'developed through long term living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice' (p. 53). This view has been recognised and shared by scholars in different fields (Norton, 2013; Morita, 2012; Huang and Benson, 2013).  Wenger (2000:239) argues that 'we define ourselves by what we are and the communities we belong to, as well as by what we are not and the communities we do not belong to'. He also says that to build our identity we have to negotiate our membership in social communities (Wenger 1998:145). Moreover, these relationships are not static; they change, and we can move from community to community belonging to various communities, while at the same time preserving a bit of each one. Hence, an essential feature of identity is multi-membership. On the other hand, Wenger (1998:146) emphasises that the unit of analysis is neither the individual nor the community, so the focus should be on the process of their 'mutual constitution' because our practices, language, and artefacts mirror our world view and social relations.

According to Huang and Benson (2013), there is little research on identity in the foreign language context, based on the assumption that EFL students lack target culture exposures or reflexive power. Nevertheless, Gao, Li & Li (2002:115) argue that in their research in the Chinese context, EFL learning goes beyond the level of instrumental language skills because it contributes to students' self-identity, which may not be less than that of the ESL student. His view is supported by other studies and scholars e.g. Gao, Cheng, Zhao & Zhou (2005), Murray and Kojima (2007), Chik (2007), and Huang (2009, 2010, 2011).

To sum up, scholars acknowledge that the relevance of identity and poststructuralist and sociocultural approaches are the most influential when it comes to exploring links between identity and SLL. Identity research tends to examine the individual in relation to the social world, relegating the affective dimensions in favour of negotiated identities and subjectivities.  Norton (2013) argues that language learners can display enhanced identities to participate more actively, so identities change according to different situations. For example, the old timer and the newcomer change according to the situation in a community of practice, and individuals in an imagined community assume an imagined identity. Thus, investment in language must also be understood within its context. When we communicate, we feel we own English, as do learners when they navigate in their imagined communities.  It is not about adopting another culture, rather improving their own.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher will investigate how identity develops in the communities of practice in which language learners participate. The distinction between identity and subjectivity will be considered, as well as the psychological angle, social class and semiotic resources taken into account, based on the perspective that identity and self-concept are interrelated. It is hoped that this will help better understand how Mexican students construct their L2 identity, that is, what language learners do in everyday life under certain conditions and in particular situations, as well as their desires for the future and sense of themselves. The next section presents the rationale behind the concept of investment.

## 2.5.1 Investment

Several researchers in the field of applied linguistics (see McKay and Wong, 1996; Skilton-Silvester, 2002; Potowsky, 2004; Vasilopolous, 2015) have applied the notion of investment. This concept has been conceptualised as 'a sociological complement to the psychological construct of motivation' (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Murray, Gao, & Lamb, 2011), which demonstrates 'the socially and historically constructed relationship between language learner identity and learning commitment' (Davin and Norton, 2015:37). Norton's (2006:504-1) research findings showed that theories on motivation did not do justice to the identities and experiences of the language learners. In 1995, she introduced the notion of investment to extend the notion of motivation. The constructs of instrumental and integrative motivation conceive 'the individual as having a unitary and coherent identity with ahistorical personality', whereas the construct of investment conceives 'the learner as a social being with a complex identity that changes across time and space and is reproduced in social interaction' (Ibid. 504). Norton was inspired by the work of Bourdieu, which points to 'the socially and historically constructed relation of learners to the target language and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it' (cited in Norton, 2006:5). When learners invest in language learning, they do so with the understanding that it will give them access to material and symbolic resources, cultural capital [(see 2.4.2)](#). In the same vein, Kramsch (2013:195 cited in Darvin and Norton, 2015:37) states that:

> *'Norton's notion of investment … accentuates the role of human agency and identity in engaging with the task at hand, in accumulating economic and symbolic capital, in having stakes in the endeavour and in persevering in that endeavour.'*

Thus, learners' investment in the target language, should also be understood as an investment in their own identity, since learners re-evaluate 'their sense of themselves and their desires for the future' with the increase of their cultural capital (Norton & Toohey, 2011:420).

The notion of investment acknowledges that learners may or may not desire to engage in social interactions and community practices. Darvin and Norton (2015: 37) provides that the construct of investment seeks to disregard the traditional conceptions of learner identity (good/bad, motivated/unmotivated,

anxious/confident, introvert/extrovert), since it takes into consideration conditions of power in the learning contexts; which position learners in multiple and often unequal ways that influence their learning outcomes. Potowsky's (2004 cited in Norton, 2006:6) findings from a dual Spanish/English immersion programme in the United States are that learners 'investment must be consistent with the goals of the programme in order to meet the target language growth. She notes that the notion of investment is not only relevant to the research of SLA but also to research on heritage language maintenance. As identity is about the multiple ways in which people position themselves and are positioned, the extent to which learners invest in a target language is related to negotiations of power in different fields, and 'thus investment is complex, contradictory, and in a state of flux' (Norton, 2013; Norton Peirce, 1995). Thus, students' investment in English can be related to their expectations for the future, with the hope that they can have access to a better job and life, social status, but also to their desire to engage in social interaction and belong to a particular community.

## 2.5.2 Imagined communities

Fukada (2008:331) offers that imagined communities refer to 'groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination (Kanno & Norton, 2003:241).  He states that language learners' imagined communities are often associated with the 'TL-related social/cultural groups which they aspire to belong to in their near future'. Wenger (1998:294) explains that Anderson (1983) coined the term imagined communities, as he observes that nations are in fact 'imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (p. 15). Hence, we feel connected to people we have never met, and we can feel a sense of community.

Norton (2011:422) points out that imagined communities are associated with the future when learners imagine who they might be and the communities to which they might belong, and these can be transnational affiliations extended beyond local relationships. Moreover, Kanno and Norton (2003) suggest that "imagined communities are no less real than the ones in which learners have daily engagement and might even have a stronger impact on their current actions and

investment" (p. 242). Learners imagine themselves belonging in different communities, which have expanded due to digital technology, such as postgraduate studies, professional opportunities, studying abroad, or participating in video games and social networks.

In short, learners invest in learning the TL in order to attain their goal. The concept of investment is their understanding of possibilities for their future, and imagined communities are those communities to which they desire to belong. Thus, both are tightly interwoven with the development of learners' second language identity. The following section reviews research related to social structure and agency in EFL.

## 2.6 Social Structure and Agency in the EFL Context

There is hardly any research on structure and agency in the foreign language context, given the fact that the relationship between structure and agency has been mostly regarded as belonging to the field of the social sciences. Although researchers have followed a social view of identity from a poststructuralist perspective, they have focused either on the learners' interactions in social activity or in their narratives. Thus, research has adopted a social constructivist perspective and has tended to be over agentive.

Gao's study, reported in his 2010 book, is one of the very few examples of empirical studies on structure and agency in SLL and has influenced the current research. His study has aroused the researcher's interest in finding out more about the language learning process and the dialectic interaction between learners' agency and the social context. These issues of the language learner's identity formation are at the heart of the current study. A summary of the key points in Gao's study follows, along with references to other studies conducted on agency and structure in the SLL (e.g., Flowerdew and Miller, 2008: Torres-Olave, 2011; Bashir-Ali, 2006).

### 2.6.1 Gao (2010)

Special attention is paid to Gao (2010) because his is the most comprehensive study conducted in terms of structure and agency. Gao (2010) draws on a sociocultural language learning perspective to explore Chinese students'

language learning experiences, focusing on their strategy use. Gao (2010:26) adopts Sealey and Carter's (2004) realist position and adapts Layder's (1993) analytical framework. He chose this framework because he is in favour of a careful description of different layers of social realities, thus he maps it around four components: context, setting, situated activity and self. That is, the contextual conditions, institutional setting and the individual's biographical experiences to interpret learners' language learning and strategy use. He follows an ethnographic research approach, yet he combines it with the quantitative approach. The findings show that in the participants' strategic learning process there is a dynamic interaction between learners' agency and the contextual conditions, for example, the way the threat of an exam can mediate the students' language learning and use of strategies.

He conceives agency as related to a human being's self-consciousness, reflexivity, intentionality, cognition, emotionality and so on (Carter & New, 2004; Giddens, 1984; Layder, 1990; Sealey and Carter, 200 cited in Gao 2010:25). Furthermore, he agrees with Giddens' (1982, 1984) view that agency is also logically connected to power, given the relevance of choice, because the agent has the power either to act or not. Along similar lines, Gao argues that that 'learners strategy use is related to their exercise of power, the will and capacity to act otherwise, and their strategy use reveals their agency in the learning process' (p. 154).

Gao points out that agency also involves learners' micro-political competence in controlling contextual conditions and social processes within particular contexts to create a facilitative learning environment, negotiate access to language competence and pursue self-assertion in the CoP where language learning takes place. Furthermore, he argues that the power of social agents includes their will, their intent of motives and their beliefs in learning, which can be captured in their language learning narratives, making use of their capacity for reflexivity, since language learners' agency is often goal oriented. This implies a purpose and requires an effort. Therefore, he concludes that agency is one of the most fundamental characteristics of general human behaviour and defines it as the individual's will and capacity to act.

### 2.6.2 Flowerdew and Miller (2008)

The authors examine the issue of social structure and individual agency in language learning through the life histories of three young engineering graduates in Hong Kong. The life stories are interpreted drawing upon: (1) Bourdieu's (1973) linguistic capital, an aspect of cultural capital (membership of a particular social class or group); (2) activity theory (Lantolf & Pavlenko 1995) to understand the different forms of human practice at individual and social levels, and how these interact; (3) investment (Norton Pierce, 1995) to take into account the complex relationship between power, identity, and language learning; and (4) creative discursive agency (Collins 1993) that allows for individual agency as a counterbalance to the weight of social structure.

The authors argue that these three life histories can tell us about the interaction between social structure and individual agency in language learning. The three participants' attention was mainly focused on the acquisition of English language skills, which at first, seemed to be for instrumental purposes, that is, having access to higher education and the prospect of a good job. Later on however, data showed that their language learning has to also be seen within a wider sociocultural context of the use of English within Hong Kong society. This involved the cost-benefit of their investment in their language learning so they could create discursive opportunities out of their classroom.

### 2.6.3 Torres-Olave (2011)

Torres-Olave (2011:30-50) investigates the role imagination plays in shaping how students and professors imagine the space of higher education and thus shape their relationship to the larger academic community. The researcher examines data from a larger study in which she explored the imagined communities of students at *Lengua Inglesa*, a medium-sized public university in the north of Mexico. *Lengua Inglesa* programs are aimed at preparing bilingual professionals to work as teachers of English as a foreign language and/or translators. The findings reveal that personal and community histories, family networks, media and migration converge to shape what was imagined and imaginable by professors and students, as well as how they interpreted their relationship to the program of the university. Hence, the author advises acknowledging the

"powerful and resilient structures and commitments" (Marginson and Rhoades 2002:293) upon which the activities of contemporary agents are layered.

### 2.6.4 Bashir-Ali (2006)

Bashir's study investigated a female ESL student from Mexico who went to extreme measures in an attempt to assimilate into the dominant social culture of her school. Although visibly Mexican, Maria (a pseudonym) told everyone she was Black, chose to speak AAVE, and denied all knowledge of her native Spanish language.  As a result, Block applies the four parameters (see 2.4) as an attempt to reverse the tendency to prime agency over structure. He insists that 'one can never consider agency in isolation from social structure', however he  points out that this study focuses on Maria's present and lacks close attention to her past in Mexico, embodied in the present in the family, in which structure plays a role in her apparent acts of agency. Therefore, he recognises the case study is an effective methodology, yet suggests the 'analysis needs to be carried out within an approach to identity, subjectivities and agency which does not move structure to a secondary plane' (p. 59).  The next section introduces the concept of autonomy, which authors have associated with agency, and different views that have defined it.

## 2.7 Autonomy in Second Language Acquisition

Learner autonomy has lately been associated with interdependence and conceptualised as a social construct (Murray, 2011:4), and social autonomy naturally resides in the social world of the students, brought with them from their lives outside the classroom (Holliday 2003:117 cited in Benson 2011:70. The ways SLA theory separates cognition from social context and the focus on the individual learner have been challenged due to 'the social turn' (Block, 2003; Firth & Wagner, 1997). This has led to the incorporation of approaches such as Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and situated learning, and the adoption of the concept of 'context' and 'community' to refer to learning and teaching environments in the educational field. Murray (2014:4) points out that despite recognising autonomy as a social construct, most literature tends to characterise it as 'a capacity or set of capacities pertaining to the individual'.

Similarly, Scharle and Szabó (2000:71) affirm that learners need to take an active role to become autonomous. They allude to the saying "you can bring the horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink" (p.4), to stress the importance for learners to take an active role to succeed in learning the target language. Little (2007:18) holds that the development of learner autonomy is necessary so language acquisition can take place and that autonomy in language learning and autonomy in language use are two sides of the same coin (p.26). Therefore, basic claims for autonomy, according to the consensus of authors, seems to be that: (a) language learners naturally tend to take control of their learning; (b) learners who lack autonomy are capable of developing it; and (c) autonomous language learning is more effective than non-autonomous language learning (Benson 2011b:16).

However, learner autonomy includes not only independence but also interdependence (Benson, 2007; Benson, 2011; Murray, 2014; Little, 1996):

> *'Viewed as an educational goal, learner autonomy implies a particular kind of socialization involving the development of attributes and values that will permit individuals to play active, participatory roles in a democratic society.'*

> (Benson 2007: cited in Illés 2012:506)

In other words, individual decisions are made according to social and moral norms, as well as traditions and expectations, and being responsible for one's behaviour also means cooperating with others in many ways (Kohonen, 1992:19 cited in Benson, 2011:15). Central to the development of learner autonomy is the capacity for reflection and analysis developed in social interaction (Little 1996:211).

On the other hand, authors concede that there is a complex relationship between autonomy, agency and identity (Van Lier, 2007; Benson, 2007; Huang, 2009; Huang, 2011; Huang and Benson, 2013). Huang (2011) cites Benson (2007), who argues that 'agency can perhaps be viewed as a point of origin for the development of autonomy, while identity might be viewed as one of its more important outcomes' (p. 30). Hence, these constructs are linked to autonomy to understand better how they interact and how autonomy is conceptualised in different contexts.

As a result, authors who acknowledge autonomy as a social construct suggest exploring the process of fostering autonomy, not only inside, but also outside the classroom, through more collaborative approaches, the aim of this being to 'better understand the ways in which learner autonomy 'might be socially mediated' by 'other dimensions intertwined with the social' such as 'the emotional, the spatial and the political' (Murray, 2014:5). Thus, the researcher in this study follows the view that language learners socially construct autonomy and attempts to look beyond, 'the individual versus the social' (Ibid. 248). The next section presents language learning in the self-access centre, a learning environment that encourages independent learning.

### 2.7.1    Self-Access Language Learning (SALL)

Self-Access Language Learning (SALL) refers to learning that takes place in a self-access environment and is 'often treated as synonym of self-directed learning or autonomous learning' (Benson 2011:10-1).  When the first self-access centres were opened in CRAPEL (University of Nancy in France) and the Language Centre (University of Cambridge), the aim was to offer second language learners access to a wide variety of materials for experimenting with self-directed learning. Gremmo and Riley (1995:156) argue that self-access centres were created as a result of dissatisfaction with the service and effectiveness provided by the language laboratories.  Additionally, Cotterall and Reinders (2001) describe how interest in SALL was manifested in the 1990s with the proliferation of self-access as a component in language teaching. As a result, a great number of conference papers, journal articles and books were published on this subject at the time (e.g. Gardner and Miller, 1999; Gremmo and Riley, 1995; Cotterall, 1995; Gardner and Miller 1999).  However, the basic principles encouraged in SALL led to the misunderstanding that 'autonomy means learning in isolation' (Little, 1991:6) and individualism, since the belief is that learners should take on the responsibility for goal-setting, material selection, activity and strategy implementation, as well as progress monitoring and outcome assessment on their own.

Nevertheless, Gardner and Miller (1997: xvii) insist in their book that SALL offers a varying degree of guidance, but its prominent role is to help students move towards autonomy. Gardner and Miller (1999:1) argue that SALL is an approach to language learning and define it in terms of the development of autonomy that it

should promote, including a long list of published work on self- access and autonomy to support their claim. They point out that sometimes self-access is understood as a collection of resources, but that it is more a combination of elements to provide a learning environment, in which each learner interacts in a unique way. In the same vein, Cotterall and Reinders (2001:24-1) state that the materials and activities are designed to cater for different levels, styles, goals and interests, with the aim of developing learners' autonomy. They agree with Crabbe (1993:444), who argues that there must be a bridge between the 'public domain' (shared classroom activities) and "private domain" learning (individual learning behaviour); hence, Cotterall and Reinders suggest that SALL can function as such bridge because it belongs to both the public and private domain. Similarly, Gardner and Miller (1999:22) state that in native speaker countries the SAC can act as the bridge 'to the outside, unstructured environment'.

Unfortunately, SALL does not seem to be as successful as expected. According to Everhart (2012:279-6), self-access centres have stressed the access to materials and resources instead of to the 'self (emphasis in original). She suggests that many centres are more concerned with managing SALL resources, including her own (Gardner, 2011; Murray, 2011; Reinders and Lewis, 2005), thus contradicting the term 'self-access learning'. She suggests this might be because of the emphasis on self-instruction and students using resources on their own, as well as access being understood as material and resources arranged like a 'walled garden' (Reinders, 2012). Nevertheless, she mentions that some authors, such as Kelly (1996), Hounsell (1979), and Breen and Mann (1997), contend that learners cannot become self-directed just by being in a self-access mode, but through a process of reorientation and personal discovery to transform their beliefs and perceptions (as learners), and their position to engage in the world.

Therefore, Everhart endorses Murray (2011), who calls for an emphasis on the 'self' and the accessing of that 'self' and all of that self' learning potential so self-access learning can benefit '[a]ll learners' (Gardner and Miller, 1994:64). This demands much more than only 'technology and the right configurations of resources' (Kelly 1996:93). As a result, she proposes four strategic elements that contribute to autonomous behaviour: identity, reflection, ownership and self-determination (Everhard Theophilidou, 2012). However, she points out that to be able to succeed in language learning through SALL, 'there is not just one self

involved', but a wide range of aspects of the self, 'which must become part of the learner's repertoire and identity' (p. 385).

To sum up, given the era of globalisation, SALL has shifted dramatically. Murray (2014:15) points out that the key word is *self* (emphasis in original) instead of access, thus learners should be enabled to relate language learning to who they are as people, by being in an environment with learning opportunities for their development of a second language (L2) self. The SAC from this study shares this perspective, as it is a 'social learning space that encourages active, social and experiential learning', in which learners have the freedom to decide what to do to meet their needs and fulfil their goals in a friendly atmosphere and through peer support (Oblinger, 2006 cited in Murray et al., 2014:82). This allows learners to develop their English skills at their own pace, prioritising the self, what they think or feel they are capable to do.

## 2.8    Summary

This chapter has presented an overview of the history and trends of agency in other disciplines and SLL that demonstrate its complex nature and 'the profound differences in definitions and ways of operationalizing the concept' (De Fina, 2014, Afterword in Vitanova et al., 2014).  Research in agency has gained prominence in the recent decades following the postmodern and sociocultural views of language and identity, which claim that language learning is a mediated activity that is closely and naturally interwoven with identity. Both perspectives recognise learner agency as a relevant construct in the language learning process and for language learners' identities. As a result, this study follows the view of language learning as a social practice. It also supports the call for interdisciplinarity to gain a better understanding of agency in SLL research (Block, 2003; Block, 2007; Block, 2012; Block, 2013, Block, 2014; Vitanova, 2010; Norton, 2013; Vitanova et al. 2014).

Concerning social structure, this is mainly related to social science disciplines and is defined according to the kind of social structure scholars have in mind when working on their theories, although it often relates to the organisation of social life. Social structure has hardly ever been researched in SLL because of the focus on individual agency, and thus structure has only been considered as another factor or variable in the language learning process. Nevertheless, the fact is that

language learners are embedded in an existing social structure, so it seems relevant to understand the role social structure plays in SLL as well as how it is that language learners' agency is either shaped or constrained by contextual conditions.

The various positions regarding the agency and structure dilemma were presented in the chapter, along with arguments to suggest critical realism as the best approach to research agency and structure in SLL. This study adopts the critical realist approach in line with Block's (2015) ideas of looking at the world as it really is, by not overlooking material aspects and considering the structures language learners are embedded in. Bhaskar (1998:38) defines society and its status as follows: 'society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices, and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so...... an ontological hiatus between society and people, as well as a model of connection (viz transformation)' [(see 2.3.2)](). This ontological hiatus implies that between structures and individuals there is a space or moment, during transformation or reproduction, which might be of reflexivity to capture the agential action in a mode of connection. Hence, critical realism seems to be a suitable approach to understand language learners within their social relations and practices.

Following the call for interdisciplinarity, this study brings together concepts related to social theory and SLL – the concept of the self, habitus and field, CoP, psychobiography, second language learning and identity-. This is with the aim of looking at language learners' identity social process through the interrelationship between individual agency and structure, which includes the psychological angle. Moreover, the participants in the study are SAC users, so it is relevant to consider 'the ways that autonomy is socially mediated' (Murray, 2014:5). Benson (2007:30) suggests 'agency can perhaps be viewed as a point of origin for the development of autonomy while identity might be viewed as one of its more important outcomes.'

Therefore, critical realism seems to offer an appropriate abstract framework, which can be used together with Block's five structure-model to examine language learners within their context. This framework will provide a means to understand how language and identity interrelate with agency as well as how the

structures interrelate with each other to explore the extent to which language learners are constrained or shaped by contextual conditions. This implies the activities they engage in within different settings on a day-to-day basis, opportunities and constrains for interaction outside the classroom, and the way interaction is socially structured to gain a fuller understanding of how learners act upon structures to create or resist opportunities to use the target language.

# Chapter 3:    Research Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the research methodology and data collection used in this study. It starts with the rationale and justification for choosing the research approach. Section 3.3 presents the research design, and section 3.4 the research instruments. Section 3.5 explains the analysis procedures. Finally, section 3.7 provides the ethics and risks of the study and 3.8 a summary of the chapter.

The chapter will begin with an overview and justification for the research approach selected due to the nature of the concepts under investigation. It follows the typical stages of qualitative research while demonstrating the application of methods informed by CR at each stage.

## 3.2 Researching social structure and agency

It is acknowledged that human behaviour is causally influenced by external factors, however it is also contested that 'human action may be affected by social causes without being fully determined by them' (Elder- Vass 2010:87) (see 2.3.1). Language learning is understood as both an individual process and a social process due to social interaction and conditioning by social, cultural and historical contexts (Benson and Cooker, 2013; Sealey and Carter, 2004; Carter and Sealey, 2000). Thus, it seems relevant to explore language learners' trajectories to understand what causes them to act in a particular way, as well as how they develop positive or negative beliefs and attitudes towards language learning from experiences and relations because of interacting in a given context.

This study attempts to examine the learner as a whole in the real domain, considering the realm of objects, structures and powers or mechanisms that shape or constrain it. Critical realism (see 2.3.2) seems to afford an abstract framework, together with Block's five-structure model, to understand why some students exhibit agency regarding language learning while others do not. As a means to finding out what causes learners to generate actions to either self-direct or resist their language learning, this model takes into account the different elements that constitute the students' context, to research how language learners are embedded within different domains.
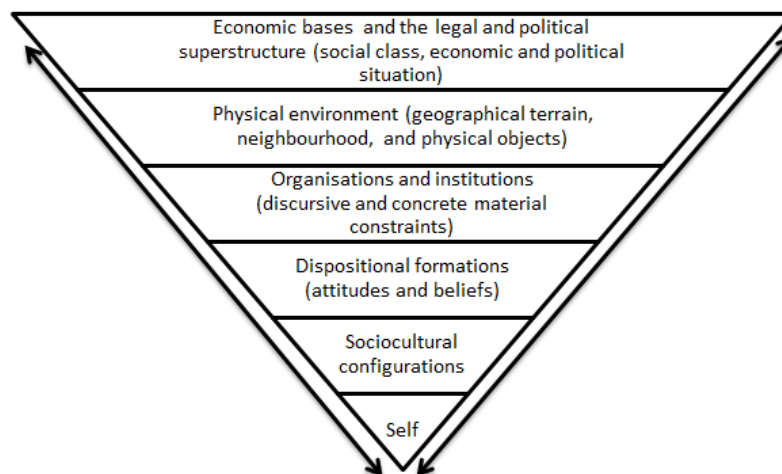
Figure 1: Block's (2014) five-model structure.

This model may help to gain a fuller understanding of the generative mechanisms (tendencies with sets of potentials) from the point of view that learners are 'neither passive products of social structures nor entirely creators, but are placed in an iterative and naturally reflexive feedback relationship to them' (Davies, 2008:226 cited in Rees and Gatenby, 2014:137). By looking at the same data through different theoretical lenses, this investigation seeks to help to explain the reasons why learners either choose to self-direct their learning or choose not to.

Previous studies have stressed the need to integrate the language learner and the learning context to relations of power and their impact on the language learning processes and learner identity (Mackay & Wong, 1996: Norton & Toohey, 2001; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). The connections between language learning, agency and identity have been studied following the sociocultural perspective and postmodern methods, as explained in chapter 2 (see 2.2.1, and 2.5). While this work has proved useful in characterising language learners' struggles within the learning context, it does not clarify the interrelationship between individual agency and social structures in language learning and identity research (Block, 2013a:15). Context has been defined in several ways, but the underlying social alignments and arrangements seem to have been overlooked in SLL. Therefore, predetermined notions of social structure and agency in social science may provide useful models for researching the language learners' agency and the

83

underlying structures on the same plane, as well as incorporating a psychological angle to understand identity construction through the lens of critical realism.

To sum up, language learners' agency and the interrelationship with social and cultural orders is examined through qualitative, partly ethnographic enquiry and the application of methods informed by critical realism. As CR undertakes necessary and contingent relations among objects and different theories through causal explanations, this approach may help explain language learners' actions and the reasons from their accounts as to why actions have taken place within their social and cultural context.

## 3.3    Research paradigm

This study aligns with critical realism (CR) as a philosophical assumption (see 2.3.2) and as an interpretative framework, but it also follows the typical stages of qualitative research, judged by myself to be the most appropriate for it. CR uses components of the positivist constructivist approaches to provide a detailed account of ontology and epistemology. According to Fletcher (2016:1-2), one of the most important tenets of CR is that ontology (i.e. what is real, the nature of reality) is not reducible to epistemology (i.e. our knowledge of reality).  Human knowledge captures only a small part of a deeper and vaster reality, thus it is in this respect that CR diverges from both positivism and constructivism. Bhaskar (1998) critiqued positivism for promoting 'the epistemic fallacy' (p. 27) – that is, the problematic reduction of ontology to epistemology, or the limitation of 'reality' to what can be empirically known (e.g. through scientific experiments). The same critique applies to constructivist perspectives that view reality as entirely constructed through and within human knowledge or discourse. The two perspectives,  constructivist and positivist, seem to contradict each other, as both of them reduce reality to human knowledge, although such knowledge also acts as a lens or container for reality.

For CR there is a real social world we can attempt to understand or access through philosophy and social science (Danermar et al., 2005), but some knowledge can be closer to reality than other knowledge. Critical realists understand knowledge 'in terms of theories, which can be more or less truth like' (Danermark et al., 2005:10).  These theories help us get closer to reality, for

example, to identify the causal mechanisms that produce social events, activities, or phenomena, by using rational judgment of these social events (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, 1998, p. xi). This view includes the ability to develop explanation and causal analysis instead of providing thick empirical description of a given context. Therefore, CR was useful for analysing the reasons why some learners seem not to be learning the foreign language after several years of studying it, and if possible, provide some suggestions that may help these kinds of learners.

Fletcher (2016:3) accounts for how CR seeks to explain social events with reference to the causal mechanisms and their effects throughout the three-layered 'iceberg' of reality. The iceberg metaphor (Figure 2) does not imply that any level is more or less real or that the levels do not interact; all levels of the iceberg are part of the same entity or the same reality. The metaphor illustrates the CR ontology and epistemology associated to human knowledge of reality, showing in graphic form the limitations of the epistemic fallacy. As Bhaskar (1979) argues, compared to the natural world, social structures are activity dependent. To put it more simply, causal mechanisms 'exist only in virtue of the activities they govern and cannot be empirically identified independently of them' (p. 48). This implies that causal mechanisms are social products that can only be understood and exist through and within phenomena at the empirical level (e.g. human actions and ideas that are generated by these mechanisms), which makes a given phenomenon relevant for investigations. All social structures possess causal powers and liabilities. These are 'potentialities' inherent in an object or structure that enable or constrain it from acting in certain ways (Psillos, 2007). Conditions in the open social world can prevent or facilitate the actualization of a structure's causal power, meaning it may or may not have an observable impact at the empirical level. Consequently, the process of retroduction investigates particular social conditions under which a causal mechanism takes effect in the world (Ibid. 3).
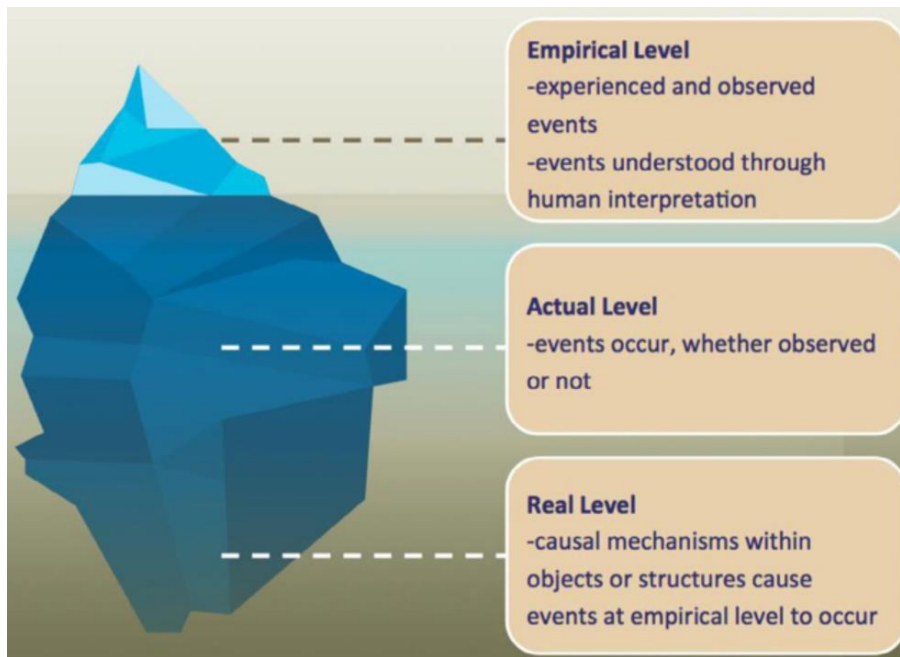
Figure 2: The iceberg metaphor for CR ontology (Fletcher, 2016).

CR is a general methodological framework for research, but is not associated with any particular set of methods. Ackroyd and Karlsson (2014) pointed out the 'serious lack of appealing and accessible material on CR methodology to set those new to these ideas off on a path to accomplish interesting and insightful research' (p. 45).

Given the above reasons, I also drew on a qualitative, partly etnographic research approach that seems compatible with CR in an attempt to derive a deep understanding and get closer to the reality of the complex issue; the reasons why students choose to shape or resist learning English. Merrian and Tisdell (2016:14) offer that the term qualitative defies a simple definition, they cite Preissle (2006), who acknowledges that qualitative is 'the label that has worked' because 'it is vague, broad and inclusive enough to cover the variety of research practices. While other journals and handbooks have titles such as ethnography or interviewing that represent particular facets of qualitative practice' (p. 690). Merrian and Tisdell point out that qualitative researchers are essentially interested in understanding 'the meaning people have constructed' (emphasis in original); that is how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.

As Creswell (2013:48) suggests, I sought to empower the learners to share their stories and experiences to learn more from their context (family, home, work, etc.), which provided me with some data and insights to start exploring the beliefs and behaviours that governed their responses. However, people's experiences are 'the empirical manifestation of a significant number of cooperative and counteractive mechanisms',.. 'which in a particular context together constitute one or more unobservable structures or causal mechanisms' (Danermark et al., 2005:111). This fact implies that the learners' accounts were not enough to fulfil the aim of going beyond the reality that exists independently of our knowledge of it. In the words of Sealey and Carter (2004:20), 'reality has powers and mechanism which we cannot observe but which we can experience indirectly by their ability to cause- to make things happen in the world'. Hence, the partly ethnographic approach contributed to having a deeper understanding of the learners' experiences and events. It was through the combination of long-term observation and diverse data collection that I could have better 'understanding of the participants' perspectives, and meaning-making practices within the complex sociocultural worlds' they live in that other methodologies may not capture (Starfield, 2010:53).

I considered that these two paradigms, critical realism and qualitative, partly ethnographic research, are suitable for characterisations of social structures and agency to investigate L2 learning and use. Applied to social structure and agency, the ethnographic approach, observing the learners in their environment, could provide additional data to identify specific events that might have contributed to their predispositions to English. Furthermore, in examining the learners from a more longitudinal perspective, it may be possible to observe how they develop and take decisions, in order to identify the structures, powers and liabilities shaping an entity predisposition while they operate and interact. The ethnographic techniques suitable for this purpose were interviews, observations and relevant documents. That is, interviews with participants to gain an insight into their SLL and life experiences (affordances and constraints); observations in their homes or workplace, documents related to their academic history, language learning biography, and local media representation of the context; as well as audio material, photos, Facebook, WhatsApp messages, and e-mails.

A few studies have examined learners' agency and the social structure employing interviews (Cooke, 2006; Lamb, 2012; Wassell, Fernandez and LaVan 2010; Gao, 2013), life stories (Flowerdew and Miller, 2008), and source texts (Gao, 2010). The previous investigations were analysed applying qualitative methods, the first ones in case studies and the last two through narrative. On the other hand, critical realism has been employed as research method and framework mainly in social science (Reynolds, Wetherell, and Taylor, 2007; Fletcher, 2016; Decoteau, 2016), management (Downward and Mearman, 2003; Easton, 2010; Tuominen, and Lehtonen, 2017) and in information science (Wikgren, 2005). In higher education, there are a few studies that evaluate educational programmes (Wong, Greenhalgh and Pawson, 2010; De Souza, 2013; De Souza, 2016) and higher institutions organisation (Hökkä and Vähäsantanen, 2014; Gonzalez, 2013). There are a few studies in education, for example, Kahn, Qualter & Young (2012), which examine the dynamic interplay between social structure and agency in academic practise. Li (2016) explores the relationship between learner, learning contexts, and technology, drawing on Archer's morphogenetic approach and narrative analysis, and Case (2015) studies the learning trajectories of two students applying the morphogenetic approach and ethnographic approach and narrative. Regarding SLL, no studies have been conducted on critical realism, either as philosophy or as a research method.

Therefore, this study does not ascribe to any of the variations provided as the basis for a qualitative research, but has  followed its particular data collection methods and the analytic alternatives to code the data. It is therefore a flexible deductive and inductive process of coding and data analysis that is also consistent with CR ontology and epistemology. CR informed the application of methods at each stage,  thus during the data analysis the process of abduction (theoretical re-description) and retroduction were also employed to investigate the causal mechanisms and structures responsible for students' choices in language learning.

### 3.3.1 Applying Critical Realism

According to Bhaskar (2014:7), CR is primarily interested in *explanation* (emphasis in original), and only secondarily in prediction (Bhaskar, 2008 Appendix ch. 2). The focus is on *structures and mechanisms,* not regularities or

patterns of events; that is, on the domain of the *real*, rather than the actual or empirical (Bhaskar, 2008: ch 1.6). There is a mismatch between the domain of the real and the actual caused by the fact that almost all we study occurs in open systems, so we find causality withouth correlation, and correlation without causality. Moreover, CR is interested in *theoretical* transfactual scientific generality -a depth from the face of the world- not empirical or actual. CR involves specific *research designs*, with distinct logics of scientific discovery, and although deduction and induction continue to have a place, abduction and retroduction become essential. Abduction is the redescription or recontextualization in terms of a characteristic causal mechanism or process which serves to explain it, while retroduction is to identify the necessary contextual conditions for a particular causal mechanism to take effect and to result in the empirical trends observed. Retroduction moves from 'the manifest phenomena of social life, as conceptualized in the experience of the social agents concerned, to the essential relations that necessitate them' (Bhaskar, 1979:32).

Rees and Gatenby (2014:138) account for the implications of CR as a method. They offet that CR assumes necessary and contingent relations among objects and its methodological aims are mainly descriptive and explanatory (Morais 2011), through causal explanations amongst events (finding or imagining generative mechanisms). This involves the gradual transition 'from actions through reasons to rules and hence to structures' (Sayer 1992:112). From this perspective, actions constitute the phenomena under study, presuming conditions in which reasons are formulated. Reasons are inferred from actors' accounts and made clear for the rules they state, through the identification of structures or objects responsible for such rules. Morais (2011) points out that 'a critical realist explanation will thus be complete with the identification of the set of circumstances in which the causal powers of objects and structures are exercised' (p.138). However, this is not an easy process, as underlying structures and mechanism might not be easily achievable to sense experience. The main point therefore, is to uncover why it is that persistent relations or features prevail and have certain effects or observable outcomes in some settings and what the factors are. Reed (2005) points out that methodologically this requires identification and exploration in detail of each historical case, revealing the complex interaction between relevant agents, structural conditions, and

situational contingencies. Therefore, direct, detailed and sutained contact with individuals over time is needed, aiding the critical realists' retroductive process. This is a process of conceptual abstraction to theoretically construct and model structures and mechanisms that could not otherwise be accessed by sense experience.

Reese and Gatenby emphasise that critical realist researchers should be consistent with their data collection and their philosophical beliefs about the world, their 'domain-specific ontology' e.g. 'scientific ontology' (Bhaskar 1989). In order to achieve this, Elder-Vass (2010:69) proposes a method to accomplish it, in which the researcher *must map the concepts of the discipline onto this structural vocabulary* (emphasis in original) (see 3.6, 4.3 and 5.2).

### 3.3.2 Ethnography

Ethnography has been used as a synonym with other labels such as case study, life history, participant observation, interpretative method and even qualitative inquiry (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Pole and Morrison, 2003). This fact relates to the fact that ethnography has developed through time, and its interpretation relates to the discipline and researchers' own views of what ethnographic work should involve. Hammersley and Atkinson (Ibid., 230) point out however, that ethnography is not just a set of methods but 'rather a particular mode of looking, listening, and thinking about social phenomena', while Pole and Morrison (Ibid. 4) stress the need for thorough research in which the complexities of the location, event or setting are more important than making generalizations.

Heigham and Saku (2009:93) provide that, in the field of applied linguistics, Watson-Gegeo (1988:576) defines ethnography as 'the study of people's behaviour in naturally occurring ongoing settings with a focus on the cultural interpretation of behaviour.' Ethnography can thus offer a description interpreting what people do in a setting, namely classroom, neighbourhood or community, and how they understand what they do. Moreover, Starfield (2010:53) states that the popularity of ethnographic approaches is due to the 'social turn' in language learning research with the aim to develop 'in-depth understandings of language learning and teaching events in specific (and frequently unequal) social contexts. This is because the combination of long-term observation and diverse data

collection allows 'understandings of participants' perspectives and meaning-making practices within the complex sociocultural worlds' they live in that other methodologies may not capture.

Thus, the ethnographic approach seems suitable to learn about the interrelationship between Mexican students' agency and their contextual conditions in Cancun.  Given that, learners' actions will be studied in their context, the researcher is a participant observer, and the analysis of data entails interpretation of the meanings and consequences of students' actions and institutional practices (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:1). Having outlined the research approaches adopted, and the rationale for doing so, the study and the particular techniques employed in the study will be presented.

## 3.4  Research Design

This study is grounded on critical realism in order to explore and find answers to the research questions. Qualitative methods for data gathering were employed. These methods are particularly related to the ethnographic approach, but also to the critical realist approach, in order to understand the language learner-society connection. The study was carried out during two phases. The pre-study lasted two months, from October 2014 to December 2014, and the main study took place from January 2015 to September 2016.

Table 2: Outline of the study

| Research | Research Methods | Participants | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Pre-study**<br>Oct. 2014-<br>Dec. 201 | -Focus group<br>-Language learner biography<br>-Interview | 6 radio station students<br>28 students from researcher's business ESP class<br>6 ESP sustainable tourism students | Data from 22 students were selected for analysis |
| **Main study**<br>Jan. 2015-<br>Sept. 2016 | Language learner biography<br>Interviews (3)<br>Observations | 11 students were selected as core participants<br>3 students remained from pre-study and 8 | Data from the eleven participants were collected and analysed |

| | Documents | more were spotted in the SAC | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Online communication | | |

### 3.4.1 Pre-study

The phase was conducted in October 2014, the aim being to refine the instruments and data collection procedures. Data from 34 students were collected for one and a half months. The first data collection was a focus group interview with six students from different academic programmes who collaborated in the radio station of the university.

The second data collection took place with two ESP groups, one from Topics for International Business and the other from Sustainable Tourism. The business group was the researcher's class and the sustainable tourism students were referred by a peer teacher. As a result, 28 students wrote their language learning biography (see 3.4.1) and were invited for an interview. However, because of time constraints, as the semester was over, I decided to have another focus group with the business students so I could finish interviewing all of them.

The interviews conducted were semi-structured. They were conducted in either English or Spanish depending on the preference of the participants.  The interviews lasted an average of 15 minutes, and they were audio recorded and transcribed using text processing software, Microsoft Word.  Data from 22 students were selected based on the richness of their stories.

The objective of this preparatory study was to obtain some preliminary data to try to identify how agency emerges in localized, diverse and variable social activity. Data collected from this phase of the study were organised in a table according to three of the realms proposed by Block's (2014) model of structures (2.4.1): sociocultural configurations, dispositional formations and concrete institutions. Then, the most representative data (appendix 8) was selected in order to analyse it and make principled decisions on how to select core participants for the main study. Dörnyei (2007:126) states that the 'purposive sampling' (Silverman 2005), transferred from  Glaser and Strauss' (1967) 'theoretical sampling' in

grounded work, should be a flexible, ongoing, evolving process of selecting successive respondents or sites, directed by our earlier discoveries, so emerging ideas can be tested and refined. Eleven students were selected because I perceived that they either seemed to exert their agency in language learning or were reluctant to English, thus their accounts could enrich the sample for the study. Nevertheless, only three of them remained in the main study.

### 3.4.2 Main study

The main study took place from January 2015 to September 2016. The first three months involved locating the individuals for the study. The site was the SAC and my business ESP course, where I had access and permission to carry it out. The candidates were selected and invited. Once the students had agreed to participate, I started either with the interview or with the language learning biography, depending on the particular situation. Then, I proceeded with the data collection, which lasted one year and eleven months. Data was collected from the four groups suggested by Creswell (2013:159): interviews (semi-structured and open-ended interviews), observations (ranging from participant to non-participant), documents (ranging from private to public), and audio-visual material (photographs, video, Facebook and WhatsApp messages). During the data collection process, these were stored with backup copies of computer files and NVivo software, in preparation for analysis.

### 3.4.3  The research questions

The overarching aim of this study was to understand better why students embrace or resist EFL, by establishing the relationship between the students and their contextual conditions in their language learning trajectories.

1.  Why do language learners choose to shape or resist their access to EFL?

1a. What is the nature of learners' dispositional formations towards English?

1b. To what extent are learners' actions dependent on existing social and cultural orders?

1c. In what ways do contextual conditions co-determine the EFL students' desire to invest in language learning?

The research questions attempted to direct this research in order to examine the extent to which social context impacts on the decisions learners make regarding their language learning. The particular aims are to understand the interplay of a variety of causal powers that affect learners' positive or negative behaviour in language learning (see 1.2). The answers to these questions should result in clarifying the interrelationship between students' agency and the contextual conditions in SLL research.

### 3.4.4   The research context

This section provides information about the university (UC) and the English programme, which is mandatory in all the academic programmes, to understand better the context of the study. This information is based on my knowledge as a full-time teacher and SAC counsellor at the institution for several years.

### UC

The UC is a government university founded in 2000, still under development, located on the outskirts of the city of Cancun. Despite being a young university, UC has gained national prestige and students from other states enrol to study there. In general, the university aims to develop human resources in the fields of the hotel industry, technology and business at a graduate level. In terms of English, the language is taught to all students from the beginning of their undergraduate studies, as it is considered essential for the labour market.

The English department is composed of ten full-time teachers (including the head of department) and is found within the SAC premises (see 1.3.2). Once the students are accepted at the university, they must take an English placement test. It consists of a computer-based test and an oral interview, and they are placed in their corresponding level based on the results. The students usually start in one of the GE courses, although there have been some exceptions of students who have started in the first ESP course. The rare exceptions are students who come from bilingual schools or have lived in the United States.

The English programme consists of four levels of General English (GE) – Level 1 (A1), Level 2 (A2), Level 3 (B1) and Level 4 (B1)- and two English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses (internally called Topics) related to the area of study. Each course lasts one semester. The GE courses teach 96 hours of classroom work per

semester, and after four semesters, the students are expected to have reached B1 level according to the Common European Framework. The ESP courses are taken after passing the fourth level, and each ESP course has 60 hours of class work. The English courses require a certain number of SAC hours and 'conversation sessions' depending on the level and teacher.

No credits are awarded for studying English. However, in order to graduate, students need to complete all the English levels. Moreover, if students fail one English level three times, they are automatically expelled from the university as with any other subject of the academic programmes. In the beginning, when the English programme was implemented the focus was on speaking, given that employers expressed a need for employees who could speak English, so the authorities supported this request. However, some agreements are being made between the UC and other foreign universities and needs have changed. Currently, undergraduate students are expected to be proficient in the four skills so they can have access to exchange programmes and other academic or work opportunities.

The fact is that the students' achievement does not meet the expectations of the authorities and employers. One of the aims of the authorities of the university and the state is to promote a multimodal approach in coordination with national and international institutions for a solid education (Quintana Roo, 2017). However, there are not many students who can access international opportunities because they do not meet the level of English required in the academic programmes.

Therefore, these facts suggest that language learners live within structural and social constraints that limit their choices and often involve power relations and policies, e.g. Bourdieu's capital metaphors (emphasis in original) (1977, 1984, 1991 cited in Block, 2007:866).

### 3.4.5 The selection of participants

The first round of participants who completed a language learner biography (see appendix 3) was drawn from two ESP courses: Topics for International Business and Topics for Sustainable Tourism, at the university in which this study took place. They were 'purposively' selected, as suggested by Dörnyei, (2007:126).

That is, the selection sought to "obtain the broadest range of information and perspectives on the subject of study" (Kuzel, 1992:37 cited in Yin, 2011:88) by including those that might offer contrary evidence or views to avoid bias. However, this longitudinal study was limited by the number of respondents, many of whom were difficult to contact again, so additional participants were added to the sample at a later date.

All the International Business students were taking the first ESP course (Topics for International Business) with the researcher, or had been her former students, except for one of them. The Tourism students were either referred by a peer teacher or spotted in the SAC as active or resistant language learners. The reasons for selecting students enrolled in the ESP courses as participants were: firstly, English might be particularly important for their future professional careers given the nature of their undergraduate studies; and secondly, being in the topics courses means that students have been at the university for several semesters, so they might have more idea of the future uses of L2 and be more likely to provide data to better understand the phenomena. From these groups eleven students were selected as core participants. The aim was to have a maximum variation sample based on the language learners' proficiency and attitude to English.

I selected eleven students from the pre-study and sent them an e-mail inviting them to participate in the research. All of them agreed to do, but only four remained because they were studying and working full-time and had very tight timetables. From the other seven core participants, five did their social service in the SAC and two were spotted in the SAC. One of them was a conversation leader, and the other seemed to resistant to English during a conversation session. It is by chance that I had invited eleven students from the pre-study and ended up having the same number of core participants.

This is a small sample, but given the nature of this research and what it attempts to achieve and the limitations in terms of time, it was not possible to include more participants. Most of the students are from Cancun, or towns and the capital city of the state of Quintana Roo; two are from Mexico City and one of them is from a city in the north of the country.

The selection of participants was purposive, trying to include a heterogeneous sample, considering their English proficiency, gender, social and educational background, and experience in a foreign country and participation in the SAC. All the participants signed the consent form, I put up a sign in the SAC informing everyone that a research study was being conducted and photographs would be taken. In addition, permission from parents and employers was granted orally for visits to their homes and workplace (see appendix 14 and 14.1).

### 3.4.5.1 The participants' profile

In this section, I introduce the eleven participants in the study. They are categorised according to their English language proficiency and their commitment to learning English. An overview of their demographic features, language learning experience and undergraduate programme are provided as well as their social educational background, projects and desires for the future. Some of them finished their degrees during the study, so their current work is included. A more thorough participants' profile was included in the appendix (see appendices 5 and 5.1). Readers should understand their trajectories in the socio-historical context of Cancun provided in chapter 1 of this dissertation.

**High achievers**

Tamara, a female participant, aged 20. She was born in Cancun into a working class family in Cancun, but moved to another state after hurricane Wilma in 1985 and came back to Cancun to study sustainable tourism. She attended elementary school at a private institution from nursery to fifth year, where English was taught. She holds an IELTS certificate, band 6.5, and studied in the UK for a semester as part of an exchange programme. She aims to pursue a master's degree in an English-speaking country and wants to work in the hotel industry in something related to sustainability.

Diana, a female participant, aged 23. She was born in Cancun. Her parents hold a university degree in Law. She studied at private bilingual schools. She studied international business because she is interested in communicating with people from other countries. She has travelled to the United States to visit her relatives several times. She got a scholarship to study English for a month in the United States and worked twice in Disney during the summer. She got the FCE in high

school and at the university she took the IELTS, achieving band 7. She is currently applying to study a master's degree at a British university. She has also studied Korean, French and Mayan.

Luciano, a male participant, aged 22. He was born in Mexico City. His mother is a psychologist who works for the government and his father has an administrative position in a company. He studied at private schools from nursery to high school and decided to study international business because he is interested in commerce and logistics. He got a scholarship to study English for a month in the United States. While at the university he took the IELTS and TOEFL getting band 7.5 in the IELTS and scoring 97 in the TOEFL. He would like to study a master's degree in Australia.

Mariela, a female participant, aged 20. She was born in Cancun. Her mother used to work in the tourism industry and her father works as a driver in the public relations department at the city hall. She studied the target language at nursery school, the first two years of elementary school and at a private preparatory school, and at government schools with virtually no English for the last four years of elementary school and secondary school. She took a couple of English courses in a language school at different times. She studied International business because she is interested in doing business, and because of globalisation she believed the undergraduate programme would provide her with more work opportunities. She took the IELTS, in which she got band 6. She had planned to study a master's degree but had to work due to family constraints.

**Medium achievers**

Monica, a female participant, aged 22. She was born in Chetumal, the capital city of the state and came to study to Cancun. Her mother works for the government. She studied international business because she is interested in Economics. She attended public schools but took English private lessons and spent summer vacations or Christmas holidays with relatives in the United States. She is preparing to take the IELTS and she would like to live and work in the States.

Carmen, a female participant, aged 24. She was born in the north of the country. Both of her parents hold a degree in Psychology but do not work as psychologists. They have set up a couple of small businesses which have not

been very successful. They lived in the United States for six months. She had several personal problems during her time at the university such as financial, health and even robbery with violence. She had to cope with both studies and work. She took the TOEFL and her score was 67. She would like to live in Canada.

Diego, a male participant, aged 22. His parents hold a bachelor's degree and are involved in politics, He studied in private schools and he also took private English lessons. He practises basketball semi-professionally and got a good job because of his English proficiency but found it hard to cope with both work and studies, so he resigned after one semester. He would like to become a professional basketball player in Europe and set up his own business.

Bernardo, a male participant, aged 22. He was born in Cancun. His father works in sales and his mother is a housewife. He attended public schools and learnt English playing video games. He decided to study International Business because there were no humanities-related degrees at a public university. He does not have any particular plans for the future apart from working and continuing with his hobbies.

**Low achievers**

Karina, a female participant, aged 26. She was born in Mexico City and moved to Cancun on her own because of family problems. She did not provide much information about her family background, except that her mother came to Cancun when her grandmother died and later her brother arrived due to drug-related problems. She had to support both in every way. She attended public schools and studied Sustainable Tourism because she is interested in Sustainability. She gave priority to other subjects and activities over English. She is interested in Environmental Education and Scientific Dissemination. Currently, she works for the Planetarium, a space for science, culture and technology in Cancun.

Max, a male participant, aged 22. He was born in Cancun into a Mayan family. His parents are merchants and hold associate degrees, and his 2 brothers and sister hold a university degree. He has always studied in public schools. He chose the degree in Sustainable Tourism because he is interested in developing better environmental practices in the tourism industry. Although he excelled in his

undergraduate programme, he only just met the requirements to pass the English courses because he disagreed with it being mandatory as he did not want to work in the hotel industry, but at an environmental consultancy firm. He works at an environmental consultancy firm, teaches at the university and is involved in research.

Daniel, a male participant, aged 34. He was born in Chetumal, the capital city of the state. Both of his parents belong to the Armed Forces. He is enrolled in International Business and is the first one in his family to study at the university. He decided to study business because he wants to develop a social programme to help the communities of the region and promote the Mexican culture. He has had brief trips to the United States and Canada and lived in Argentina for three years as part of a social programme. Although he understands the importance of English, he disagrees with American policies and agreements because he considers they are unfair and negatively affect Mexico

### 3.4.6 The researcher role

In qualitative research, it is essential to understand the degree of the researcher's familiarity with the context and characteristics, which potentially influences all phases of the research process. In other words, 'no research is free of the biases, assumptions, and personality of the researcher and we cannot separate self from those activities in which we are intimately involved' (Sword, 1999: 277 cited in Berger, 2015). Thus, I recognised the importance of stating my positionality as a researcher in this study for those who read this thesis.

I will discuss the advantages and some issues related to my insider role. I was an insider researcher in the context of my research and collected the data as an insider participant observer. The setting of the study was the university where I had been a full-time professor and a SAC counsellor for seven years before the research. Currently, I teach the Topics for International Business (ESP) course, therefore having background knowledge about the setting and access to university documents, e.g. students' records, was an advantage. Furthermore, some of the participants were my students or SAC users, which facilitated our initial point of contact. These facts contributed to accelerating the process of gaining insider perspectives on the context under investigation. Additionally, my role in the community favoured the ongoing communication with the participants

who would drop by to discuss issues regarding their language learning, advice on international exams, or simply to comment about personal life matters. For example, they learnt about the preparation courses for exams and opportunities to apply for some exchange programmes due to our ongoing communication. As a result, Tamara, Diana, Luciano and Mariela took the IELTS exam, and Carmen and Luciano the TOEFL exam, which made some of them eligible to participate in the international programmes offered at the university and to be able to pursue postgraduate studies. Thus, our relationship seems to have influenced their trajectories in terms of deciding to certify their language proficiency.

Given that my researcher identity was drawn from my understanding of my status as a doctoral student who had to follow ethical protocols when entering and exiting the field in order to ensure my research was rigorous (Giampapa, 2011:135), sometimes the closeness with the participants made me struggle with my insider/outsider position.

On the one hand, I had the key advantages of being an insider, described by Bonner and Tolhurst (2002:8-9): as having a 'good understanding of the culture' without 'altering the flow of social interaction' that helps to 'establish intimacy' and promote 'both the telling and the judging of truth'. I am Mexican, a teacher and counsellor, and speak Spanish natively, so being a member of the community allowed me to establish a good rapport to communicate at a different level with the participants before, during and after the study. I saw my self-positioning as a Mexican, non-native English speaker as an important link to accessing, understanding, and engaging in the lives of the 11 core participants. My intention was not only to give a voice to the participants but to capture the participants' realities and struggles in second language learning through analysing emerging discourses to disclose the generative mechanisms responsible for their dispositions and actions (Giampapa 2011:134).

I must make it clear that although I maintained close social contact with the participants, I did not have much professional contact with them except for Diana, Mariela, Bernardo, Carmen and Luciano, who did their *social service* as SAC helpers for one semester where I was a counsellor. Therefore, I carried out the research from within the sense that I was on site and was an integral part of the SAC staff with administrative duties and knowledge about the events occurring.

This fact implies that I had power and authority over those participants, which can affect the data process collection. That is, they might have felt compelled to participate in the study, or they may have felt they were getting special treatment and more attention compared to their peers, as well as more important with their relatives or bosses when I visited them. I did not anticipate that participants might have re-positioned my identities and aligned these with their own agendas, which might have influenced their participation in the research (Giampapa, 2011:134).

Regarding intimacy, they confided delicate issues in their lives, such as abandonment by a mother in her teenage years, alcohol problems, having a brother with a drug addiction, and being diagnosed with HIV. They also shared with me the good news, such as being hired on an international cruise, getting accepted to postgraduate studies, and I even was invited to be the godmother of a participant's wedding. Hence, I tried to prevent this relationship from clouding my perceptions and influencing the analysis, and omitted sensitive information. As Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, & Richardson (1992:5 cited in Giampapa, 2011) point out, researchers are 'socially located persons', who bring their biographies and subjectivities to the research process that should be considered as another component of the study instead of being seen as a deplorable disturbance.

Overall, my insider position facilitated the research process as I speak the same language, understand local values, know the formal and informal power structures, as well as having obtained permission to conduct the study, interview and have access to students' records (Coghlan, 2003; Herrmann, 1989; Rouney, 2005; Tedlock, 2000 cited in Unluer, 2012:5).

On the other hand, being a teacher-researcher collecting data for the study also positioned me as an outsider, although I tried not to pass judgement or tell them what to say. Data was collected by letting them do the talking and trying not to influence them, as well as by taking some notes to avoid overlooking essential features of the context and the accounts offered by the participants. Moreover, the outsider role when I visited the participants' homes and places of work allowed me to take advantage of ordinary events and increased opportunities to get to know other aspects of their lives and their behaviour in a different

102

environment. I consider that being an outsider while visiting the participants was beneficial because I was able to observe the implicit differences within each participant, which gave me more insights for this research.

Nevertheless, I sometimes struggled to keep the balance between my insider role (SAC counsellor, social service coordinator, and teacher) and the researcher role (DeLyser, 2001; Gerrish, 1997 cited in Unluer, 2012:2). Sometimes I felt concerned about their problems or got involved in various activities with them. For example, when Karina left her job to help her mother open the take-away food business, I promoted it with my co-workers, and also participated with my class at the MUN event Diego was responsible for, and ended up collaborating with him in the organisation.

Dwyer and Buckle (2009:59) suggest that it is not the insider/outsider position that matters, but the 'ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience'. From my experience, as an insider I was fortunate to experience the advantages that facilitated the research process, and as an outsider, I learnt interesting features about my participants that I would not have known otherwise, which was essential to the understanding of my participants' contextual conditions. Furthermore, throughout the study, I constantly reflected not only on the similarities and on differences between my participants, but I also started paying more attention to people's behaviour and what could be the causes of such behaviour. I would think about the reasons why they acted in such a way, whether they were reproducing what they had lived or acting through their reflexivity bringing about change to pursue their aims, regardless of their contextual conditions. One of the limitations is that a research journal where I had reflected more about such issues would have given me more insights throughout my research journey.

## 3.5 Research Instruments

This section presents the research instruments adopted in this study. Harklau (2005 cited in Dörnyei 2007:231) recommends that it is advisable to have multiple data sources. Hence, this study is based on the language learners' biography, interviews, observations, online communication (e-mails and text messages) and documents, in order 'to make the world visible in a different way'

(Denzin and Lincon cited in Heigham and Croker 2009:8). Harklau also points out that one of the key features of ethnography is focusing on participant meaning through the participants' subjective interpretation of their actions (the eyes of an insider),  as was the case in the observations and the interviews. Therefore, these data collection techniques allowed a fuller  picture of the participants for a deep understanding of  how language learners exert their agency and the reasons why they chose to do so, in light of their contextual conditions.

### 3.5.1   The language learner biography

The language learner biography  was the first instrument employed. It is an adapted version of the European Language Portfolio (2013) and Palfreyman's (2006) questionnaire, with guiding points to help the participants frame their writing and express their ideas more easily. It is divided into two parts corresponding to its two complementary purposes: firstly, to learn about the language learners' family background; and secondly, to obtain information about their language learning experience and any other relevant data about ways in which they use the L2 on a regular basis (see appendix 3). As Cole & Knowles (2001:20) provide, life history research takes narrative one step beyond the individual, placing accounts and interpretations within a broader context such as cultural, political, familial, educational and relational spheres.

Murray (2009:47-48) raises the point that life history research can help understand learners' beliefs and assumptions about learning, and enables the researcher to access the identities of the participants (Clandini & Huber, 2002; Kouritzin, 2000; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zieber, 1998; Pavlenko, 2002).  He adds that to understand a language-learning story this should not be separated from the individual's life story and its sociocultural contexts, which is the case of the present study.

I considered  that this instrument, written in the form of a narrative, could provide valuable data to start exploring learners' beliefs and assumptions about learning and to identify potential participants for the study. That is, by being able to learn about the language learners' family background, learning experiences and how they use English could serve the purpose to start gaining knowledge about the reasons of what they do (behaviours) regarding foreign language learning (Spradley, 1980; Creswell, 2007 cited in Heigham and Sakui, 2009:93).

I applied the instrument, which was written in both English and Spanish, and participants could choose the language they preferred. Moreover, the instructions were given in Spanish to avoid misunderstandings. In the pre-study there were 22 students, and subsequently, seven more participants, spotted in the SAC, were added, making a total of 29 language biographies. This instrument proved to be a good starting point to explore the respondents and get an insight of their language learning experience and different backgrounds to select the core participants for the study.

### 3.5.2    Interviews

The eleven participants were formally interviewed three times over the nearly two year-period the study lasted (see appendix 6). There were semi-structured and open interviews to explore the students' learning decisions, experiences, and goals. Interviews were carried out at different times with all the participants due to time constraints of the participants and the researcher. The first interview took place at the beginning of the study, the second within the first year and the last one near the end of the study.  Furthermore, there were several informal encounters and ongoing conversations with the participants, as we would usually meet in the SAC, but we could also bump into each other in other places at the university. We also kept in touch by e-mail, WhatsApp or Facebook.

According to Smith and Elger (2014:122-2), critical realists see interviews as a valuable tool in social research, despite their limitations in terms of preoccupations, points of view and interest of specific informants. They agree with Bhaskar (1998: xvi), who says that 'actors' accounts form the indispensable starting point of social inquiry', whereas Archer (1998) points out that accounts give a way into structure, but do not provide access to deep structure. Additionally, Archer (2012) suggests that the role of the interviews is to draw out and analyse human reflexivity, individual reasoning in relation to others and to society. However, from a  critical realist perspective, it is recognised that interviews are necessary for accessing human thought, meaning, and experience, but that these cannot be the basis for analysing the multiplicity of casual factors in social relations (Smith and Elger: 2014).  Taking this fact in consideration therefore, the study used other research techniques.

The first interview was a sort of semi-structured interview based on the information obtained in the language learner biography (see appendix 1). The wording and order of the questions were accommodated according to different interviewees, and the interview followed unexpected directions towards new aspects. Direct questions were used more fully to explore the language learning experiences, attitude towards the foreign language, as well as current and future expectations towards English (see appendix 7). Although the interviews started with a list of issues to be covered, the aim was to allow the discussion to flow in a more natural way.

In the second interview, non-direct questions were asked (see appendix 8). and the interview followed unexpected directions towards new aspects. Although the interviews started with a list of issues to be covered, the aim was to allow the discussion flow in a more natural way. In other words, the interview was guided to some topics, but was also flexible to allow the researcher to respond to the interviewee when relevant issues arose, so new knowledge and thoughts were generated. At some point the participants directed themselves and I allowed them to, or redirected the conversation. Richards (2009:182) notes that interviews have been described as a 'conversation with a purpose' (Burgess, 1982:102) and they are a data collection method that offers different ways of exploring people's experiences and views. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:117) offer that ethnographers do not usually decide beforehand the exact questions they want to ask, and not all interviewees are asked the same questions, as was the case in these sessions.

In the third interview, the aim was to identify and explore contradictory accounts and gaps, ask more focused and meaningful questions, elicit comments on views expressed and probe matters that might have been overlooked. Smith and Elger (2014:31) suggest that interviews should be treated as cumulative and iterative and not only as discrete indicators of attitudes or sources of narratives. They stress the multi-faceted character of the respondents' accounts and the relevant role of an effective, investigative and analytical CR interviewer to be able to generate the data needed. I tried to move in this interview from non-directive to directive or vice versa and it was decided as the interviews progressed. I also tried to keep in mind that the interviews were not merely conversations as these sometimes went towards other directions. I therefore knew I should have some

control over the event and used direct questions to test inferences or find out more information on a particular issue, which was sometimes hard to do.

The interviews were also supplemented with informal conversations, where we engaged when we met, not for purposes of the study, but for 'the value of pure sociability as means of building trust' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:70). For example, they would drop by in the SAC to say hello, tell me about the latest news, or ask for advice, especially about the international certifications or English courses.   The subjects during the small talk encompassed rock bands, boyfriends, pets, motorbikes, etc. I usually referred to something they had said before to show that I remembered our previous conversation, and thus help establish a good rapport and relationship. These encounters were not always audio recorded since I felt it was a little rude and impractical to stop the flow of the conversation to get my mobile phone to record. When these sessions were not audio recorded, some notes were taken immediately after the talks. The fact is that a good relationship was established between us. Moreover, the relationship evolved and grew to become more affectionate, so I was truly interested in what they said or were up to, although I always tried to keep my distance as teacher-researcher.

The language in all the interviews was either English or Spanish, depending on the level and preference of the students. Most participants did code-switching when they wished or were unable to explain themselves in English. This fact made me think that whenever possible it might be worth using L1 because the participants were able to express their ideas and feelings more easily, thus richer data would be collected.

As a result, the eleven participants were formally interviewed three times plus the informal conversations, altogether making a total of 67:54 hours of recorded material. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using the research transcription tool *transcribe.* As such, it was hoped that the data would aid the first and second research questions as well as the third research question through the retroductive process (see 3.6).

### 3.5.3 Observations

I conducted observations in different settings during the time of the study, observing participants in the classroom, in the SAC, other areas of the university and also at some of their homes or workplaces (see appendix 9). Cowie (2009:166-168) offers that observation is essential to see behaviour from a different perspective in order to discover new aspects to a context and get insights into the external aspect of language learning. He highlights that participant observation does not mean fully participating, rather interacting with people while they are doing their regular tasks and taking field notes. Nevertheless, note taking might be difficult when the teacher-researcher is familiar with the context, as many things are taken for granted, as in my case. As an ESP business course teacher and also a SAC counsellor, I therefore tried to approach the setting, participants, activities, or interactions without any particular orientation in mind, but using the general question, 'What is going on here' (Spradley, 1980).

I observed participants in different settings because I wanted to see them in their own setting, consider their family relationships and gain insights into their working environment. This was useful to learn more about their individual lives. I was intrigued and wanted to know what the different impacts in their lives were, therefore I considered that visiting their homes or workplace would help me to do so. I observed the participants in two settings: (1) in the formal setting, at the university e.g. SAC, classroom, corridor, etc.; and (2) out of the institution or formal setting, at their home or work (see appendix 9.1). Angrostino (2007 cited in Creswell, 2013:166) suggests that observation 'is the act of noting a phenomenon in the field with the five senses'. With this in mind,   I paid attention to the physical setting, participants, activities and behaviour (my own behaviour included) as I moved between different roles. My role was that of participant observer, complete observer or complete participant (Creswell, 2013:166), depending on the site. At the university, the most common place to meet was in the SAC, but we also bumped into each other in the cafeteria or corridor. Moreover, I also observed two of the participants in the auditorium, one of them in his role of speaker at a Symposium and another one as organizer and presenter of a business event.

**The SAC**

The SAC was the meeting place where most of the participants would go on a regular basis, so it was relevant to obtain data documenting the learners in this setting (see appendix 2). I wanted to learn what learners do on their own as well as how they interact translated into observable behaviour. In each session, I wrote ethnographic field notes (Spradley, 198; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), giving as much detail as possible regarding what had happened. However, being a SAC counsellor and a participant observer was not an easy task as students are used to approaching the researcher to ask for conversation sessions or other things they need, so the writing was often interrupted. Hence, I filmed two observations to get a broader picture of the environment of the SAC and to be able to examine it. The observations were carried out over a period of four weeks for about an hour a week. Sometimes I was a non-participant observer or a participant observer, at other times I was a complete observer because I managed to set my mobile phone in a strategic position to film the SAC without being noticed.

**Home and work visits**

It was not easy to coordinate with all the participants, and perhaps they were not entirely sure about it but did not openly say so, however I was able to visit some of them at their home or work place. The aim was to pay particular attention to their families and workplace as the most likely immediate social influence, and to observe the students interacting in their ordinary settings. Learning more about them could help me build an in-depth picture to be able to identify the underlying mechanisms that shaped the learners' dispositions to English.

I visited the homes of three students, and the place of work of another three students around the middle stage of the research, and such visits lasted between one or two hours. At their homes, I talked to the parents of two students, and the sister of another one. With the parents I elicited basic biographical information and focused on the parents' hopes for their child, the support they offered, and the perceived role of English. At their work, I spoke with the boss of three participants and the co-workers of two of them. In those places, I observed what was going on, paying particular attention to the environment and interpersonal relations. Field notes were made as concrete and descriptive as possible, based on Spradley's ethnographic categories –space, actors, activities, objects, acts, and

events- aiming to provide a comprehensive record of the research setting and actors (see appendix 9.1). Visiting the participants provided additional information and sources of data.

Some photographs were taken during the observations and whenever possible, the visits to the participants' homes were audio recorded, but not the ones in their workplace.  Two observations in the SAC were filmed. Unfortunately, the background noise made the recordings unintelligible. The data gathered aided to address the three research questions.

### 3.5.4    Documents

Some documents were collected to help build a fuller picture of the participants as students and compared their overall achievement with the subject of English. These documents were the students' university records (general student record and academic history). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:122) provide that many times ethnographers need to examine documentary evidence as part of the social setting under investigation. They also say that the sort of documents to draw on can be of two types, ones generated specifically for the research and others produced independently of it. Thus, the English national educational policy and media, such as classified ads and advertising content, were also included and analysed.

### 3.5.6 On-line communication

The initial study design did not anticipate including on-line communication. However, for a number of participants this was their most common means of communication in both languages, with Spanish speakers and with foreigners or native speakers. Moreover, most of the participants were often in on-line contact with me through WhatsApp messages or e-mail and sometimes via Facebook. These communications were noted in the research journal and although this data was not formally analysed due to time restraints, it was included as part of the background information for the research.

## 3.6   Data analysis

Considerations of data analysis are an essential part of the research process from the early stages (Richards, 2003; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The analysis

of first-phase study data shed some light on the identification of themes of interest and areas that needed more investigation so that data collection could be more focused during the rest of the research.

In the main study, data pertaining to the participants' learning experiences and trajectory were interpreted seeking to provide causal explanations for the learners' outcome in language learning. Data collected consisted of language learner biographies, three interviews with each participant, observations, documents and online communication via e-mail and WhatsApp. The focus was specifically on finding out the generative mechanisms of specific events, which involved identifying the underlying structures and mechanisms shaping the learners' predisposition while they operate and interact that may be applied without being noticeable in the real domain.

The study was explored as follows:

- The Empirical: learners' accounts, particularly with reference to their learning experiences, affordances and constraints, as well as the structural influences.

- The Actual: events which have been generated by mechanisms: learners' decisions regarding language learning. How did the students come to favour or resist English? How were learners' decisions co-determined regarding the formative events that caused their decisions towards English?

- The Real: mechanisms or structures that have generated (or produced) the actual events; that is, how things act, namely structures, powers, and liabilities. As they operate and interact with the learners, they shape their predispositions towards English.

The following table was therefore designed considering the entities (parts) to analyse the interrelationship between the language learners and the social structures in which they are embedded to be able to provide the causal explanations for their predispositions to second language learning.

## Table 3: Method of techniques for data collection and analysis.

| Process of data analysis | The study focus | Research instruments | Levels of interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.The particular entities | Language learners<br>Social structure | | |
| 2. The parts of each type of entity | Language learner as a whole: personality, projects, and the use and constraint of L2 in time and space<br>Social structure:<br>Sociocultural configurations e.g. SAC<br>Institutions (family, education, and employment);<br>Physical environment: city of Cancun, neighbourhood, physical objects (computer, mobile phone);<br>Material economic bases of Mexican society, legal and political system | language learner biography<br><br>interviews<br><br>observations<br><br>documents, field notes | |
| 3. Causal powers | About the nature of each type of entity and the strong dispositional properties that this nature gives rise to: the learners' values, beliefs, interests and ideologies as well as material entities that created important structural influences. | First coding | Codes:<br><br>Dispositional formations, projects, interests, beliefs, conscious reason decisions, identity.<br><br>Relationships, Imagined communities, symbolic capital, family, work, education, physical objects, SAC, Cancun, economic and political situation. |
| 4.Abduction | Associations to discern relations and connections that are not otherwise evident or obvious. | Explore diagram | Inferences to link participants' dispositions and structures (the actual and the real) obscured in empirical data based on demi-regularities to find the best explanation of reality through existing theories. |
| 5.Morphogenetic causes (retroduction) | The explanation about the causal mechanisms (underlying structures and mechanisms) that are responsible for an event subject to circumstances that bring about change. | Archer's (1995) morphogenetic cycle | The complex interaction of causal powers responsible for learners' decisions as reflexive deliberation bringing about change. |
| 6. Morphostatic causes (retroduction) | That sustain their existence in the system through stability and reproduction. | Bourdieu's (1968:xx) habitus | Habitus as potentially generating a wide repertoire of possible actions, simultaneously enabling the individual to draw on transformative and constraining courses of action. |
| 7. Causal explanations | By which its parts and relations produce the specific properties of the entity (powers and liabilities). | Causal model | The underlying structures that co-determine EFL students' desire to invest in language learning. |

**Source: Based on Block (2015), Elder-Vass (2010), Archer (1995, 2010), and Bourdieu (1977).**

In the sections below, I describe my process of carrying out CR research from beginning to end, following the typical trajectory of a qualitative research project and the various steps in CR analysis, which are identified throughout the process and for which concrete examples are provided.

The first two steps are the entities or object of my study, while the third and fourth show how data was analysed according to the entities' emergent properties and their relations. As Fletcher (2016:4) highlights, the process of CR analysis is not necessarily linear; however, CR involves several key steps: identification of demi-regularities (step 3), abduction (step 4), and retroduction (steps 5-7). Data processing is also important in qualitative research, including CR, for which it provides insight into empirical demi-regularities and represents the beginning of abduction and retroduction. Moreover, Rees and Gatenby (2014:138) emphasise that the causal mechanisms are not always observable, so 'they have to be theoretically constructed and modelled, through retroduction. Thus, the activities on steps 5-7 are retroductive in nature and heavily rely on having been able to map out (steps 1 and 2) relevant to the domain ontology, namely second language learning and social science.

**The causal powers (step 3**)

In this phase, the participants' accounts -with reference to their relevant experiences and events with the English language, and structural affordances and constraints- were analysed and coded inductively and deductively, in the NVivo qualitative software. The aim was to identify the causal powers with regard to the nature of the entities, that is, important structural and material entities that formed the learners' values, beliefs, interests and ideologies. Data was filtered into themes and categories representing the perspectives of the learners, so the layers of explanation of reality could start to be revealed. This process might be enough from a phenomenological perspective (rooted on the actual), but insufficient from a critical realist perspective to discover the hidden dynamics of the multi-relational stratified nature of shared discourse (Crinson 2001:11). This is based on the assumption that subjects construct a story of events or actions, which should be recorded and challenged, and then linked with a realistic explanation of action. Thus, I began with 35 codes [see appendix 10] of the two types described by Maxwell (2012), organizational and theoretical. Organizational

codes are simply topic-based 'bins' into which information is sorted, while theoretical codes are derived from theory (Maxwell, 2012:111-2). The theoretical codes were beliefs, self-efficacy, conscious reason, imagined communities, identity, and symbolic capital.



Figure 3: Codes hierarchy chart

The hierarchy chart shows the amount of nodes coded from data. The most prominent were the ones related to students' dispositions.

**Abduction (step 4)**

The next step was the process of abduction (theoretical redescription) defined by Danermark et al., (2005:205) as a process of 'inference or thought operation, implying that a particular phenomenon or event is interpreted from a set of general ideas or concepts'. The authors offer that abduction becomes a manner of acquiring knowledge of how various phenomena can be part of and explained in relation to structures, internal relations and contexts which are not directly observable (p.94). The NVivo software was used to create and iteratively revise codes to capture themes or concepts that could have contributed to learners'

dispositions to language learning. I particularly sought to identify prominent demi-regularities, that is, look for tendencies which can be seen in rough trends or broken patterns in empirical data (Danermark et al., 2005:70). I reviewed the codes and students' diagrams [(see appendices 11](#) [and 12.1)](#) to identify such demi-regularities. Smith and Elger (2014 cited in Rees and Gatenby, 2014:140) point out that to be able to find out the reasons for action involves including contextual knowledge obtained on a subject from theory and ideas. I focused on the learners' dispositions to language learning and their relation to structures, internal relations and contexts which were not directly observable to find the best explanation of reality.

**Retroduction (steps 5-7)**

In retroduction, causal pathways to explain how structures impact learners' actions were theorized, and mapped into contingent pathways [(see appendix13)](#). The process of retroduction was carried out by searching for interacting causal forces, which involved the relationship between the causal power and its effects, external and contingent.  Wortham (2006:279 cited in Pérez-Milans and Soto, 2016:50) suggests that "contingency happens when unpredictable configurations of resources from across multiple timescales play a role in processes' as is the case with language learning. An explanation requires the study of generative mechanisms in their context because 'social structures do not exist independently of the actions they condition, or independently of the actors' conceptions of what they are doing, and they are only relatively enduring' (Porter, 2002:62 cited in Decoteau, 2016: 16). The learners' decisions for their actions were the event, therefore learners' choices in their trajectories were analysed to disclose the causal mechanisms (underlying structures and mechanisms) that are responsible for such event, subject to circumstances.

Elder-Vass (2010:98) suggests that our actions are directly or non-consciously determined by our current dispositions, so they are the outcome of a series of past events.  These events include: 1) very recent reflections that we tend to see as directly causally effective decisions; 2) older reflections that shaped our dispositions consciously at the time, but which we may have forgotten; and c) experiences that affected our dispositions, such as unconsciously acquiring a habit or skill (Bourdieu's habitus). Learners' actions were analysed regarding how

learners' decisions were made, that is, by emphasising reflexivity or non-conscious behaviour responses to the real determination of actions emphasising dispositions.

Archer's (1995) morphogenetic approach was employed as a method to understand the interplay between structure and agency over time in the learners' specific circumstances. It is through this interactive process that connections were made about the complex interaction of causal powers to map the extent to which learners' actions are morphostatic (reproductive) or morphogenetic (transformative) of existing sociocultural orders. This was done with the aim of providing the causal explanations about what contributes to students' decisions in language learning that might go beyond individual choice and which shape learners' agency in particular ways.

The morphogenetic approach helps to unpack and understand different levels of the context in which the English language learners find themselves. During the time T2–T3, participants come with different learning motivations, previous learning experiences, expectations, reflexivity, personality traits and dispositions, and accessibility to practice or use the language. They reflexively take decisions regarding language learning, or are shaped by their habitus, predisposed to do it, structured by their past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences. The analytical dualism adopted in the approach enabled me to examine the interplay between the features and properties of the social structure and participants' trajectories, and hence enhance my understanding of the language-learning phenomenon.
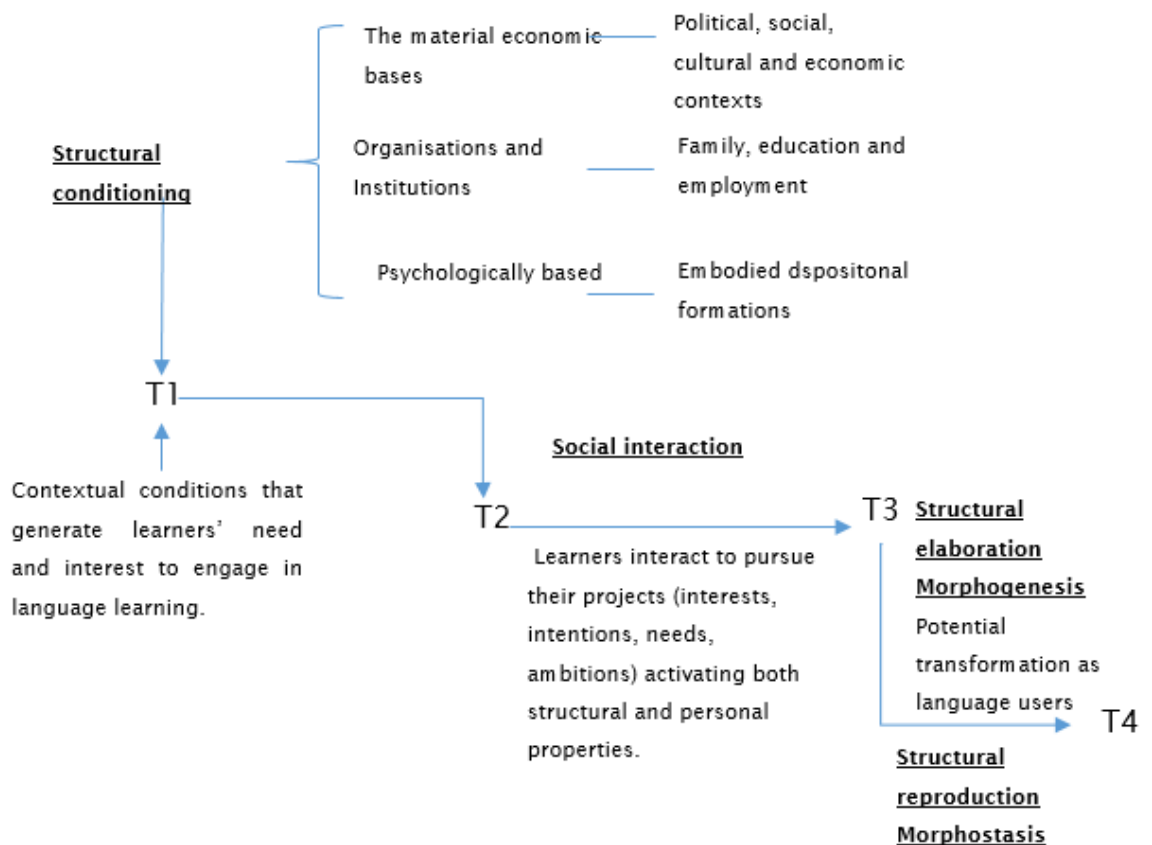
Figure 4:  The morphogenesis of the language learners (based on Archer, 1995:157)

Thus, I re-described empirical data using theoretical concepts to map the participants' trajectories in order to interpret and arrange data into general concepts and observe something general in the participants' decision-making process and actions.

The software programme for the qualitative data QSR NVivo 11 was used through the analysis process, firstly to store the language learners' biographies and the transcriptions of the recorded data, as well as in the development of the coding categories. The analysis in Nvivo was abductive (Meyer and Lunnay, 2013) because it was informed by the theory (deductive) and also oriented to theory building (inductive).  The data was divided, grouped and reorganised to identify and categorise the elements and explore their connections step 3, 4). Furthermore, the tools provided by the software allowed the investigation of patterns, relationships and connections within and between data. This was done by conducting text searches through word frequency queries and visualisations to reveal the causal mechanisms that produce change or favour social reproduction

(step 5, 6) to be able to provide more in-depth causal explanations (step 7) (see appendix 13).

## 3.7    Ethics and risks

There did not appear to be any great risks to either participants or researcher. The activities the participants were expected to participate in, writing their language learner biography, interviews, observations, questionnaires, documents and on-line communication did not offer any danger. The research was conducted with the written consent of the participants. The researcher did not fully explain all the details to the participants due to the risk of influencing their behaviour, but she did explain the aims of the study, to find out language learners' experiences to understand what influences the learners' attitudes and beliefs towards learning English. Participation in the study was voluntary and it was made clear the students could withdraw at any time. As the researcher was also a SAC counsellor and former teacher of some of them, it was made clear that choosing to withdraw would not have any consequences. Participants' anonymity has been protected with pseudonyms used throughout this research and any related reports. The research was conducted in the SAC and with full consent of the participants, and some of them were visited either at their home or place of work.

## 3.8    Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the methodological issues involved in this study. The study is based on critical realism and a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore the interrelationship between learners' agency and the social structure in SLL.  It attempts to understand how social structure interrelates with agency, as well as how its entities interrelate with one another to reveal the links between individuals' subjective understandings and their social origins regarding SLL.

Thus, since critical realism undertakes necessary and contingent relations among objects through causal explanations; this approach helped explain language learners' actions and their reasons from their accounts as to why actions took place. That is, by describing the gradual transition 'from actions through reasons to rules and then to structures' (Sayer 1992:112 cited in Rees and Gatenby, 2014:138). This was done by linking rich language learners' accounts to various layers of context and social structure, as proposed by Block's (2014) model of

structure and agency. Moreover, data analysis also drew on Elder-Vass (2010) and Archer's (1995) morphogenetic approach. The research instruments were the language learner biography, interviews, observations, documents and online communication. The pre-study was conducted from October to December 2014 and the main study was carried out from January to September 2015, as summarised in the chapter. The process to analyse data, ethics and risks were explained.  Eleven students were selected as core participants, and although it is a small number it is hoped that this study can contribute to the understanding of similar contexts where English is learned as a foreign language. In the next chapter, the analysis and findings of this study will be presented and discussed.

# Chapter 4: Students' dispositional formations

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a background for the students in the study and a picture of their experiences in language learning. It outlines essential issues that will be further explored in chapter 5 to illustrate how language learners' agency is co-constructed within their contextual conditions. The central purpose of the chapter is to examine students' experiences and events to learn how the social context gives rise to their positive or negative dispositions towards language learning. These objectives are conceptualised as the following research questions:

1) Why do language learners choose to shape or resist their access to language learning?

   1a) What is the nature of learners' dispositional formations towards English?

This chapter draws on various data sources, in particular, the participants' language learning biographies and interviews. Informal conversations and observation notes are also used as supplementary data. My knowledge of the context, as a SAC counsellor, and as the previous teacher of some of the participants contributes to my understanding of relevant phenomena and issues.

In the following sections, dominant students' experiences, events, opportunities and constraints relevant to their language learning trajectory are described (4.2 and 4.3). This study focused on students' learning experiences, but it takes into account their contextual conditions. The participants are not always able to articulate some of the features when discussing their language learning and use, although to varying extents. Hence, data analysis yields important results for building an understanding of how the students' dispositions are formed, which is not always seen in empirical data. The primary purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the language learning pathways of the participants in EFL. First, the students' dispositions towards learning English are analysed to discern relations and connections with the major areas that seem to have caused them. Then, the life stories of two students are interpreted regarding the nature of each type of entity that causes strong dispositional properties.

## 4.2 The language learners' dispositional formations

The students' dispositions come out as a result of their experiences and events in formal and informal contexts, which impact on their language learning. That is, as a result of interacting in the social context the learners develop values, beliefs, interests and ideologies towards language learning. Students' previous learning experiences and their perceptions of themselves influence the effort they invest in language learning as well as the understanding that learning English is an achievement that can afford them opportunities in their future.

The following sections present the areas that seem to exert an influence on the participants' language learning, which were established during the data analysis process. The findings indicate that academic background, family involvement, work experiences, visits to the United States, opinions about the United States, sports, and imagined communities (video games, social media and social networks) play an important role in the formation of language learning dispositions. This is because through interacting in these sociocultural configurations, students form their values, beliefs, interests and aspirations for the present and future. That is, they influence what students expect from themselves and others, how they expect to be seen, and how they interact. The students identify with some communities and negotiate their identity as language learners and users through relations of belonging and not belonging to them. For example, the resistant learners hold a negative opinion of the position of the United States towards Mexico and the attitude of the Americans in Cancun, which ultimately influences their dispositions towards EFL.

In the next sections, the discussion is supported by examples illustrating relevant experiences and events that seem to have influenced the participants' beliefs and attitudes towards language learning and use of English. It should be noted that extracts quoted in Chapters 4-6 either are originally in English (unedited) or marked 'translation' (TR). In the latter case, the original Spanish version is also provided. Key phrases relating to interpretation of the data are **highlighted** in the English extracts.

### 4.2.1 Language learning experiences

This section sets out to examine the participants' language learning experiences that seem to have made an impact on the dispositions toward English. The Mexican educational system consists of nursery school (3 years), primary school (6 years), secondary school (3 years), preparatory school (3 years). A year is called a 'grade'. Students' EFL learning experiences can be broadly divided into three initial stages: private bilingual nursery school, government secondary school, and individual private lessons or courses at a language institute.

The participants come from different educational backgrounds, so they did not begin their English learning at the same time. While some students began to learn English from nursery school in private bilingual schools, some others started their English learning when they were in the first grade of secondary at government schools. English teaching is considered deficient in the government schools because of the lack of qualified teachers, so they repeat the same content in secondary and preparatory school. At the university most students start their English courses at a beginner or an elementary level, while a few students from private schools begin at upper-intermediate or in the first of the two ESP final courses. Thus, the participants have different levels of English proficiency and language learning experiences, and there is a big gap between the ones who study in private bilingual schools and the ones who do so at a government school.

The students' dispositions and beliefs are presented regarding their experiences, confidence, motivation and interest in English, as provided in their accounts. As for their personality traits, these were inferred from their accounts and my observations and informal conversations with the participants.

Students' linguistic competence aims are connected with to expectations of success and their initial stage of exposure to the foreign language as well as how they perceive their language experiences. These facts influence the extent of their engagement in language learning and the attributed importance of English in their present and future life (see 4.3.1). These themes are often interrelated as shown in the following examples, in which the students' views to language learning are presented ranging from positive to negative.

**Example 4.1 Luciano**

Luciano rates his English proficiency above average compared to his peers, but he is aware that he needs to work on his speaking. He has always studied English and he uses it in his everyday activities, so he could not do without it because it is part of his daily routine, as he expresses in the extract below:

LUCIANO: I would **say my English level is above average,** but **my speaking is not very good,** I need practice**. My strongest skill is listening** because I tend to understand everything when people speak. ….**I started studying English in kindergarten and I have always been in bilingual schools,** so I have always been studying English at school.… **English is very important, I use it every day**, for example**, I surf in internet, read the news, and look for new things in internet**. **It is needed to be competitive in the field of work.** I have always been in English**. I cannot imagine my life without English**, I have always been in contact with it, since I was a little child. **I visit pages, the songs, watch videos.** (Interview 1)

The extract suggests that Luciano has self-assessed his English skills because he is able to provide information about his language skills, '*my speaking is not very good.… my strongest skill is listening'.* Moreover, he offers evidence on how he uses English on the internet '*I surf in internet, read the news, and look for new things in internet'* and he is aware of its importance for work '*It is needed to be competitive in the field of work'*. The fact he states that he could not do without English also seems to point to his language user identity as he does use it every day.

**Example 4.2 Tamara**

Tamara's learning trajectory is different from the two previous examples regarding the length of formal exposure. She studied English at private schools from nursery school to the fifth grade of elementary school, and some years later, as a teenager, she took a sixteen-level course at a language institute for two years. She sounds satisfied and pleased with her English, particularly with her speaking skill that helped her to be placed in an upper level at the university and to be assigned the VIP zone at a luxury hotel during her first internship. At that time, she was so into English that she even would reply in English to her roomie. She is pleased about her English level compared to her peers, but she is aware she needs to continue learning.

**I studied English from kindergarten until 5th grade**, they taught me with normal classes. From 2010-2012, **I took a special course at Harmon Hall. It were 16 levels every Saturday**. So **this gave more tools, strategies and lots of confidence on my English, especially on my oral skills**, cause on the Institute **I had people and friends who talk with**. At home not at all. (Language learner biography)

TAMARA: I think that **according to the placement test I was level three, but during the interview, the teacher** said that she was **sending me to level fourth**, so I started at level 4. **I think that I can do quite well with my English. I worked as a waitress at the Ritz Carlton hotel during my internship** because in their English evaluation they said my English was good. **They gave me the VIP zone with groups of Jewish, Russians and from many non-Spanish speaking countries. I was all day into English, so sometimes I get home and spoke English to my roomie. I felt well because I understood almost all but my friends couldn´t understand the guests** and ask me for help. Then. **I feel happy with my English, but I still feel I need to improve.** (Interview 1)

These extracts from Tamara's accounts show that she has an extroverted personality and is confident about using English in learning and real contexts. Her words suggest she enjoys speaking and interacting with other people as she says '*I had people and friends who to talk with'* at the language institute, and '*there were groups of Jewish, Russians and from many non- Spanish speaking countries'* at the hotel. She is goal-oriented towards becoming proficient in the foreign language because she devised a way to learn it when she lived in a small town by commuting to take the language course for two years ([see 4.2.2](#)). The fact that she would reply in English to her roomie is a sign of her level of engagement with the target language and her identity as a language learner and user.

**Example 4.3 Mariela**

Mariela has studied at private and public schools and taken private courses at a language school. Based on her experience, she believes that the type of school you attend impacts your language learning. She compares the teaching methods of her private high school, where the students are made to speak English, and the government secondary school, where beginner students are made to translate texts. She holds self-efficacy beliefs because she says she was the best in the class and is capable of carrying out the learning task, as opposed to her peers who only copied her work as illustrated below.

MARIELA: En La Salle si hablabas español te bajaban un punto, o sea si no querías salir bajo tenías que hablar a fuerzas inglés o tratar de hablarlo...En secundaria estuve en una escuela de gobierno, teníamos clase de inglés pero no era buena. Puedo decir que era la mejor de la clase, sin embargo no era porque supiera mucho sino porque había estudiado inglés en primero y segundo de primaria y en una escuela de idiomas. Un hombre fue a mi escuela y me dio un cupón de descuento, les dije a mis papas y nos inscribieron.. la enseñanza inglés de la secundaria era muy mala, el maestro nos daba un texto en español y decía tradúzcanlo al inglés. Yo más o menos le sabía porque era de las niñas que siempre cargaba mi diccionario de inglés-español a la escuela. El maestro sabía que yo podía hacerlo pero habían alumnos que no sabían inglés, terminaba mi tarea y cuando me volteaba ya tenía mi tarea por atrás y todos la estaban copiando.... cada traducción se firmaba y contaba para la calificación. (Entrevista 3)

MARIELA: At La Salle **they made you speak English, or they would lower you a point,** so if you wanted to have a good grade **you had to make an effort**. ..**In secondary**, I was **in a government school,** we had English class, but it was not good. I can say that **I was the best of the class**; however, **it wasn´t because I knew too much but because I studied English in first and second year of elementary school and in a language institute. A man went to my school and gave me a discount coupon for an English course, I told my parents and they enrolled us** [she and her sister] ..... the English teaching was very bad in the secondary, **the teacher used to give us a text in Spanish and he would say 'translate it into English'. I could do it quite well because I always carried my English-Spanish dictionary with me to school. The teacher was aware that I could do it but there were other students who couldn´t. I would finish my homework and when I turned my head I would see my homework at the back and everybody was copying** ...**each translation was signed and counted for the grade**. (Interview 3) TR

During the interviews she reports to have had four different language experiences, that is: at a bilingual private school in first and second grade; at a government school; at a language institute; and at a private high school. Her language learning experience makes her compare the teaching methods, and she seems to have quite a realistic understanding of the different learning contexts, and teachers' teaching. Then, she goes on to state the reason why students cannot learn English well:

MARIELA: Me he dado cuenta que en el tipo de educación, inconscientemente te enseñan, no me importa como lo hagas solo dame resultados, ósea el maestro nunca preguntó ni dijo una palabra acerca de la tarea....Me acuerdo perfectamente que en ningún momento nos enseñó "*he, she* o *it*", los colores, o algo...También me acuerdo del día del examen de

admisión a la universidad en el que había solo una pequeña sección de inglés. Yo la contesté toda pero a la salida escuché a unos estudiantes que comentaban del examen. Uno de ellos decía que no pudo contestar porque no había entendido nada... Yo pensé 'oh, Dios mío', tal vez no es que ellos no quieran aprender sino que es el Sistema educativo que los les da las herramientas suficientes para aprender. Yo aprendí Inglés porque estuve en Harmon Hall y no porque lo haya aprendido en la escuela del gobierno. (Entrevista 3)

MARIELA: **I have realised that in this type of education, it is unconsciously taught that what counts is the result, no matter how students get it. I mean, the teacher never asked or said a word about the homework**. I can remember perfectly that **he never taught us "he, she, or it", the colours or anything**.....I also remember the day of **the university entrance exam**, in which there was **only a small English section** and I answered it all, but **on my way out I overheard some students** commenting on the exam. One of them said that **he couldn´t answer it because he didn´t understand anything**...I thought 'oh my god', **maybe it is not that they don´t want to learn, but it is the educational system that does not provide them with enough tools to learn. I learnt English because I was enrolled in Harmon Hall [a language institute], and not from what I learnt in the public school**. (Interview 3) TR

MARIELA: Y ahorita yo si considero que tengo un mejor inglés en mi carrera y también en inglés general, porque después de ir al *World Economic Forum* y tener platicas fue como que... como tanto practicarle, ya no piensas dos veces si es *"Does o Do"*. (Entrevista 1)

Mariela: **Now I consider that my English is better in terms of my field of studies and English in general, after going to the World Economic Forum [as staff]** and having conversations with the participants. **It was like after so much practice, you do not think twice if it is, 'Does' or 'Do'.** (Interview 1) TR

From the above extract, it is clear that she believes that she has learnt English thanks to the private schools and language course at the language institute, which would not have happened if she had only studied at government schools. She is particularly critical of the educational system and raises some interesting points: (1) the educational system focuses on the outcomes, suggesting that what matters is the results, ignoring the learners; and (2)  students are not provided with enough tools, which implies that language learning is deficient at government schools are not well. She is a hard-working and responsible student (e.g. she carries her dictionary) because she is motivated to learn English, so she looks for opportunities to learn and practice English, such as asking her parents

to pay for the language course and putting up her name, at the university, to be a staff member at the international event. As a result, those experiences influenced her linguistic competence, and strengthened her self-confidence in the use of English.

**Example 4.4 Monica**

Mónica studied in government schools in the state capital, Chetumal, but her mother enrolled her in two language courses. The first one was at the age of seven, and the other one at 13. Although she was not very happy at the beginning in the first course, her words suggest the teacher had good teaching methods.

MONICA: **I started when I was little with English classes**, I remember **at the university of Chetumal** at the UQROO.. and my mom took me there**, I remember the first  English class and.. I hated it because I only wanted to play, other things, but my teacher was very good so like.. teach me like.. other things to not make it boring.** (Interview 1)

The passage shows that she does not like it at first, as little girls do, she preferred to play. She points out the relevance of good teaching, '*She always.. teach me like.. other things to not make it boring which has encouraged to continue learning.'* She took another course at the age of 13 at a language institute where her mother had studied [(see appendix 8).](#) Thus, those learning experiences have contributed to her continued learning.

However, some participants' views regarding language learning are not as rewarding as the ones above. Karina and Max [(see 4.3.2)](#) started learning English in their public secondary schools, and they are not very proficient in English. Their comments show they do not feel comfortable in English classes at the university, which suggests that they may experience language classroom anxiety. They are neither confident nor motivated to learn English.

**Example 4.5 Karina**

Karina does not openly express that she is rather resistant to English but for one reason or another, she has failed several English courses at the university. When asked about it, she said that she feels less capable than her classmates do. She believes they are better prepared because of having grown up in Cancun. This is not always the case, but it is how she perceives it. On the other hand, she calls

herself an autonomous learner because she is used to working out things by herself.

KARINA: Lo que sucede con ese idioma es que yo soy del Estado de México y allá comparado con Cancún el inglés para nada es una prioridad. En las clases de las escuelas de gobierno, nunca avance porque siempre había gente que nunca había tenido inglés, así es que los maestros siempre volvían a empezar desde el principio. Entonces, cuando llegué a Cancún me di cuenta de que aquí si se reconoce y enfatiza la importancia del inglés tanto en las escuelas públicas como en las privadas, lo cual tiene sentido debido al destino turístico en el que nos encontramos. Así es que tuve que lidiar con esto, me sentía en desventaja en comparación con mis compañeros… La cosa es que yo siempre he sido muy autónoma. Soy la clase d persona que está acostumbrada a trabajar sola porque si trabajo con otras personas me siento frustrada porque quiero llenar sus expectativas. Pero si lo hago sola me puedo concentrar mejor, repasar lo que necesito y si tengo dudas me paro a preguntar y me regreso a mi lugar. Me las he arreglado para pasar inglés cumpliendo con los mínimos requerimientos de la clase. No me siento capaz porque los maestros siguen con la clase con la mayoría y no repiten los temas. Así es que me siento impotente porque yo no tengo tanto tiempo para repasar inglés como mis compañeros. (Entrevista 1).

KARINA: **The thing with that language is that I am from the State of Mexico and when compared to Cancun, English is not a priority there at all**. In the classes in the government schools, I never went any further because there were always people who had never taken any English so, the teachers would always start from the beginning. Then**, I arrived in Cancun and I realised that here, in both public and private schools, they recognise and emphasise the importance of English**, which makes sense given the touristic destination in which we live. Thus, **I had to put up with this; I felt I was at a disadvantage compared to my classmates**……. The thing is **that I have always been very autonomous. I am the kind of person who is used to working on her own because if I work with other people I always want to fulfil their expectations, and I feel frustrated**. **But if I am on my own, I can concentrate better,** review what I need, and if I have any doubt I stand up to ask and go back to my place. I have managed to pass English by fulfilling the minimum requirements of the class.… **I did not feel capable because the teachers continue the class and work with the majority and do not repeat the themes.** Then, **I feel helpless because I don't have as much time as my peers to work on English**. (Interview 1) TR

When Karina refers to English, she uses the phrase *that language* showing distance from it. This way of speaking suggests that learning English has not

been a good experience for her. When she calls herself autonomous, she uses the term to say she prefers working on her own.  The data sounds affective in tone when she says, *if I work with other people I always want to fulfil their expectations, and I feel frustrated, I did not feel capable, I feel helpless*. It is possible to see how her EFL self-concept appears connected to her feelings and emotional responses about her performance when she compares herself to her peers.

To summarise, despite individual differences between participants, the extracts given here illustrate how language-learning dispositions relate to their language learning experience, psychological factors and expectations for the future. Moreover, the students point out the role of their personal interest and factors related to teaching. In general, the age of exposure, the type of school and teaching methods influence the students' beliefs and commitment to English (e.g. Luciano, Diana, Tamara, and Mariela) as well as their expectations for the future (Luciano, Diana, Tamara). Although these students have different personalities, they are goal-oriented to master the language, so they seek opportunities to do so, despite their circumstances (Tamara and Mariela). The students with less exposure to English (Karina and Max) however, feel uncomfortable in the English class, and seem to be affected by foreign language anxiety that makes them feel nervous and insecure regardless of the classroom environment. Both of them prefer working on their own, which suggests that they feel self-conscious. These factors hinder their desire to invest themselves in the foreign language that is essential in their undergraduate studies of Sustainable Tourism.

### 4.2.2 Parents involvement in language learning education

The participants' family directly or indirectly influences their language learning by investing in their education, providing some tools or hindering their chances. Parents recognise bilingualism as a symbolic capital and want to secure their children's access to good job opportunities. The following examples indicate the extent to which parents are involved in their children's language education (see 4.3.1), which sometimes involves an economic effort depending on their socio-economic status.

**Example 4.6 Tamara's family**

Tamara's father now has his own business, but he has had several jobs, some of them in the hotel industry in Cancun, where he worked as a bellboy and at the towel stand. Her mother is a housewife, but she also sells things to contribute to the family economy. They cannot speak English, but they believe it is important for their daughter to learn it. For this reason, they enrolled her in a private nursery school, paid for a two-year course at a language institute and helped with her expenses to go to England.

TAMARA: **My father wanted me to have more opportunities than the ones he had**... **Many times my dad has told me that he wants me to have what he didn´t have**. (Interview 2)

TAMARA: **I asked my parents to pay me an English course as gift for my 15th birthday** ... **I feel it was good doing it. And, it is not only the time, but the money invested, it was the course and the transport for two years from the town to Villa Hermosa [the capital city]..... the course was an investment and in something I liked, and I did it. I am *agradecida* [grateful] with my father to help with my studies.** (Interview 1)

TAMARA: Cuando supe que iría a Inglaterra hablé con mi mamá y yo le dije: ¿Lo ahorro de mi trabajo y me sigues mandando tu o yo me sigo pagando y tú lo ahorras o cómo? Y me dijo no, pues yo lo voy guardando. (Entrevista 3)

TAMARA: **When I knew I would go to UK I talked to my mom** and **I asked her 'Shall I save the money from my salary and you keep sending me money or shall I continue paying for my expenses and you save it or what? And she said, no, I am going to save it for you.** (Interview 3) TR

Tamara's family belongs to the lower-middle SES (AMAI, 2018), but they have supported her daughter. Her father has explicitly said that he wants her to *have more opportunities* and *have what he did not have,* that is, to be well prepared, which includes learning English. On the other hand, the fact that Tamara prefers a language course instead of a party is not typical behaviour for a teenager in Mexico since the custom is to throw a great party to celebrate the fifteenth birthday. What is more, other parents might have rejected the idea, firstly because it goes against the tradition; and secondly, because she has to commute to take the course. She acknowledges the value of her achievement by saying *'the*

*course was an investment and in something I liked',* she clearly demonstrates a positive attitude towards English and how important it is for her. Moreover, Tamara was awarded a scholarship for a student exchange; her parents supported her with money for her expenses. Thus, she recognises her parents' support and is grateful, so she always tries to do her best, not only in English, but also in her undergraduate studies, to make them feel that it has been worth doing it.

**Example 4.7 Luciano's family**

Luciano's father did not study a degree, but his mother has got a degree in Psychology. Everyone in the family speaks English, but he is the most proficient. Although they do not explicitly say it, they enrol him in bilingual schools and provide him with things that are useful to learn and practice English.

LUCIANO: In the subject of English **in my family I am the one who has the highest level**, but I may say that **all of them can get along quite well in an informal conversatio**n. I mean, with normal topics. (Interview 2)

MAGDALENA: Did your parents encourage you to learn English? Did they make explicit that it was important for you to learn English?

LUCIANO**: Just the normal,** my dad bought me **a book in English, the Titanic and I loved it.** They did not tell me to learn it but I was **in a bilingual school and they bought me videos that I could watch in English with subtitles or games**….I believe that **computers helped me in a large scale**. Since I was **in primary school and everything was in English**. In that time **there were no translations from English, so everything was in English and I needed to learn how to read and expand my vocabulary**, this **also** happened **with videogames**... All **these learning tools helped me** achieve the knowledge of English that I have today. (Interview 2)

Luciano's family belongs to the middle SES (AMAI, 2018). They influence him indirectly by providing the suitable learning conditions, such as enrolling him in a bilingual school and buying him things to practice it, *'they bought me videos that I could watch in English with subtitles or games', 'computers helped me in a large scale',* which facilitate and motivate him to learn English.  As he expresses *'I needed to learn how to read and expand my vocabulary'*, then *'these learning tools'* trigger his interest in learning English. His parents can speak it and they can afford it. Thus, Luciano regards having attended bilingual schools and having

been given the things that encourage him to learn and confidently use English as *'normal'*, since it started to become part of his life when he was in elementary school.

**Example 4.8 Mariela's family**

Mariela's mother used to work in the hotel industry, and her father is a driver for the city hall. They can speak English and sometimes speak it at home, which makes Mariela interested and curious, so she looks for opportunities to learn it, such as taking a flyer home for an English course at a language institute. Her parents do not appear to have much money, but they have made several efforts, to enrol her in schools where she can learn English, such as the bilingual school and the language course. However, those efforts do not last long, as illustrated in the extracts.

MARIELA: Yes, **my mother speaks English**. She always **worked in the hotels** and she learnt it when she was 17 or 18. **She thought it was important for us** [she and her sister] and we were in **kindergarten with English**....**Then, they wanted to buy a car and take us to a public school where a man give us a flyer with discount [for a language course]** and **they decided** to **take us**.... I don´t know I always thought it was interesting the language. Maybe is because **sometimes my father and my mother speak it when they didn´t want me to know** what they were saying (Interview 1).

Mariela's family belongs to the lower-middle SES (AMAI, 2018, but as they can speak English, they believe her daughter must learn it too.  However, they cannot afford it for a long time because they have other priorities: '*they wanted to buy a car and moved us to a public'* school, which is evidence of their tight economic situation.

**Example 4.9 Karina's family**

Karina does not provide much information about her parents, only that they wanted her to study administration. She did the admission exam for a government university in Mexico City, but she was not admitted, and she decided to travel to Cancun without her family's support. When she was in her last year at the university, she wanted to devote time to English, but her grandma died, her mother got depressed and moved to Cancun. This fact has made things difficult for Karina because her priority has been to work out the family situation, so English has been put aside.

KARINA: Mis papas querían que estudiara administración en la UNAM, pero yo no quería y ni quede. Entonces cuando me vine me dijeron, "¿Te toca a ti no? ¿Haber como lo logras?" (Entrevista 2)

KARINA: **My parents wanted me to study administration** at the UNAM, but I neither wanted to nor, was I admitted. Then, **when I came here, they told me 'It is up to you, isn´t it? Let see how you accomplish it'** (Interview 2)

The quotation suggests that Karina's parents are disappointed because she is not going to study administration, as well as with her decision to move to another city. They decided not to help her, and their words suggest that they do not have much faith that she will manage to live on her own without them. In the extract below, Karina explains how working and studying is not easy and how she takes decisions regarding her studies, in which English is left in second place.

KARINA: Yo salía del trabajo a las 2 y la clase de inglés era a las 4. Yo llevaba ocho materias y la clase de inglés era tres días de la semana más las conversaciones y las horas de SAC. No quería bajar mi promedio así es que prefería pasar las otras materias en lugar de inglés. Acostumbraba a ir a las primeras clases y evaluaba la carga de trabajo y decidía si podía con ello o no. Como consecuencia reprobé el mismo nivel de inglés dos veces y estuve a punto de ser expulsada por eso. (Entrevista 1)

KARINA: **I finished work at 2, and the English class was at 4**. I had eight subjects, and English class was three days a week plus conversations and SAC hours. **I did not want to lower my average, so I preferred to pass other subjects than English** [which does not have a grade but a fail or pass and does not affect the students' average]**. I used to attend the first classes, assessed the amount of workload and decided** whether I could cope with it or not. As a result, **I failed the same English level twice** and was about to be expelled because of that. (Interview 1) TR

She evaluates how demanding the English class will be and decides whether to take it or not '*I used to attend the first classes, measured the amount of workload and decided',* and knowing that not taking it means failing the subject. She has a tight timetable, so she prefers to use that time to catch up with homework from other subjects to keep a good average because English does not have a grade, just a pass or fail, and she thinks it will not affect her much. This suggests that she makes her decisions focusing on the time constraints and her priorities, underestimating the risk that not passing English could have. Hence, she did not only fail English but was at risk of being expelled. Then, in a later interview, her

situation is more relaxed in terms of work, studies, and expresses her desire to devote time to English.

KARINA: Siento que ahora ha llegado el momento de enfocarme en el idioma y decir este día voy a aprenderlo, y este día a practicarlo porque ya no tengo que hacer tantas cosas como hace dos años. (Entrevista 2)

KARINA: **Now I feel that the time has come to focus on the language**, and to say this day I am going to learn it, and this day to practice it **because I do not have as many things to do as I used to have two years ago**. (Interview 2) TR

She intends to improve her English, but her relaxed situation does not last much because of family issues. She sets up a small business selling food *'I decided to start a family business to empower my mother and brother'*, so her mother and brother can have a source of income. This might be why she thinks that the only way she can focus on English is to spend some time away from so many responsibilities. Thus, she thinks about the possibility of spending some time with her relatives in the United States English, but to be able to do that she needs her mother and brother to become self-sufficient.

KARINA: Decidí empezar un negocio familiar para empoderar a mi hermano y empoderar a mi mamá que son dos personas que dependen de mi soltarlos y regresar a mis objetivos. Yo quiero seguir estudiando, ahorita tengo la idea loca de irme seis meses a Estados Unidos con unos familiares para poder vivir el entorno escucharlo aprender, pensé que eso podía ser lo mejor porque aquí me absorbe todo me absorbe todo. Yo quiero hacer mil cosas y simplemente no puedo porque me tengo que dividir en muchas Karinas. (Interview 3)

KARINA: **I decided to start a family business to empower my mother and brother; they are two people that depend on me.** The aim was for them to become independent, **so I can meet my objectives**. I want to continue studying. **I currently have the crazy idea to spend six months with my relatives in the United States to be able to be in the environment, to listen and learn.** I thought that could be best because **here I am absorbed by everything. I want to do a thousand things and I simply can't because I have to divide myself into many Karinas**. (Interview 3) TR

The passage above illustrates that Karina has studied without her family's economic support and makes decisions constrained by her life circumstances. First, giving priority to other subjects to maintain a good average, and doing other activities e.g. the radio station where she feels at ease; and later due to

family issues.  When she finally has the intention to improve her English, she cannot do it because she thinks that it is more important to solve her family situation. Hence, far from getting family support, she ended up taking care of her mother, and later her brother, while studying and working full-time. English has therefore not been on her priority list.

To sum up, the previous examples suggest that parents' beliefs of the importance of English makes them invest in their children's education despite their socio-economic status. Diana's mother gives up her professional career to look after her daughter; Luciano's parents provide him with tools to develop and practice his language skills; and Tamara and Mariela's parents pay for private lessons despite their tight economic situation. However, Karina's parents seem to be the other side of the coin, having left her on her own during her first years in Cancun, where she eventually had to support them economically and emotionally. These factors suggest that she cannot focus on the target language because she sets priorities, deciding that her family comes first.

### 4.2.3 Family in the United States

Visiting family in the United States offers the students the opportunity to have exposure to English in a natural environment, so they can develop their language skills and gain self-confidence. By being able to interact with native speakers and use English in the real world, students engage with it and become more proficient. These experiences seem to provide them with a sense of belonging and identification with the American culture, given the possibility they have to travel and spend time in the neighbouring country afforded through contact with their relatives. Using the target language in the English-speaking country seems to positively contribute to the development of the students' identity as language learners and users.

Monica and Diana (see 4.3.1) have travelled to the United States several times to visit their relatives, usually during the summer vacations, and they usually spend over a month there. What follows is an account of the students' experiences in this English-speaking country and its impact on their language learning and use of the target language.

**Example 4.10 Mónica**

Mónica spends some summer holidays with her 'aunt', who is really her mother's close friend, but they see each other as family. She is Belizean and her husband and son are Americans, so English and Spanish are spoken at their home.

MONICA: **I have family in the U S** so every time I regularly... **go every year** so my mother's friend, is like my aunt.. She lives in Chicago but her husband doesn't speak a lot of Spanish so at **the first time when I was with him, we didn't know how to communicate** well because he uses another like vocabulary so sometimes **it was hard to understand him so I always try to learn more**. And he is like in business and **he tried to teach me some new vocabulary.** Yes, I think so. If I go next year **I want to do my internship there**..... Last year I went just with my sister, and **we stayed there like for a month**.... I remember the first time I went with my mom; I was fifteen and **one of the neighbours said I didn't sound like Mexican.** (Interview 1)

Her words illustrate that the interaction with the American encourages Monica's willingness to improve her English vocabulary and desire to go back, not only to visit them but also to have the experience to work over there. She is proud because she is told that she does not sound Mexican, which might mean she speaks with the American accent because she feels identified with that culture.

**Example 4.11 Carmen**

The experience of spending time in the United States is not always pleasant for all the students, as in Carmen's case, whose family moved to the United States for some time with the intention of setting there, to look for opportunities to have a better life, economically speaking, as in many other cases. The extract illustrates her contradicting feelings about her time in an American city.

CARMEN: We lived in Monterrey and **my parents decided to go to work to Texas where my uncle lives**. **He is rich and he convinced my parents** to go there....When **I was young and have 5 years**. We were there and **I thought oh my God a pool and in my house, and were five rooms. It's a dream, American dream**......When I come to the States, to Dallas. It was very typical, they only speak English, **we lived in a zone, rich zone where they only speak English and I was really unhappy**. I was five years and **I was scared**. I cried I wanted to come to Mexico, but my mother said no we need to stay here ok? so I said okay I started school but **it was a different school like the movies. I don't know anyone I could not understand anything, what the papers say** so I was very scared**. My mother try to help me stayed with me in all the classes**.....**I met a**

**girl, Ann** she speak to me and say hi in Spanish and try to make jokes, and **she said I speak Spanish and English.** Her parents are Mexican, but she born in the States, and **she helped to understand. In English the score was 7 but in Math I always have 10 because the Maths is the same**. (Interview 1)

Carmen is so amazed by her uncle's house that she uses the expression '*the American dream',* as she does not know any English. She has a hard time and is scared at school '*I could not understand anything, what the papers* say''. For her it is a frightening situation living in a strange country and not being able to understand a language, especially at that age. However, her mother and friend's support seem to have helped overcome the language barrier and she manages to study in the States, emphasising that she got 10 in Maths because they are the same in both languages.

The above excerpts illustrate the extent to which having the opportunity to be exposed to English and interacting in English with family support helps students to gain self-confidence and a sense of self-efficacy. By staying with their relatives they can also speak Spanish, and they move in American circles and places for short periods of time (e.g. Monica and Diana) and feel somehow protected. This fact suggests that they do not experience language anxiety because they are with the family and use English in a friendly and relaxed environment, which makes them enjoy the experience, motivating them to want to learn more. For Carmen however, it is not that easy because she has to use it in the school context, where she is on her own until she finds a friend who can speak Spanish and helps her to do the school tasks. Therefore, using the target language in the English-speaking country in such conditions can positively contribute to the development of the students' identities as language learners and users.

### 4.2.4 Academic and job opportunities related to English

The data shows the beliefs students hold regarding English for academic purposes and job opportunities. They all acknowledge the importance of English regardless of their degree or language proficiency because they are aware that knowing English is essential in academic and professional fields. Moreover, growing up and living in Cancun, they have learnt that English is a requirement for any job, from unskilled (e.g. gardeners, drivers, cooks) jobs to skilled ones, and that being proficient in English can give them access to better opportunities,

as some of them have experienced. Thus, students seek the available opportunities to study in English-speaking countries through scholarships and international exchange programmes. The following examples show the participants' views, attitudes and feelings towards their experience in such programmes as well as the academic and job opportunities they have achieved or lost because of English, as well as how or what seems to be the cause of their decisions.

**Academic opportunities**

Due to the trend in internationalisation, in tertiary education there are some programmes and agreements with other countries and universities such as Proyecta 100 000, and FUNED (Fundación Mexicana para la Educación, la Tecnología y la Ciencia) that support students who wish to study abroad. In order to be selected for such programmes, students are required to hold a B2 level, certified by an international authority.

Luciano and Diana were selected for the *Proyecta 100 000* programme in the United States. This programme is based on an agreement between the Mexican and the American governments in 2014. The programme grants around 1000 scholarships per year to Mexican students at government universities, so they can take an intensive English course as a second language at the American tertiary education institutions for a month.

Luciano and Diana ([see 4.3.1](#)) are pleased about their achievement of having been accepted in the *Proyecta 100 000* programme, since the scholarship is offered at all the universities throughout the country and there are many candidates and requirements to be met, such as a B2 level of English.

**Example 4.12 Luciano**

Luciano was very excited preparing everything to go to the United States. He told me (during an informal conversation) that he was going with other four students from Cancun. He is the one who planned and checked every detail for their trip, for example, how to get from the airport in another state, to university and interesting places nearby that he wanted to visit. However, Luciano's comments about his experience in the United States are not as enthusiastic as the ones expressed by Diana. He said it was interesting, but that he stayed in the residence

hall with other Mexican students, which seems to have made the experience less satisfying. Although the courses were good, they were not as advanced as he had expected. Hence, he sounds disappointed, which suggests that the experience in the United States did not meet his expectations. That is, given his language proficiency he might have imagined himself interacting with native speakers, like Diana who stayed with an American family, and taking more challenging courses. He feels that the experience was not that useful since he is determined to study a master's degree in Australia. With this in mind, he took the IELTS, he got quite a good result (C1), but a couple of months later he decided to sit the TOEFL to raise his score, and he obtained 97. Nevertheless, he is a little upset because the Australian university where he wants to study requires 100 points, so he plans to retake it.

**Example 4.13 Karina**

Karina's English proficiency level is low, despite her field of study, tourism, which in Cancun, is undoubtedly linked to English. During her studies, she relegates the English subject paying more attention to other subjects, priorities and interests e.g. the university radio station and family issues (see 4.21 and 4.2.2) that also involve time and effort. Nevertheless, she is aware that she needs to learn more English to be able to read journal articles and books.

KARINA: Estoy de acuerdo que el inglés es importante pero también lo son otras cosas. Aunque yo estudio turismo no creo que sea lo más importante….Me ofrecieron participar en el COP de Filipinas pero tenía que presentar en inglés así es que no pude ir por mi nivel de inglés y perdí la oportunidad. (Grupo focal)

KARINA: **I agree that English is important but other things are, too. Although I study tourism I do not think English is the most important**......... **I was offered to participate in the COP [Conference of the Parties for climate change) in Philippines but it had to be presented in English so I could not go because of my level of English and I lost the opportunit**y. (Focus Group 1) TR

The first sentence of the previous extract carries a rich meaning *'I agree that English is important but there are also other things that matter'* as Karina openly express English is not her priority. She recognises its relevance, but that she has other interests.  Nevertheless, it is because of English that she has missed out on

two international academic opportunities, as she would not take the risk, as a face saving strategy, which is illustrated below.

KARINA: Participe en un congreso en México como representante de nuestro estado y allí conocí a una chica que me invito a un congreso internacional en Sur Corea. Sin embargo, mientras llenaba la solicitud en línea me di cuenta de que había otros candidatos mexicanos mejor calificados que yo, así es que decidí desistirme. Sé que algunas veces nosotros somos los que nos ponemos los límites y esa vez lo hice porque nunca termine el procedimiento ... Necesito saber leer y entender artículos de revistas o libros que solo están en inglés. Estos algunas veces muestran estadísticas que puedo entender y algunas ideas pero algunas veces hay párrafos muy complejos, son tan complejos que es difícil entender la idea principal. Entonces este es mi objetivo con el idioma inglés. (Entrevista 2)

KARINA**: I participated in a congress** in Mexico [Mexico City] **as a representative of our state**, and over there **I met a girl who invited me to an international congress in South Korea. However, while I was filling in the online application form, I realised that there were other Mexican candidates who were more qualified in English than me, so I decided to give up. I know that sometimes we are the one who set the limits and that time I did it because I never completed the procedure**....**I need to be able to read and understand journal articles or books that are only in English.** These sometimes show statistics that **I can understand and some ideas, but sometimes there are complex paragraphs,** they are so complex that the main idea to understand. So, this is my objective with the English language. (Interview 2)

She is interested in participating in cultural and academic dissemination and she knows English can help to pursue her interest, enabling her to read academic journals and participate in an international congress. However, she does not feel competent in English and comforted by her friends' words she prefers to get involved in other activities rather than trying and struggling with the language, as she says in the extract below

KARINA: Si, en ese tiempo yo no me sentía bien conmigo misma. Esto es, yo siempre me he exigido mucho y no tenía tiempo de trabajar en ello o me olvidaba de hacerlo. Me decía a mí misma que era imperdonable que no pudiera hablar inglés. Sin embargo, mis amigos me decía que me calmara porque yo no solo estudiaba también trabajaba... Fue por ese tiempo que me di cuenta que también había otras cosas que me gustaban muchísimo, las cuales no quería hacer a un lado porque me ayudaban a mantener el balance en mi vida. Si trabajaba y estudiaba, necesitaba algo que me ayudara a deshacerme del estrés como el radio y otras actividades. Algo como el radio que me

encantaba y me hacía sentir más satisfecha y a donde conocía mucha gente interesante. (Entrevista 2)

KARINA: Yes, **at that time I did not feel good with myself**. I mean, **I have always been fairly demanding towards myself and as I did not have time to work on it or I just forgot to do it**, **I used to tell myself that it was unforgivable that I could not speak English**. Nevertheless, **my friends would tell me to calm down because I was not only studying but working**…. It was by that time when I realised that I also liked other things a lot, which I did not want to put aside because they helped me keep a balance in my life. If I worked and studied, **I needed something like a way to get rid of all that stress**, such as the radio and other activities. Something **like the radio** that I really love doing **that would make me feel more satisfied** and where I met many interesting people. (Interview 2)

The passage above illustrates her feelings and thoughts about English *'I used to tell myself that it was unforgivable that I could not speak English'*, which are shared with her friends who comfort her by attributing the problems into having to work full time. Her words demonstrate she is worried about English, but she feels overwhelmed and dealing with a difficult situation, and English is just one more problem more on her list. She decides to do something that can help her relax,

*'I needed something like a way to get rid of all that stress'* and that she is good at, such as the radio station that does not make her feel stressed and less self-confident, unlike English. Thus, academic opportunities are relegated because she does not feel competent enough in the language and she prefers not to make an effort given the life circumstances that seem to make her feel overwhelmed.

**Example 4.14 Tamara**

Tamara believes that being proficient in English will provide her with employment opportunities. She witnessed that her aunt could not get a promotion because of English, despite holding a master's degree. Tamara believes English is '*a key that opens doors*' regarding the opportunities it offers, so she wants to be well prepared to have more chances to succeed. For example, it is because of English that she got a part-time job at an American travel agency, related to her field of studies, permitting her to study and work; and she was also accepted in an exchange programme for a semester at a British university.

TAMARA: **English is the key that opens doors**. English **helps to get a job**, you can have good abilities but if you don't know English, **employers prefer someone with good English.** For example, **my aunt is an environmental engineer with a master,** and she is very good, but **she is not promoted for English**. She is now learning, but **if you can do it when are young you can have more opportunities**. It is not only money but also **you feel well with yourself for possessing certain abilities** and I think this is more like the reason why I want to do it. (Interview 1)

In the following excerpt, she explains the reason why she could not complete the procedure for the *Proyecta 100 000* programme because of a terrible family issue. However, she does not regret it, despite the time and money invested, as she believes it will be of use later.

TAMARA: **There was a problem with my birth certificate, my father was kidnapped, and I could not finish** for Proyecta 100 000. **I paid 500 pesos and the passport, but I think I can use it in the future**. (Interview 2)

Sometime later, she had the opportunity to apply for an exchange programme and she was selected because she was one of the few students who had the IELTS certificate and a passport issued for travel.

TAMARA: **I'm preparing things to go to Southampton**. **I have checked the clothes I need in a webpage.** So, **I am excited.** I'm going to take four basic subjects and critical thinking, they are 5. The most difficult is critical thinking, long essays and to think a lot, then. (Interview 3)

Magdalena: Why do you have some maths exercises in the computer at work?

TAMARA: **I applied for a call to compete for a scholarship. I passed the first filter but I have to present the GMAT (Graduate Management Admission) and the TOEFL so I am revising for the exams**. You know that I have applied twice to go to the States [twice]... But **I am excited about getting this one.** (Visit to her job)

In the extracts above, Tamara demonstrates her interest and intrinsic motivation to be proficient in English. Since she says *'you feel well with yourself for possessing certain abilities'* related to her perceptions of success and usefulness of English, '*the key that opens doors'.* These beliefs are what make her keep going and looking for opportunities to achieve her goal of being well prepared. Hence, her commitment to learning English has paid off because she has achieved what she wants, namely to study for a semester in the English-speaking country, a

part-time job (which I visited, [see appendix 9.1)](#) that allows her to work and study, and a place on the FUNED programme. This programme prepares students for the GRE (Graduate Record Examination) and TOEFL exams for the American universities to compete for a master's degree scholarship. She is a goal-oriented, organised and persistent student e.g. working and preparing for the GRE exam, that is, she uses her time wisely, and is not easily discouraged by the obstacles. Thus, her beliefs about the importance of English have made her become more proficient, which has paid off because she has a good part-time job related to her field of study, which is not easy to get in Cancun.

**Job Opportunities**

The students who are proficient in English are more likely to get a job. The following examples illustrate some of the participants' perceptions and job opportunities they have had because of English.

**Example 4.15 Luciano**

Luciano got a job in an ice cream shop in the touristic zone because he knows English. Although he has not used it out of class, he took the risk despite his introverted personality. Then, he did his internship in a company, in which English is used, and he was offered a job. However, he decided to resign months later because it interfered with his studies.

LUCIANO: **I worked in Häagen Dazs at the age of 18 at the hotel zone. The first time was difficult** as there was a flow of people. **I kept on practicing and then, I started feeling more confident. I hadn't used it in the real world just in class**. Also, **two months ago I was working in a company that specializes in freight forwarding so English was a must in order to communicate with logistics suppliers all around the world.** In the Freight Forwarder Company, I just used writing and reading, **communication was through mail. I tried once with a Chinese, but communication was not clear, so I prefer do it written**. **When I finished my internship, they offered me to stay,** so we could begin with a project. It started in November…. **I decided to end because my grades were getting low**. (Interview 2)

Luciano was hired in both jobs because of his command of English. The experience and practise in the first job helped him to become more fluent and self-confident. He decided to resign from the second job, although it is in the area that he wants to specialise because he is determined to maintain a good

average and obtain a scholarship for a master's degree in Australia. This fact suggests that he is future oriented because he has clear goals that direct his decisions.

**Example 4.16 Mariela**

Mariela describes herself as an analytical person who evaluates situations, carefully traces plans and tends to get depressed when things go wrong. She had not planned to work to in order to be able to maintain a good average and apply for a scholarship to study a master's degree. However, she accepted the job because it was related to her field of study.

MARIELA: Yo soy muy analítica y tiendo a analizar mucho las situaciones entonces me encanta hacer planes y yo sé que es algo no tan bueno porque cuando planeas las cosas y no salen, entonces uno se deprime porque no funcionan las cosas como uno quiere, porque yo ya había como que establecido que este invierno tenía que hacer mis prácticas. Lo que yo quiero ahorita o lo que me importa es terminar la escuela, quiero terminar la escuela. Soy una persona que se estresa mucho. Quiero salir con un buen promedio, quiero aplicar para una beca entera. Sé que piden mínimo 9...y tengo 9.3 y no quiero bajar de 9..... No había planeado trabajar, pero pues surgió, es una importadora. Esa empresa importa todo, pero principalmente vino. Yo estoy en el área de logística, recibimos las órdenes de los hoteles y vemos como se manda esa mercancía.... Si me gusta, me gusta mucho. (Entrevista 3).

MARIELA**: I am very analytical,** and I tend to analyse the situations a lot, then **I love to make plans** and I know this is not that good **because when you plan something, and it does not go as planned you get depressed**. I had decided to do my internships in winter. What I want now and what I care about is finishing school, I want to finish school. I am the kind of person who is easily stressed**. I want to finish with a good average; I want to apply for a scholarship. I know they ask for a minimum average of 9.. and I have got 9.3 and I do not want to lower it from 9**......**I had not planned to work but it just happened.** That company imports all sorts of goods but mainly wine. **I am in the logistics department.**....Yes, I like it, I like it very much. (Interview 3) TR

Mariela expresses her intention to get a scholarship for a master's degree. However, when there is an opportunity to participate in a free course with the FUNED programme, she chooses to devote her time to completing her studies and working because she finds it stressful having to cope with both of them.

When she finishes her degree, in an informal conversation, she comments that she has decided to continue working to contribute with economic support to her grandmother and is not sure about the master's degree. She therefore changes her plans due to economic and family issues and due to her analytical and perfectionist personality, which evaluates situations and likes to do things right. Although she never openly talks about her family economic situation, her decision to keep working suggests that she feels or needs to contribute to the family economy.

The data indicates the link between the participants' dispositions and their decisions regarding English, driven by the perceived opportunities in the academic and work fields, as well as external factors and their personality traits. Most of the participants have access to academic and job opportunities due to their command of English and continue searching for more options. They take international exams for certificates of English and seek to participate in the international exchange programmes at the university and pursue an international scholarship for a master's degree in an English-speaking country. They have high expectations for their future and get prepared to be suitable for the master's degree in an English-speaking country. For example, they have all taken the IELTS exam, Diana (C1) and Tamara (B2) want to study in England, and Luciano (C2) who scored 97 in the TOEFL IB, wants to study in Australia. Mariela on the other hand, has attained (B2), but she has put it off, which indicates that she has the desire, but is forced to choose between her plans and the family situation. Luciano, Diana, Tamara and Mariela applied for the Proyecta 100 000 programme, but Mariela and Tamara did not finish the procedure due to family issues. Tamara persevered in her attempt and got the scholarship to study in UK and is preparing to get a scholarship for postgraduate studies abroad. In contrast, Karina overlooks the academic opportunities, despite her interest and previous work on the theme because of English. She relegates English, giving preference to other activities, in which she feels more confident and capable and which do not involve English, despite her academic and cultural interests.

### 4.2.5 Work experiences

The experiences in using English afforded to the students by their jobs influence their dispositions and attitude towards the language, usually in a positive

manner. However, it can also have a negative effect. The students' experiences are illustrated in the examples below.

**Example 4.17 Carmen**

Carmen is an independent user, rated B1 in the TOEFL exam. Her English has been sufficient to get jobs in the tourism industry, mainly in travel agencies, where she has had native speaker bosses and the working environment is an English-only space. She does not report to have problems carrying out her work responsibilities, but she feels insecure when talking to the native speaker boss, as expressed in the passage below.

CARMEN: In Nexus tours **in the customer service and the excursions department only speak in English. Usually we only speak in Spanish in the lunch time**... **If you speak in Spanish in front of him [the British manager] he will ignore you.** (Interview 2)

MAGDALENA: Have you found it hard being in an English-speaking environment?

CARMEN: Hmm, I think, **a bit nervous when I speak English, I forget some words. I try to read some books to sum in English and to learn more words. I think I don't have the level to make the conversation with a British person. I don't feel secure. I** get a bit nervous **especially in front of my boss**. ...he's from England and, for example, **I thought that the better English you can learn is from England so I get very nervous** I will feel very bad if he say you don't speak English, I don't understand you. (Interview 2)

MAGDALENA: And has that ever happened?

CARMEN: No, but **I'm afraid it will happen**. (Interview 2)

The extracts show that Carmen's experience in the work setting with a native speaker boss produces language anxiety. She is afraid that she will not meet her boss' expectations of her language proficiency, which has not occurred, but makes her feel insecure.

In an informal conversation she talks about a bad experience in her internship with another British boss because her fear materialized, what she was fearful of happens with this boss.

CARMEN: **I'm doing my practices in the weddings department**...**The professional ambience is not good at all. My boss is British, and she gets mad because sometimes**

**I can't understand some words in English, and I ask her and also the German**. **They get angry and want me to work more hours.** (Informal conversation?)

The extract shows that she is unhappy at work and she seems to be mistreated because of her English. She openly admits she has lost confidence '*Now I feel I can´t speak English*' and she is mistreated. Therefore, the interaction with native speakers in the working environment is very stressful for her because she feels she should be more proficient than she is. These experiences affect her in both ways, motivating her to try to improve her English, but also make her feel insecure and anxious, affecting her linguistic competence.

### Example 4.18 Diego

Diego sounds self-confident about himself and his English knowledge and proud of the hotel where he works.  He not only does what he likes doing, sports, but he is also making money and interacting with English-speaking tourists. He studies international business, so money matters to him. Although he does not need to work, he is offered the job after doing his internship in the hotel, and decides to take it to save money to set up a business with some friends.

DIEGO: **I work in the Moon Palace hotel. I don´t see it as a work** because **I create my own luck because I get paid for do exercise**, so that is not a work for me. **I train people in the resort mostly women, European and half of them are from England**. We have now like 9000 people in the hotel. **I think is the biggest hotel in Latin America**. I get paid $10 000 for what I like doing, training. (Interview 3)

The student's words illustrate that he is happy in his job, which involves sports and talking to the international guests.  His comments indicate that he does not have any problem regarding English, and he enjoys the experience because he can do what he likes and make money.

Therefore, it seems that the kind of relationship and experiences that learners have when they interact in an English working environment influences their linguistic confidence. Talking to the tourists and talking to a native speaker boss is not the same, the latter is more demanding, making people feel anxious and insecure. On the other hand, the reasons why the students work also seem to affect their perceptions of the situation e.g. Carmen needs to work to support herself and Diego to have extra money to set his business.

## 4.2.6 Opinions about the United States and the Americans

Students' attitudes, beliefs and dispositions about the United States and the Americans seem to influence the students' desire and interest to learn the language of the dominant country, since two of the resistant students share negative attitudes toward them. Daniel and Max [(see 4.3.2)](#) have grown up in Cancun where American tourists, visitors and residents appear to have more privileges and status than locals e.g. access to the beach and waterfront properties. Nevertheless, there are other students who do not seem to care about that, and identify with American culture.  The participants' perceptions about Americans and the United States are illustrated in the following examples.

### Example 4.19 Daniel

Daniel dislikes the fact that people seem to learn English to please the tourists, and he considers this behaviour as *malinchista,* which has a negative connotation associated to la *Malinche*, a Mexican who helped the Spanish Conquerors.  He recognises the relevance of the international language but points out that people do not speak Spanish properly before attempting to learn another language, as illustrated below.

DANIEL: Aquí la gente es muy malinchista demasiado, entiendo que el inglés es muy importante para un pueblo turístico, o si quieres ir a otro país ¿no? …la mayoría de las personas se desviven por el hecho de aprenderlo como por agradarle a otra gente en realidad, entonces a mí, a mí no me gusta … si con trabajo aprendemos realmente hablar español y hablarlo correctamente, vamos a andar aprendiendo a hablar pues, correctamente el inglés? (Entrevista 1)

DANIEL: **People here are too '*malinchista'*** [hatred or disdain for one's own country]. **I understand that English is very important in a touristic zone, or if you want to go to another country**. However, I have realised that **most people go out of their way to learn English, like, to please other people**. **So, I don´t like that**. I mean **if we find difficult to learn to speak Spanish and speak it properly**, **how come we are going to learn to speak well, properly in English**. (Interview 1) TR

His words show that he thinks a language should be spoken well, and that it not easy to achieve, '*if we find difficult to learn to speak Spanish and speak it properly, how come we are going to learn to speak well, properly in English*', which suggests that he might probably find English difficult to learn. Then, Daniel

148

goes on to express his views about the United States. He is disappointed that the United States is Mexico's neighbour and main commercial partner in the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), and that this agreement has not been beneficial for Mexico. He believes Americans are responsible for some of the problems, not only in Mexico, but in other parts of the world.

DANIEL: Desgraciadamente nuestro país vecino es ahora sí que los Estados Unidos por qué parte de los males también ha sido eso de este país …… si revisamos el tratado libre de comercio los que salimos perdiendo. Fuimos nosotros siempre al final de cuentas a Canadá no le interesa, ¿Por qué? Porque Canadá tiene tratados con Europa…. nos tocó la peor parte de ese tratado y aunado a los males manejos que hemos tenido de los gobernantes. Siempre nuestro gobierno como de lame botas de Estados Unidos y realmente Estados Unidos es el causante de los grandes males en el mundo…. no soy de esas personas que ven a los extranjeros y les hacen tanta fiesta…. el mismo mexicano es el que hace que de pronto el extranjero se sienta con poder de sentirse más. (Entrevista 1)

DANIEL**: Unfortunately, the United States is our neighbouring country** because that country is **responsible for some of the problems in this country**…**. If we check the free trade agreement, we are the ones who are losing. We have always been.** Canada is not interested in the end. Why? Because Canada has agreements with Europe….**we have got the worst part of that agreement along with the improper management of the rulers we have had. Our government is like licking the United States' boots**, and the truth is that the United States is responsible for the greatest problems of the world … **I am not the kind of person who meets the foreigners and tries to please them**…**the Mexican is the one who makes that the foreigner feels powerful and better than him.** (Interview 1) TR

Daniel has a strong opinion about the United States that seems to affect his desire for language learning. He studies international business and his academic performance is quite good, except for English. He does not feel very motivated to study it as he perceives Mexican interests are always subordinated to the Americans in every way such as in the case of the NAFTA, due to bad negotiations of the Mexican government. He likes reading, and he seems to be well informed, so he is critical and questions the relationship between the two countries, which tends to be disadvantageous for Mexico. These views make him feel disappointed provoking his discontent and rejection in terms of learning the language of the dominant country.

**Example 4.20 Bernardo**

Views about the Americans do not always negatively affect the students' language learning. Bernardo is keen on playing video games online. He associates Americans with drugs and chauvinism and calls them radicals, maybe repeating somebody else's words. He compares Americans to some Mexicans who seem to be to the other extreme, which is illustrated below:

BERNARDO: **I think of Americans from what I have learnt through the news, TV and video game**s. **The Americans are closely related to drugs and patriotism**. Americans have that **crazy patriotism that even guide them to stupid things**, **during 9/**11 on the news I saw most of the interviewed people say things **like "someone must pay for this**", those words are the kind of stupid things that I say, or like the people who **"guard the frontier to save the country"**. In México stupid people doesn't care so much about their country. I **think that it´s easy to blind a Mexican from his patriotism**. (Interview 2)

Bernardo's perceptions have been developed mainly by watching the news on TV and through interacting with Americans in online video games, and in Cancun, although he does not mention that here (informal conversation). He thinks Americans are incapable of expressing their own thoughts and that some Mexicans can be easily fooled, given that they do not protect their country, for example, when they sell natural resources for money. He is critical with respect to Americans' sense of patriotism, which seem to be shared by his father, as shown in his comments.

During the visit to Bernardo's home, his father expresses a harsh critique of the United States because of the way they handle their international affairs, interfering with other countries, making money out of the war and hiding what is not convenient for them.

PAPÁ DE BERNARDO; Estados Unidos es un asco, la verdad, como país …su relación exterior con todos los demás países es un asco, son unos oportunistas que viven de los demás, viven de la guerra que es lo peor, lo más absurdo y lo más triste …la hipocresía de Estados Unidos, muchas noticias no lo revelan. ¿Por qué? ¿Quienes consumen la droga?......EL problema es que quieren meterse a cambiar la vida de todos y nunca ven la suya. (Visita a casa de Bernardo)

BERNARDO'S FATHER: **The truth is that the United States is disgusting as a country**… **its relationship with other countries too. They take advantage of the other countries**

**and live off the war, which is the most absurd and sad…the hypocrisy of** the **United States, a lot of bad news is not revealed because who are the ones who use drugs?** The problem is that **they want to interfere to change everybody's life and never look at theirs.** (Visit to Bernardo's home) TR

Bernardo´s father disapproves of the way the United States handle international affairs, interfering in domestic issues of other countries and manipulating the information. He raises the point of drug trafficking and Americans being the main consumers. Although Bernardo seems to agree with his father's opinion, this has not interfered with his language learning dispositions, because his personality is extroverted, and he loves talking in English and Spanish. Hence, speaking English widens his chances of meeting more people, either online or face to face.

The students' views (e.g. Max and Daniel) suggest that they are concerned with their identity as Mexicans and that this has an impact on their negative attitude towards using English in Cancun. For them, it is like being positioned as inferior to the Americans, pointing to relations of power, which suggests that their views also involve the relationship between Mexico and the United States. Americans are not the only native English speaker tourists in Cancun, but they constitute the largest number and those with which the students relate the most when using the foreign language.

Thus, their Mexican identity positions and excludes themselves from belonging, participating and aligning their efforts to invest their energies in the foreign language that is closely linked to the Americans. Bernardo's language learning however, does not seem to have been affected by his ideas or his father's criticism of the Americans.

### 4.2.7 Physical objects that enhance the language learning experience

The students increase their language input and practice by means of objects such as books, computers, iPads and smartphones. They engage in digital environments to be updated on the latest trends and news, listen to music and watch videos, preferring to read and listen in the original language, English (e.g. Luciano, Mariela). Therefore, English has become part of their life given that they prefer to do some of their daily activities in English instead of Spanish, as the extracts below illustrate.

**Example 4.21 Luciano**

Luciano demonstrates the extent to which English is part of his daily life activities by means of his digital devices such as his mobile phone and iPad, as illustrated below.

LUCIANO: **The first thing I do when I wake up is to check the news in twitter in my mobile phone,** they are **50% are in English and 50% in Spanish**. **At school when I have some free time, I open my iPad or when I am having lunch, I do some web surfing** and **watch videos of cars and motorcycles mostly in English, the songs are mostly in English**. In my home **it has helped me a lot, some information I cannot find in Spanish I look for it in English and I can understand it very easily**. (Interview 1)

He acknowledges how confident he is about his English and his level of engagement with the language to make it part of his life. In the extract below. Luciano [(see 4.2.2)](#) states that he became interested in it as a child to be able to fully exploit his computer potential. The desire to make the best use of his computer motivates him to learn English because it is a tool for achievement. He goes on and offers the reasons why he prefers to read the information or watch videos in English.

MAGDALENA: Why do you browse the internet in English?

LUCIANO: **Because I cannot find that information in Spanish or if I find it in Spanish is not the same quality.** For example, the **videos are not well done, the audio is not clear. The information is short or it is not updated**..... **I look for something I need or want**. **I also follow a video blog from an Australian motorbike rider who also gives tips for travelling in Australia**. (Interview 3)

The extracts indicate that he believes that the information in English is more accurate and updated, and that English allows him to find information on his hobbies and interests. Thus, these facts imply that through the language he identifies with the English-speaking community and uses it as a native language user does.

**Example 4.22 Diego**

Diego is interested in music and films, so he browses for information and watches old films on his personal computer and smart phone. He is keen on all kinds of music, particularly rock.

DIEGO: En San Google busco toda clase de información acerca de la música y bandas de rock, principalmente en inglés…… Las que han vendido más discos en la historia.…También me gusta ver películas. Veo las películas de Chaplin en mi computadora con subtítulos. (Entrevista 1)

DIEGO: (In San Google, **I search for all sort of information about music and rock bands, mainly in English**… The ones that have sold more records in history …. I also like watching movies. **I watched Chaplin movies with English subtitles on my computer**. Interview 1) TR

He seems to do it confidently and is driven by his interest in music and films, so he makes use of his computer, smart phone and the internet to track his objects of interest.

**Example 4.23 Mariela**

Only two of all the students report being fond of reading books in English, Diana who started reading English in the States [(see. 4.3.1)](#), and Mariela. The latter is so interested in a series of books that she follows the writer on social media and realises that she can understand English.

MARIELA: **I got interested in one that is a series of books** named The Mortal Instruments, I was obsessed with those books. In the **internet I realized that the author had Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr and when I checked those pages, they were in English. For my surprise, I understood every word of what she was writing and that was the little push that I needed to started reading books in English and since then I have not stopped**, now **I actually prefer to read books in English instead of reading books translated into Spanish**. (Language learner biography)

MARIELA:.. **I have bought books in Amazon in the United States sometimes**. (Interview 1)

The above passage indicates how one thing leads to another. Her interest in the book makes her want to know about the author and being capable of understanding it gives her confidence to read books in English. She even starts ordering books from the online store because she wants to read them in the original language. That is, she decides to invest her money in having the books in the original language, English.

Students expand their opportunities to learn and use English to pursue their interests by using digital devices and books across diverse contexts and physical settings. This highlights their dispositions to use the language in the real world as well as the extent to which they are engaged with English to do so. Thus, they talk about their activities and refer to them as normal activities in their daily life that is, using English in a real context.

## 4.2.8 Imagined communities

The students participate in imagined communities they want to belong to in their present and future life. They do so by assuming imagined identities through video games and social networks, in which they navigate, communicate and learn not only the language, but also about other cultures. Their participation in these communities influences their desire and dispositions to learn and use English as illustrated in the following extracts.

**Example 4.24 Mónica**

Mónica studies international business because she wants to travel, live and work in another country to learn first-hand about other countries. She is determined in her purpose. Illustrated by the fact that she has started searching for information on the procedure to be able to live abroad.

MÓNICA: **I'd like to travel and see like the relationships in other places**. .That you can see what's happening in other countries and not just on your own country. **Maybe you can have opportunities to go to other countries, to do business and things like that and living here and there.  Maybe being the manager in another country. I have like investigated in some sites.** You need to apply first for a job and then they give you like a residence. I think that as far as I know, it is difficult. (Interview 3)

Her desire to live in another country has made her take decisions such as studying a degree in international business to help her achieve her goal. She does not only imagine herself living in a foreign country, but also as being able to work in a managerial position, which she is aware might not be easy. Hence, this imagined community influences her decision of what to study, and English is essential for international matters, in order to achieve her objective.

**Example 4.25 Diego**

Diego trains basketball with a professional team and talks about it as if it were his job. In the team there are players from other countries and the coach is American, so English is spoken during the training sessions.

DIEGO: **My work as pro baller is play basketball, I need to speak English, all coach instructions are in English and most of the players are foreign**. (Language learner biography)

In the above extract, it is worth highlighting that he talks about it as it were his job. He calls himself a pro-baller but is not formally one of them. Although he has been invited to join the team, he has not accepted because of his studies. Thus, this fact suggests that training with the team makes him feel like a part of them. Then, in an interview, he raises the point that by training with the basketball team he is so into English that he says words in English unconsciously when he gets to the university.

DIEGO: Ya muchas veces ya ni pienso en español, luego vengo del entrenamiento y llego a la escuela y estoy pensando en inglés, luego hablo con alguien y se me sale el inglés. Con los jugadores las indicaciones son en inglés, entonces se va quedando. (Entrevista 1)

DIEGO: **Many times, I do not even think in Spanish. When I come from the training, I get to school, and I am thinking in English, then I talk to somebody and English comes up**. With the players, the instructions are in English, so it remains. (Interview 1) TR

The above extract shows the extent to which Diego is affiliated to the basketball team and how English is used as means of communication. Moreover, he expresses his desire to become a professional player in a European team because he does not plan to stay in Mexico.

DIEGO: No quiero pasar toda mi vida en México. Quiero que el equipo sea como un trampolín para ir a otro país y jugar profesionalmente. He hablado con mis padres acerca de esto.…Quiero estar en la Federación Internacional de Basquetbol. Yo no me gasto mi dinero en fiestas, digo salgo con amigos pero no gasto mucho. Lo ahorro como un hombre de negocios, así que esa es la diferencia, hacer dinero sin tener que trabajar. Supongo que como un apoyo para ser profesional, así es que cuando termine la escuela me iré a Europa. (Entrevista 2)

DIEGO: **I don´t want to spend all my life in Mexico. I want the team to be like a springboard to go to another country and play professionally.** I have talked to my parents about this.…I want to be in the International Basketball Federation. I don't spend my money partying, I mean I go out with friends, but **I don´t spend much money. I save it like a businessman,** so that's the difference to make some money and not having to work. I suppose like a bridge to making a pro in Europe, so when I finish school I will go to Europe. (Interview 2) TR

It seems that training in the basketball team, where he interacts with players from other countries, makes him believe that he can also become a professional player in Europe, so he has even started saving money. He studies international business, and stresses that he thinks like a businessperson. Thus, English is essential for his current team and for his plan to be part of the imagined community, namely the professional basketball team that allows him to communicate with other players.

**Example 4.26 Bernardo**

Bernardo is keen on videogames and belonging to such imagined communities has led him to invest in EFL to be able to interact in them and become a good player. He started as a child and points out that he does not spend much, just on the basic license. The extract below illustrates what attracts him to video games.

MAGDALENA: How old were you when you started playing video games?

BERNARDO: **Maybe 9 years old something like that. There is a lot of races stuff and funny stuff.** I have never paid like per month. I just don´t like it. **I like to pay the license, and that's it**. (Interview 2)

It seems he became interested because through playing video games he learns about other races and 'funny stuff' things he would not otherwise know. Thus, playing video games develops his commitment and desire to learn more English,

BERNARDO: **I had a need to understand English, in order to make my experience with videogames better, I used to play almost every kind of games, so there was a variety of commands, orders, verbs and stuff that I needed to know**…. **During online videogames people doesn´t take racism too serious, it´s more common, but less mentioned, and if it is mentioned it's just for fun or stereotypes**, not for the normal causes of racism, like hate or obliteration…replacing words that I don´t know with other words that "can fit" makes me feel pretty skilled in English. (Interview 2)

The extract shows that he is willing to learn English in order to enhance the experience. He also sounds satisfied with his success in being able to convey the meaning of unknown words. He also emphasises that the online community does not take racial issues so seriously but as a game, and so does he. He focuses on knowing English to be able to play and interact in the video games community.

**Example 4.27 Luciano**

Luciano enjoys not only games, but also the opportunity this interaction offers him to listen to different accents and interact with people from other cultures.

LUCIANO: **I like playing video games; most video games are in English. There is a big community from many parts of the world and they communicate in English**, I cannot speak to them but I can hear them speaking English in many accents….. I suspect it is not very expensive a headset, but maybe I don´t feel talking to them. (Interview 1)

As illustrated above, despite the fact that Luciano expresses he has the opportunity to listen to different English accents, he communicates through writing. When asked about it, he says he does not feel like talking to them, which suggests he does not feel that confident about speaking in English with native speakers. Hence, the video game community allows him a level of interaction where he feels competent, and he takes advantage of it.

**Example 4.28 Tamara**

Tamara uses social network sites to communicate with a friend in another state who is an English teacher, and she belongs to an online community in which several languages are practiced. She is aware that through these digital communities she can have further practise English further, as well as make new friends from all over the world and learn from their cultures.

TAMARA: **I have a friend who lives in Chiapas and studied English language teaching** and when **we communicate face to face, by mail or WhatsApp we do it in English. I am also in a group on Facebook called 'language exchange skill trade'** where **people can ask for help in a specific language, offering assistance in return with their native language. Then, I have friends from Egypt, Poland, Scotland, Malaysia, Chile, India and Indonesia to practice. I talk to them by Facebook or WhatsApp** and it's so funny having friends from other places. (Interview 2)

The extract above shows Tamara is interested in practising English and interacting with other cultures. This might probably due to her undergraduate programme of sustainable tourism, and she is willing to study abroad in an English-speaking country. Thus, interacting in the online communities offers her the extra practice she needs to feel more confident in English as well as familiarising her with themes from other countries that she would not otherwise learn.

**Example 4.29 Karina**

Karina is not very confident about using English, but she is fond of politics and social issues, so she navigates in some social networks recommended by her friends. She does not participate but she likes reading social criticism and jokes on the web sites.

MAGDALENA: ¿Estas consiente que usas algunas palabras en inglés, *check list, swapping y reality check*? ¿Por qué crees que es?

MAGDALENA: Are you aware that you use some words in English, *check list, swapping and reality check*? Where do you think these come from?

KARINA: Bueno, de mis amigos, series y redes sociales, por ejemplo de 9gag memes que son críticas sociales y chistes, yo aprendo mucho de allí.

KARINA: Well**, from my friends, sitcoms and social networks, for example, in 9gag memes that are social criticism and jokes, I learn a lot from there.** (Interview 2)

As the extract shows, she has started picking up English words and using them without being that aware of it. This fact suggests that she understands and appropriates the words by visiting and reading the social networks without actually noticing it.

Through the students' affiliation to transnational communities, their communication extends outside their local sets of relationships in their present life and imagined identities that influence their future expectations. The learners have different levels and ways of interaction within their reach, enhancing their experiences, possibilities and dispositions for social interaction in English. Thus, in such communities, they participate and negotiate the identity they want and with which they feel more comfortable.

## 4.3 Two stories

This section presents the trajectories of two students. Diana and Max, to indicate the relationship and connections between their language learning dispositions, and the causal powers that might not be obvious (see appendix 12 and 12.1). That is, their trajectories have been selected to discern relations and connections in their dispositions to take the language or do not. The letters in bold type represent the nodes and relationships.

Diana studies international business, and Max, sustainable tourism, both of them being good students in their academic programmes. However, they differ in terms of what they believe, think and do in English. Diana is a competent user of English who holds an IELTS certificate C1. She has travelled to the United States and looks forward to studying and living in an English-speaking country. Moreover, she loves learning languages and meeting people from other cultures. Max, on the other hand, has an A2 level of English, is resistant to English, and rejects the idea of working at a hotel. He is interested in research and academic activities and he has managed to pursue it with his knowledge of English and the help of other resources such as the dictionary and the internet.

The following narratives provide an important and complementary means of understanding what seem to be the structural influences that give rise to students' beliefs and dispositions towards language learning and use, which are mapped in the text.

### 4.3.1 Diana

The first part of Diana's story shows the role of the family regarding the choices she has made, drawing on her life experiences and opportunities. Her dispositions towards English seem to come from her family upbringing and having been exposed to English at a young age (OPPORTUNITIES), which I learnt when I visited their home. She has attended bilingual schools and it soon became natural for her to use English (EDUCATION). She is a responsible, hard-working student (PERSONALITY TRAITS), which I have evidence of, as she was my student. She decided to study international business because she loves travelling and meeting people from all over the world (CONSCIOUS REASONS). Even though she is quite proficient, she has continued working on her English and looking for

opportunities to practice it, as she wants to study a master's degree in an English-speaking country (PROJECTS). This desire might have arisen from both the experience of staying with her relatives during summer vacations in the United States (TRAVEL TO USA) and from her father's advice (FAMILY). His father wants his daughters to be able to live abroad to get better life opportunities than the ones he and his wife have had in Mexico (EXPERIENCES), His views are illustrated in the extract below.

PAPÁ DE DIANA: Yo siempre le he dicho a las dos, que si tienen la oportunidad de irse de México que se vayan, pero no es porque yo menosprecie México ¿no?, porque en México tenemos al menos de dónde venimos la costumbre de la familia, los amigos, las amistades las visitas y la vida que percibo en Estados Unidos, por decir, lo que conozco, no hay esa convivencia, hay trabajo-escuela, trabajo-escuela y si cenan en su casa......pero en cuestión de oportunidad económica o laboral pienso que es mejor ahí que México, ¿porque? pues por muchos factores, el sistema de gobierno, eso es lo que considero que afecta ¿no?, la delincuencia, ósea a mi ese lado, como todo, si hay pero es en menor escala. (Visita a casa de Diana)

DIANA'S FATHER: I mean, **it has been rather difficult to get what we have managed**.... **I have always told my daughters that if they have the opportunity to leave Mexico they should go**. It is not that I underestimate Mexico because **we have strong family values and customs,** friends are also important, and **I know that life in the United States**. For what I know, is more like between school and home and work and home ....... But **in terms of the economic and working situation it is better than in Mexico.** There are many elements involved such as **the government system**, which in my opinion **is the problem**, isn´t it? There is also violence over there but to a lesser extent. (Visit to Diana's home) TR

Diana's father has encouraged his daughters to look for opportunities to live abroad (BELIEFS) because of his personal professional experience. He is a lawyer, but his wife has always worked, so this suggests things have not been easy for them economically speaking, and that they have struggled to maintain a socio-economic status (CONSTRAINTS). They are professional middle-class people with aspirations and strong beliefs about how to bring up their children and the life they want for them (DESIRES). He has travelled and has relatives in the United States (FAMILY IN THE STATES), so he believes his daughters may have a better life quality there despite this involving other values and customs. Although he knows that not everything is perfect in the States, he still believes they have more

possibilities there, and he blames the government for the lack of opportunities in the country (ECONOMIC BASES).

Diana's mother did not want her to be in day care, so she gave up her career as a lawyer to look after her daughter. She started teaching, and Diana attended nursery school in the same school. Diana´s parents are from a neighbouring state of Cancun and do not know much English but being aware of its importance they make decisions where to learn it, as is shown in the excerpt below.

MAMÁ DE DIANA: Soy abogada igual que mi esposo, pero pues yo no quería que fuera una niña de guardería. Entonces yo empecé a buscar trabajo …y es cuando me vino la inquietud, pues voy a dar clase para llevármela conmigo. ..entonces en el colegio interamericano empezó ella con su interés … las maestras me decían "tu hija tiene una pronunciación maravillosa" pero no le di la mayor importancia. Cuando ella sale del kínder le dan su primer diploma por tener un inglés mejor que el de todos los demás…yo no tenía idea. En Mérida llevamos inglés pero un inglés que solo lo llevas en la prepa por una hora dos veces a la semana en la secundaria igual… en el Interamericano daban lo que se llama el *pre-first*, es llevar un año todas las materias en inglés, .. ella podía entrar a primero de primaria y no llevar el *pre-first*, pero su papá y yo quedamos que pues lo que queríamos es que ella tenga un buen nivel de inglés, entonces la dejamos …. a unas niñas decidieron llevárselas sus papás que porque era un año que se iba a perder el dinero. Nosotros no lo consideramos así, al contrario lo consideramos que si era puro ingles pues iba hacer mucho mejor para ella. (Visita a casa de Diana)

DIANA'S MOTHER: **I am a lawyer like my husband, but I did not want her to be a day care centre girl**. So, I started looking for a job… and **it is when I had the idea, well I am going to teach so she I can take her with me**…. **at the Interamericano school she started with her interest**… … **the teachers would tell me "your daughter has wonderful pronunciation"**, but **I did not pay much attention**. It is **when she finished her nursery school that she got her first certificate because of being the best one in English**. I had no idea, **in Merida we had English, but the kind of English that you have in high school,** one or two hours per week as well as in secondary. **In the Interamericano they had the pre-first, a year in which all the subjects are in English**… she could go directly to the first year of elementary school and not take the pre-first, **but we wanted her to have a good English level, so we left her**…. **Some parents decided to take her daughters out of the school because they considered it was a waste of money. We did not see it like that, on the contrary, we considered that if it were only English, it would be much better for her**. (Visit to Diana's home) TR

The passage illustrates Diana's parents and the decisions they took regarding her upbringing and language education, such as giving up a professional career and enrolling her in the pre-first, extra school year before elementary school, compared to what the other parents think (EDUCATION). Diana's mother is a lawyer, but she also holds a certificate in education, so she got a job as a teacher. Diana attended the same school. Diana's mother raises the point that teachers used to say she was good at English and talks about her willingness to learn, saying that *she started with her interest* and sounds proud of her achievements (DISPOSITIONS). Although their parents do not speak English, they wanted their daughters to learn it (LINGUISTIC CAPITAL) and made an effort to pay for the extra-year of English, which is usually done in the bilingual schools. They do not only believe it will be useful for Diana, but that she will take advantage of it (BELIEFS).

Diana remembers that she started studying English when she was three years old, and that she was enrolled in bilingual schools from nursery school to high school (EDUCATION). Her mother was always close by helping her, for example, to do her homework until she acquired the habit to do it on her own (FAMILY).

**Since I was in kindergarten, I have attended bilingual schools**. …. My mom was a teacher and when her classes were over, she would come pick me up in the same school and then **we would go home, eat and every time, ah. .always after we ate I had to do my homework**. **It was do your homework and then you are free** and do whatever you want to do. First, she would sit with me until I learnt; **I made it a habit and didn´t need her.** (Interview 3)

The extract above illustrates Diana's mother was involved in her daughter's education, instilling discipline and good study habits into her (FAMILY). Furthermore, her mother makes her aware that she is privileged compared to other students who have complex and difficult family dynamics.

DIANA: Yes, since I was little. **That's something my mom tells me every day, like you are lucky seriously because not everyone has had the opportunities that I've had**…… Yes, I know that many children's parents work, and they even have to look after their brothers. (Interview 2)

For Diana's parents, their daughters are the most important thing, and they try to equip them with what they need so they can be well prepared for the future (FAMILY VALUES).

DIANA'S FATHER: Para nosotros lo más importante son ellas, lo que hacemos es para ellas, no tanto para nosotros porque.. Bueno, lo que quiero decir es que nosotros queremos que ellas sean felices, su inglés, trabajo, preparación es para que ellas puedan triunfar en la vida. (Visita a casa de Diana)

DIANA'S FATHER: **They are the most important thing for us, what we do is for them**, not so much for us because well, I mean, we think that **we want them to be happy, their English, work, preparation** is for them so they can be successful in their life. (Visit to Diana's home) TR

DIANA: **We have this family joke** that **whenever we correct my mom´s pronunciation** or a word in English, she says, **do you want me to tell you how you learn English**? And one day I said yes, and she told me 'Well, I was young and decided to enrol you at **schools'** and it was **a long, long story to remind us that is because of her that we could learn English, and she is absolutely right.** TR

Her parents consider that if their daughters are well prepared, English being part of that preparation, it will help them in their future life, so they will have more chances to succeed and lead happier lives (BELIEFS). They seem to be a family where the parents are in charge and pull together. An example of this is that when Diana's mother had to work in the afternoon, her dad would pick them up from school and give them lunch. Moreover, Diana's mother always encourages and supports them (she and her sister) to take risks and try whatever they want (FAMILY EMOTIONAL SUPPORT).

Diana, therefore, sounds grateful and recognises that it is due to her parents' support and her mother's guidance and closeness that she has got the bases and stability needed to devote her time to studying and preparing for the future (FAMILY EMOTIONAL AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT).

Diana's parents also expressed that they are proud of her their daughters' achievements and they feel that everything they have done for them has been worth it.

DIANA'S FATHER: Siento que no todos los padres son como nosotros, que tienen hijas como ellas, bien portadas, hasta ahora por lo menos lo que yo sé jajaja. Entonces, yo creo

que ha sido por mí pero más por ella porque ella es quien ha pasado más tiempo con ellas que yo. (Visita a casa de Diana)

DIANA'S FATHER: **I feel that not all parents are like us, who have daughters like them,** well behaved, up to now as far as I know, ha ha ha. So, I believe that it has been because of me, but I think that it is more because of her [Diana's mother] because she is the one who has spent more time with them than me. (Visit to Diana's home) (TR)

On the other hand, Diana has used English to interact with native speakers because she has travelled to the United States several times. She and her family often visit her relatives and stay with them for a month during the summer holidays, which helps to improve her linguistic skills and has developed her enjoyment of reading in English while staying in the English-speaking country (FAMILY IN THE STATES).

**During elementary school I often went to Dallas, Texas on summer vacation** with my parents and my sister **to visit other relatives** and stayed with them **for over a month**. While being **there I practiced my English skills**. Mostly because **I went with my cousin to the library and we checked out books and movies we found interesting. It helped me learn grammar and vocabulary, but it also woke up my interest in reading.** Now, **I still read books in English and watch movies with no subtitles**. With my relatives, at home, we spoke Spanish but when I was, for example, **with friends of my cousin,** we would go to visit, and, then **they spoke English** and that's how I practice with them. **We used to play or anything we did; it was in English.** (Interview 1)

In the above extract, Diana is aware and clearly explains how summers spent in the States have contributed to an improvement in her English skills because of interacting with the Americans, reading, watching films and playing (OPPORTUNITIES). Furthermore, her parents pushed her to translate for them in a nice manner, in order to encourage her. Although she was shy, there was no option and it helped overcome her shyness (PERSONAL TRAITS).

….several times when **my parents had questions at the airport of if we got lost or we didn´t know where to go. It would be me and I was little, I was twelve years, thirteen. I am shy, at that age I was very shy.** To speak to Americans, **just because I had, I need to do it.** Right now, I don´t mind asking for directions, where to go or how much is this or things like that, I don´t mind…. And **my dad used to joke about it. Anywhere we go, we have to take you because you are the one.** (Interview 1)

Thus, Diana's memories suggest that she had good practice while in the States, enabling her to become a competent user, such experiences triggering her desire to travel. She is aware that English is the international language, useful for travelling and for her professional career. She has only travelled to the States but seems to have high expectations for visiting other countries (DESIRES).

**I believe that by learning languages I can communicate with people from all over the world. Knowing English is well, the most important language** and **all my life I've been learning English, but I still want to keep learning. English is important no matter where you go or where you are**. You should know English; it doesn't matter your major either. (Interview 2)

Diana has been exposed to English since she was a child, but she has also studied other languages such as French, Korean, and Mayan (OTHER LANGUAGES). It seems that her love for languages is not only driven by her desire to travel, but also to learn about other cultures. For example, she got interested in the Korean language because of a friend who showed her the video of a Korean singer, and later on because of a school project (RELATIONSHIPS).

**I got interested in Korean because** on my freshman year in high school one of **my friends showed me a music video of a Korean artist and I instantly loved it. The music, the voice**, which at the **time I couldn't understand anything, and I started thinking about how a language be so different than mine**. I remember later that same day **I started looking for interesting facts about Korea and its culture just fascinated me**. Also, during that same year **my high school did a Model United Nations (MUN) and by faith I was chosen to be a candidate representing South Kore**a so I had to do an extensive research about the country and the more I learned the more I liked it. (E-mail)

The extract illustrates Diana is curious and resourceful (PERSONAL TRAITS). It was because of another friend that she applied for a scholarship to study a business degree in Korea when she was in the third semester at the university (RELATIONSHIPS). There was a problem with her father's birth certificate, so she cannot complete the procedure on time. However, she seems to have taken it well (PERSONALITY TRAITS).

**I learned about the scholarship from one of my best friends**, she applied for it and told me **we should apply together**. I wanted to study there because it is a scholarship funded by the Korean government and includes the first year of Korean language and 4

years for a bachelor's degree. Therefore, I'd have more opportunity to learn about the culture. (E-mail)

The way she speaks demonstrates that she has an intrinsic interest not only for English but for other languages. Hence, she has become multilingual because she believes that knowing the language of a country eases the communication and enables you to learn more about the culture of a country (INTERESTS).

I love learning new languages. I have a FCE Certificate by Cambridge, an A2 French Certificate and a Diploma for accomplishing level 1 in Korean language and took a course in Mayan language at my university....... by learning other languages, I can be able to communicate, relate with people from other countries, not only English speakers. (Language learner biography)

She believes learning English is 'a must' for all students regardless of their major, and she finds it difficult to understand those students who do not care about it (BELIEFS). She can clearly understand its relevance in terms of studies and professional careers. This fact suggests that it might be due to her language user identity that she takes ownership and responsibility for language learning. (IDENTITY).

Diana's desire to continue practicing English makes her look for opportunities to do so.  At the university she does her social service in the SAC (self-access centre) because she wants to continue practising, share what she knows with her peers and help them, as well as doing something worthwhile (VALUES).

**That's also another reason why I am here because I want to teach them, help them in any way I can** because I don't **know it's satisfying to know that I am doing something** when others don't have the same opportunities I did. I also motivate them to learn. It's like a reward. I don't know **a way to give back what I have**. (Interview 1)

She applied for the *Proyecta 100 000* programme (Mexico- United States governments programme) and got a scholarship to study for a month at an American institution (LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE). She considers this experience as a great success because she says, '*I won',* and mentions it several times during the interviews and that it had a '*huge impact'* on her language development (EXPERIENCE). She is satisfied by her performance at the American university by highlighting the fact that she is treated as an equal; at the

166

university, like an American student, and like one more member of the family in her host family (IDENTITY).

 **An experience that had a huge impact** in my English-learning process was last November **when I won a "Proyecta 100,000" scholarship** ….**to study in California State** University Monterey Bay **for one month. It was a wonderful experience** from which I had the opportunity to learn English from native speakers…. **I lived with an American host family**, the parents and 3 small children. **I had to talk in English all the time** because they didn't understand Spanish. They are very nice and caring and **I still keep in touch with them**. **I learned different aspects of American culture that are contrasting with my own culture**. Recently, **I applied for a summer job at Walt Disney World and got accepted**. So I will be working in the United States for 3 months. **It will be another opportunity to improve my English skills and meet new people from all over the world. I feel very excited and look forward to it**. (Language learner biography)

She raises the point that she learns not only English, but also about the American culture through interacting with them (INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS), so she feels well accepted and is still in contact with them. Therefore, driven by her desire to be in the States (IDENTITY), she learns about the job opportunity and follows a long procedure, and is accepted to work at Disney. (Students from all the country apply and only a few are taken on).

The first time she works in a Disney store as a shop assistant and lives with American girls she reports having a great time, despite working the night shift. This is because she achieved what she wanted, namely, to be in the English-speaking country and use the language all the time (PURPOSE).

In Disney I was in the merchandise section, **so I demonstrated and sold Disney products to guests from all over the world**…I **lived in an apartment; my roomies were all American,** three were from Puerto Rico and three of them from the United States and me. **I was the only one from Mexico.** It was fun…**It was dark, and the cars were passing by, but you didn´t feel like if something could happen to you**. Because sometimes **there were several of us going out but others I was on my own, but I didn´t feel insecure**……**I could never dream to do that in here** [Cancun], **walk 15** or 20 minutes **at one in the morning, no way**. (Interview 3)

From her experience in Disney, she enjoys meeting people from all over the world in a relaxed environment and she does things she does not normally do in Mexico, such as walking on her own or with friends at night and taking a bus.

(Her parents always take her everywhere, and she has never taken a bus in Cancun. (When I visited her home, she was learning to drive). Therefore, she wants to live the Disney experience again, and works there the following summer (EXPERIENCES).

But **it was so nice to be with everyone in the back in the kitchen with everyone** else because **they were always laughing and telling jokes**. And sometimes they even made fun of the guests we were outside because they would ask these silly questions… sometimes **we would go party, we would go to the parks**, or I don´t know just to have fun**.. I was never bored, not at all**. And from one of the locations you could see the parade**. The electrical parade at night at 3 p.m. I used to see it every day**. **Now that I am here, I say, oh it's the time of the parade**… **Now I have to get used to living with my parents again and all that**. (Informal conversation)

Whenever Diana talks about her experiences in the States, the scholarship and the two summers in Disney, she points out that she feels sorry about coming back and misses her time over there, for example, *Now that I am here I say, oh it's the time of the parade.* She always says she had a good time, even working in the kitchen, where she would not work in Mexico. These views suggest that she feels at ease and part of the community, moreover her family is very traditional and living in the States allows her to have more freedom (IDENTITY).

I think I will go to England, but I still need to do some research. (Informal conversation)

After Diana finishes her studies and goes to Disney for the second time, she gets a job the first time she applies for one, as a concierge at a five-star resort (because of her linguistic competence). While working at the hotel she contacts an agency that helps her with the paperwork to apply for a master's degree at two different British universities (PROJECT). She is accepted at both of them, but the government changes the regulations and that master's degree is not included. Fortunately, she is also enrolled in the FUNED programme that prepares students for the GRE (Graduate Record Examination) and TOEFL exams for the American universities. Although things have not always gone as she expected, she maintains a positive attitude, looks for other options, and is open to alternative plans (PERSONALITY TRAITS). For example, when her master's degree programme is excluded from the government scholarships, she remains in the FUNED programme and is selected to study in Canada for a month to continue preparing for the GRE and the TOEFL exams (PROJECTS).

Diana dispositions, therefore, have been heavily influenced by her middle-class professional parents' upbringing, whose aspirations have afforded their daughter better education and life experiences, so that she can have access to more professional and life opportunities, ideally in a developed country (ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION). Moreover, Diana's organised, disciplined and perseverant personality (PERSONALITY TRAITS) has also contributed to her achieving her goals. She has spent one month studying in the United States and Canada, and two summers working at Disney. As for the scholarship to study her master's degree in the English- speaking country, she does not have it yet. However, she has not given up and continued seeking for a way to get it. An example of this is that she presented the IELTS again to raise her score and increase her chances of obtaining the scholarship (PROJECTS).

**4.3.2 Max**

Max strongly questions the use of English in Cancun (PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT) and he is resistant to learning and using English (NEGATIVE ATTITUDE). His dispositions towards English seem to have developed from his life experiences, which include his language learning experience, his stay in Costa Rica, and his insights into the mismatch between what sustainable tourism implies and the reality of the Cancun (EXPERIENCES). He seems to be socially oriented (PERSONALITY TRAITS) because he says he studies sustainable tourism to help improve the environmental and social practices as well as the economic development of the destination and the country (PROJECTS).

He looks, and is Mayan, and employers in Cancun often prefer to hire western-looking employees, although they might not be as qualified if they can speak some English (EMPLOYMENT). Hence, his resistance to English suggests that he might have suffered discrimination, or he might feel he does not have much opportunity to develop professionally, which has made him more reluctant to the American culture and consequently to English (BELIEFS).

Max's parents studied a technical career in Accountancy, but they have encouraged and supported their children to study at university, so the four of them hold a university degree. He is the youngest, and out of all of them, his sister is the only one who has taken private English lessons. However, all of them

work in an area related to their field of study and seem to be doing quite well despite their lack of English (FAMILY).

Mi hermano mayor estudio ingeniería telemática y cuenta con su propia empresa...mi hermana estudió administración y es asistente de Recursos Humanos en el hotel…. Y mi otro hermano es ingeniero civil y es supervisor de obras en una inmobiliaria. Mi hermana es la única que cuenta con cursos de inglés. (Entrevista 2)

**My eldest brother studied telematics engineering, and he has his own company**….**my sister studied administration, and she is the human resources assistant at a hotel.** And **my other brother is a civil engineering and he supervises construction sites** for a real estate company. **My sister is the only one who has taken an English course**. (Interview 2)

Max has a negative opinion about English courses he takes at the university (BELIEFS). He prefers the way English is taught in high school, where he was able to work on his own on the computer, to the one at the university where he has to interact with students from other semesters (PERSONAL TRAITS).

MAX- Es que en el CEVETIS las clases eran también intensivos de 6 horas 3 días a la semana, pero eran también con audio, video, ejercicios o traducir algo en la computadora durante la clase, no extra. Y en la universidad la clase de inglés es 2 horas, pero en las que se integran estudiantes de diferentes semestres y es como cierta apatía de todos de querer estar con sus amigos. Y es ahí cuando profesor intenta hablar, pero todo mundo está hablando porque nadie se conoce y están *habloteando* y entonces se pierde el interés por aprender, al menos yo no me siento en confianza de hablar. Y entonces el maestro no se adapta a las edades de cada uno sino como que lo trata de generalizar y viene el conflicto a quien le pongo más atención o como lo resuelvo. …. Si con grupos con tantos alumnos, la maestra Margarita si hacía que se callaran y daba la clase, si no se puede dar clase con tanto ruido…. Estuve un semestre en Costa Rica y ahí los estudiantes escogen que idioma estudiar porque inglés no obligatorio. (Entrevista 1)

MAX- The thing is that **in the CEVETIS** there were also intensive classes, 6 hours, three days a week, but **they also included audio, video, exercises or translating something in the computer during the class, nothing extra**. Moreover, **at the university,** the English class lasts 2 hours, but **there are students from different semesters, and some students want to be with their friends, so there is a certain level of apathy**... And, it is there, **when the teacher tries to speak,** but everyone is talking because **no one knows each other, so everyone keeps talking. Then, the interest to learn is lost, at least in my case** because **I do not feel confident enough to talk.** So then, **the teacher does not**

**adapt the class for the different ages and applies the same for everyone**; then, the conflict, **whom I pay more attention to or how I can work this out**. ..... Yes, **with large classes with so many students,** the teacher Margarita made them keep silent and gave the class. Otherwise, **it cannot be possible with so much noise**...... I spent a semester **in Costa Rica,** and I like the fact that at the university and **the students can choose the language they want to study because English is not mandatory.** (Interview 1)

In English class, he finds it difficult to interact and deal with his peers, who he describes as noisy, *'everybody is talking'*, disrupting focus in the class *'the interest to learn is lost'*. The lack of class management of some teachers makes him feel nervous, *'whom I pay more attention to or how I can work this out',* which indicates language anxiety (FEELINGS). This might be because he felt in control working on the computer at his preparatory school, as opposed to having to interact in class (PERSONALITY TRAITS). Moreover, he dislikes having English imposed as a second language, and wishes he could choose a foreign language he would like to study (EDUCATION).

Nevertheless, he manages to pass his English courses by meeting the minimum requirements, for example, completing the number of hours required in the SAC, and avoiding the speaking practice, which implies interacting in English. He is also reluctant to English because he believes there is a mismatch between the discourses of preserving and promoting our culture and the fact that English is mandatory at the university, also given that there are several language courses, but Mayan is not included. He suggests that our culture is relegated instead of being promoted, so he strongly disagrees with having a foreign language imposed on him (REFLEXIVITY).

Yo iba al SAC solo por cumplir. Digo, a hacer el número de horas que pedían en el SAC y la mayoría de las veces leía un libro. Creo que era tener un maestro como el que tuve en el segundo nivel desmotiva, así como el hecho de que empecé a estudiar sustentabilidad. Entonces empecé a cuestionar la razón por la cual el inglés es obligatorio y a las autoridades no les importa promover cultura maya. ¿Cómo es que se ofrecen varios idiomas extranjeros y no se enseña el maya? De acuerdo a la sustentabilidad, nuestra cultura debe ser promovida lo cual incluye la lengua. (Entrevista 2)

**I would go to the SAC just to meet the requirement. I mean, to do the number of SAC hours required and most of the times I would read a book.** I think that having a teacher like the one I had in second level was demotivating as well as the fact **that I**

**started studying sustainability. Then, I started questioning the reason why English is mandatory and the authorities do not care about promoting the Mayan culture. How come that several foreign languages are offered and Mayan is not being taught?** According to sustainability, our Mayan culture should be promoted including the language. (Interview 2) (TR)

Although he studies tourism, he would hate working at the hotels or travel agencies because of having to interact with tourists. In the same extract, he repeats twice that he does not want to interact with tourists, which suggests that he might have had a bad experience, or that he is not willing to communicate with tourists because he is not confident enough to do it (PERSONALITY TRAITS). He wants to specialise in an area where he does not need much English. He does however, recognise that he might have to read it to get updated (CONSCIOUS REASONS).

Yo odio trabajar en hoteles o agencias de viajes. Me refiero a tener que interactuar con turistas. A mí me gustaría trabajar en algo relacionado con turismo pero en el área de planeación. Me encantaría trabajar en una consultoría especializada en el desarrollo de destinos turísticos sostenibles. Me atrae más lo que está detrás pero no el trato con turistas. Un maestro de ingeniería ambiental me invito a trabajar con él en un proyecto así que pude aprender lo que esto involucra, así es que puede saber de lo que se trata y me dije a mi mismo "esto es lo que yo quiero hacer así es que no necesito el inglés". Aunque al final tienes que verlo  para obtener la información, pero no para los turistas". (Entrevista 1)

**I hate working at hotels or travel agencies**. I mean, **having to interact with the tourists**. **I would like to work in something related to tourism but in the field of planning**. I would love to work **for a consultancy firm specialised in the development of sustainable tourist destinations.** I am more attracted to what is behind but **not dealing with tourists.** An environmental engineering teacher invited me to work with him on a project so I could learn what this involves, and **I said to myself 'this is what I want so I do not need English'.** Although in the end you have to use it to get information, but not for the tourists. (Interview 1) (TR)

He criticises Mexico's position, which privileges English-speaking tourists, made up, for most part, by Americans; some of them having their vacation homes or living in the city, without needing to speak any Spanish at all (PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT). He is critical of the attitude of Americans who do not care about

our culture and take advantage of the resources, so in his opinion, the tourist industry should diversify to other markets in Cancun (REFLEXIVITY).

Siento que México se adapta demasiado a los Estados Unidos debido a los turistas americanos que vienen cada año. Entonces nosotros somos los que nos adaptamos y les hacemos las cosas fáciles cuando son ellos los que se deberían adaptar a nuestro país. Esto es algo que tengo en la cabeza y que no puedo parar de pensar. No es que no me guste el inglés pero es como que no hay cooperación. ¿Cuál es el punto de ser parte de la manada que habla inglés? ¿Por qué es que no podemos hablar otros idiomas o abrir otros sistemas turísticos? Por ejemplo, Brasil, Rusia y China….Bien esas pequeñas cosas son las que se las pasan dando vueltas en mi cabeza. (Entrevista 1)

I feel that **Mexico adapts too much to the United States** because of the **American tourists who come every year.** So, **we are the ones to adapt or make things easier for them** when they should be the ones to adapt to our country. **This is something in my head and that I cannot stop thinking about**. It is not that I don't like English but, it is like no cooperation**. What is the point of being part of the herd who speak English? Why is it that we cannot speak other languages or open other touristic systems?** For example, Brazil, Russia and China…. Well, those little things are the ones that keep going around my head**, people live here, and they do not speak Spanish**. (Interview 1)

Consistent with his beliefs he decides to go to Costa Rica, where he participates in the students' exchange programme (REFLEXIVITY). He likes the fact that English is not mandatory in Costa Rica. Hence, he questions the reasons why students at his university cannot choose which foreign language they want to study (PERSONALITY TRAITS).

Estuve en Costa Rica el año pasado, sin embargo, no exigen hablar inglés, se puede optar por otro idioma que se imparte por seis semestres y al finalizar cada uno se da un tiempo de prácticas. (Entrevista 1)

 Last year I **was in Costa Rica**, however **they do not force us** [students] **to speak English**, **other languages can be chosen** and taught for six semesters and at the end there is a time to practice them. (Interview 1)

He is an outstanding student in every subject except in English. He is interested and actively participates in research and dissemination activities (INTERESTS). In one of these events, he is criticised for not knowing English, but as he has evidence of this particular participant's work, he proudly replies that people should not dare to show off about their English when they cannot correctly write

in Spanish. He believes that before learning another language, we should first use our own language properly; pointing to his Mexican identity that is not always supported (IDENTITY).

Acabo de ir a un congreso de turismo a Acapulco y un chavo de aquí de ingeniería me pregunta, 'oye tú hablas inglés' y yo le dije no, y me dijo 'mediocre, eres un mediocre' y yo dije 'si, si lo soy pero no soy parte del montón' y así como que se sacó de onda. Y como teníamos que llevar nuestro trabajo escrito le pedí su trabajo, a mí me encanta el español, en su escrito en menos de un párrafo le encontré 10 faltas de ortografía y yo no sé si por mi enojo le dije 'eres tú más mediocre por hablar inglés y no saber bien español que yo por no saber inglés, tu dime quien es el mediocre'. Yo fomento eso primero aprende lo tuyo y si no sabes lo tuyo no eres nadie. Muchas personas me dicen "eres un ingenuo"'. (Entrevista 1)

**I have just been to a conference of tourism** in Acapulco **and a guy from here, from engineering asked me, 'hey do you speak English? I said I did not, and he went 'you are a mediocre'** and I told him **'yes, yes, I am but I am not part of the crowd'** and he was like baffled. And as we had to take our written work, I asked him to show it to me. **I love Spanish, and in paragraph of his work he had at least 10 spelling mistakes.** I don´t know if it is because I was angry, **I told him 'you are more mediocre than me because you learnt English but you don´t know Spanish well. I challenged him to tell me who the mediocre one was. I said, I believe in learning what is ours and if you don´t know what yours is, then you are nobody. Many people say, 'you are naïve'.** (Interview 1)

He wants to make the difference and help the Mayan communities. He is co-founder of *Voces Ambientales* (Environmental Voices), an association formed by Mayan students who have graduated to promote environmental education and develop environmental projects in alliance with the government (PROJECT). Their mission is to make children and youngsters aware of the importance of taking care of the environment by being socially responsible and creating sustainable communities (IDENTITY).

En Voces, la misión es educación ambiental para todas las comunidades, si y hay sectores en específico, niños y jóvenes, fomentamos la participación, la justicia, la equidad, y con ello se resuelven los problemas sociales. Bueno desde mi punto de vista, yo lo resuelvo así; desde los problemas sociales contribuir a la parte del medio ambiente, tenemos cursos y talleres cursos de educación ambiental. (Entrevista 3)

In Voices **the mission is environmental education for all the communities and it is particularly aimed at children and youngsters. We promote participation, justice, and equity because this is the way to solve social problems. Well, from my point of view**, I work it out like this, **starting from the social problems to then, contribute to the environmental ones.** We have courses and workshops. (Interview 3)

The excerpt above illustrates that he is socially oriented because of his commitment to educating the new generations in terms of social and environmental issues (VALUES). He also participates in projects with the professors of his faculty and attends congresses and dissemination activities (INTERESTS). In order to be updated he has to read academic articles in English, and he has managed to get by with his English knowledge and with the help of a dictionary to understand, having even attempted to write an executive summary. Although he is aware of his weakness in English, he does not make an extra effort to work on it (ATTITUDE). The fact that he considers Spanish and English to be very different might relate to his identity (IDENTITY).

Hasta ahora, el inglés sólo lo he utilizado para analizar lecturas porque me interesa el área de la investigación. Es un hecho que el inglés es el idioma de las mejores investigaciones que existen en diferentes campos de las diferentes ciencias que existen. Es ahí cuando he tenido que leer y apoyarme con un diccionario especialmente cuando existen tecnicismos.... lo que me encanta es la investigación, me gusta estar leyendo no libros, pero documentos de divulgación. De hecho, la semana pasada estaba haciendo un documento, un resumen ejecutivo que me pidieron en inglés, lo traduje literalmente... pero había muchas deficiencias en el ...se me hace muy difícil, muy complicado son dos cosas muy distintas el inglés y el español. (Entrevista 3)

Up to now, **I have only used English to analyse readings** because I am interested in the area of research. It is a fact that the best research in the different fields of the different sciences is in English. It is then **when I have needed to rely on a dictionary particularly because of the technical words**. …. What I really like is to be reading, **not books but journal articles.** In fact, **last week I was doing a document, an executive summary in English, I translated it literally. But there were many errors**… **I found it very difficult and complex, English and Spanish are two different things**. (Interview 3)

When he finishes the university, he gets a job but keeps looking for one in the area of touristic planning or consultancy. He ends up working in a hotel in the environmental area, and it takes him over a year, but he succeeds in getting a job in an environmental consultancy firm recommended by a former teacher

(RELATIONSHIPS). He can get by with his English in small talk when he travels. At work, they share his beliefs because they have a 'Speaking Spanish only' policy. The rationale behind this policy is to get tourists more involved with the culture of the country, as offered by the Global Code Ethics for Tourism (VALUES).

Para la parte de *speaking* hasta ahora no la he utilizado a profundidad. Comprendo y hablo lo necesario para una conversación básica. En el hotel nunca utilicé el idioma; teníamos una "política" en la empresa, de que los extranjeros que vinieran se les atenderían en español, con el fin de que el turismo/turista comprenda y también se involucre con el idioma del país que visita (sin importar si hablara idioma diferente al inglés) Y también cumpliendo con el Código Ético Mundial del Turismo que promueve el entendimiento y  respeto mutuos entre hombres y sociedades; así como la cultura de los países, incluyendo el idioma  para que el turista se adapte a las condiciones culturales del destino. (Entrevista 3)

**Regarding speaking, I have not used it much. I understand enough to make a small talk.** At the hotel, I never used it; **the company 'policy' was to speak Spanish with the foreigners to make them get more involved with the language of the country** they are visiting; no matter if their mother tongue is other than English. **This policy** is consistent with the Global Code Ethics for Tourism that **promotes mutual understanding and respect between people and societies**; as well as the culture of the countries, including the language, so the tourist must adapt to the cultural conditions of the host country. (Interview 3)

Max can understand a little Mayan, but does not speak it, so he communicates with his grandfather through signs. Living in Cancun, his parents considered it was more important for their children to learn Spanish, and they did not have much contact with his Mayan relatives. In other words, as Mayan is not used in Cancun, they felt that speaking Spanish would make things easier for their children (BELIEFS).

Entiendo un poco del idioma/lenguaje Maya debido a que tengo orígenes étnicos, mi familia (abuelos, bisabuelos, padres, tíos) hablan este idioma, pero mis papas consideraron que el español era más importante…Mis papas son de Tizimín. Llegaron hace mucho a Cancún, pero se fueron a trabajar en la cd. México y yo me quedé con una tía que no habla maya y no tuve convivencia con ellos. De la familia solo mis, papas, hermanos y tía viven en Cancún y no tuve convivencia con el resto de la familia. De hecho, el abuelo por parte de mi mama ni siquiera habla español, ni lo entiende…yo lo entiendo,

pero no lo hablo mucho y a señas…como introvertido, no extrovertido, me gusta hacer muchas cosas, yo solo me tengo que poner límites. (Entrevista 1)

**I understand Mayan language a little due to my ethnic origins, my family (grandparents, great-grandparents, parents, uncles) speak this language, but my parents consider Spanish was more important.** .. My parents are from Tizimin [a Mayan town in the neighbour state of Yucatan]. They arrived in Cancun a long time ago, but they went to work to Mexico City, and I stayed with an aunt who does not speak Mayan. Thus, I didn´t interact much with them. We, my aunt and my parents and brothers, are the only ones who live in Cancun, so we have not had much interaction with the rest of the family. In fact**, my mother's father can neither speak nor understand Spanish….. I can understand Mayan but I do not speak it so we communicate through signs…..I am like introverted, I am not extroverted; I like to do many things so I have to set limits to myself**. (Interview 1) TR

There seems to be a mismatch in Max's discourse, on the one hand he criticises the fact that Mayan is not taught at the university, on the other hand, he has never used his opportunity to learn Mayan from his family. He describes himself as introverted and someone with many interests, so he has to self-regulate to accomplish them (PERSONALITY TRAITS). It seems that this might relate to his interest and participation in social and environmental issues (INTERESTS).

Therefore, Max's unwilling dispositions towards English seem to reach beyond the classroom. He shows strong cultural resistance towards English for whatever the reasons are, whether it is down to discrimination, fear of being despised, or anger against the American hegemony that excludes the Mexicans from the benefits of their own natural resources. On the other hand, he recognises he sometimes needs English to be updated and to participate in research but seems to be satisfied with the English he has and with the help of the dictionary and internet.

Max and Diana can be considered good students, academically speaking. However, they are somewhat different regarding what they believe, think and do in English. Diana is a competent user of English who holds an IELTS certificate (C1). She has had the opportunity to study and spend time in the United States and she looks forward to studying and living in an English-speaking country. Moreover, she loves learning languages and meeting people from other cultures.

Thus, Diana's openness-to-experience is demonstrated in her proactive attitude in seeking opportunities in English-speaking countries.

Max however, is resistant to English and is an A2 level. He accomplishes his life project to work on environmental and social issues in which he can find personal meaning and relevance. In congruence with his goals, which are beyond the foreign language, he manages to pursue his interest in research and academic activities with his knowledge of English and the help of his own resources.

Diana's actions, therefore, seem to be guided by her habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), the set of dispositions that inculcate the conditioning of our social environment, such as her parents' upbringing, bilingual education and life opportunities. Max's actions however, seem to be guided by his reflexivity 'the ability to monitor ourselves in relation to our circumstances …..through internal conversations about our situation, our behaviour, our values and aspirations' (Archer, 2003); since he rejects the idea of working at a hotel, despite his degree in tourism and he is determined to work in a consultancy and promote environmental education.

To sum up, these two life stories suggest that learners make decisions co-determined by their reflexivity on what matters most to them and their life projects (Archer, 2006:6) as well as being guided by their habitus, inculcated by their social environment.

## 4.4 Summary and conclusions

This chapter has examined the structural influences on the development of students' dispositions, from their language learning biographies, their accounts, and my knowledge of the context. Findings of this chapter, analysed through the lens of critical realism, indicate that under certain conditions the power of language learners' dispositions become actualized as a liability, 'a power to change in certain ways responding to certain kinds of stimulus' (Elder-Vass, 2010:47). Understanding that students' lives are also structured by a psychological angle, their dispositions are causal mechanisms shaping their learning patterns. Thus, the participants' dispositions are the liability that prompts their decision to invest in language learning with the aim to communicate in English-speaking contexts or not.

The participants' dispositions were explored concerning their orientation and achievement as language learners provided by their accounts and the language, they use to talk about themselves. These accounts indicate that the students' engagement in language learning and the relevance assigned to English in their present and future come mainly from their interests, personality traits, projects, and experiences while interacting in different sociocultural configurations.

Regarding language learning experiences, there are some salient features that affect students' dispositions and beliefs in language learning: (1) the age of exposure to the target language; (2) their beliefs and their understanding of how to learn the foreign language; and (3) their perceptions of success or failure in English learning acquired through their experiences. A careful analysis of the data has revealed the following, the participants exposed to English at a young age at bilingual schools, private schools and courses at language institutes hold a positive attitude to English. These students are willing to continue learning and use the foreign language on a regular basis. For them, English is part of their everyday life, and they hold self-efficacy beliefs, indicated by their belief in their ability to succeed in language learning and use. This fact reveals that they have developed a second language identity. The students reluctant to invest in English however, started at an older age in government schools, although they are brilliant in other subjects and activities. They express their dissatisfaction with the teaching methods, class management and class content, which might be the reason why they prefer to work in English on their own. These perceptions might relate to the belief that they are not capable of carrying out the classroom tasks.

In the formation of the dispositions, the students' personality traits seem to affect the way they interact within the different contexts and their investment in English. The participants who are extroverted and open to experience are more willing to engage in social interaction and take risks, and the introverts who are hard-working and organised prefer to engage in language learning through reading and listening. Thus, these types of learners also hold self-efficacy beliefs and can succeed in learning English, but they take different routes. While the students who are low achievers in English display features that are associated to neuroticism, such as feeling worried, insecure, emotional and inadequate, seem to experience language anxiety, or appear to be perfectionists who want to avoid mistakes and are inclined to procrastinate (Dewaele, 2012:45-51)

These particular views and attitudes of the students imply that in language learning and university education, their life domain needs to be taken into careful consideration. Moreover, globalising institutional spaces, such as having a subject in English and perceived opportunities to study in a foreign country encourage students to continue improving in English to have access to such opportunities. Language learners define themselves by how much linguistic capital they hold, as well as by their social and individual trajectories. As a result, this analysis shows that students share a similar position in their social space and learning opportunities. However, although they may have a similar habitus and dispositional characteristics, they also make decisions based on their reflexivity and their life projects, which can be enabled or constrained by their individual circumstances.

Depending on the individual student's conditions, their language learning dispositions are manifested at the empirical level. Thus, the process of retroduction to identify the deeper structures from which these powers and liabilities originate will be discussed in chapter 5, moving between empirical and deeper levels of reality to understand better how students exert their agency in EFL.

# Chapter 5: Agency

## 5.1 Introduction

While chapter 4 focuses on students' experiences in language learning and their dispositions to EFL, the present chapter mainly examines students' evidence of agency based on their individual circumstances to make choices and their actions to master the language. It addresses research question 1b, which examines the extent to which learners' actions are dependent on the socio-cultural orders and research question 1c, how contextual conditions co-determine language learners' agency in second language learning.

In this research, I follow Elder-Vass' (2010:112-113) perspective to account for human action. He reconciles Archer and Bourdieu theories to show how emergence applies to social structure and agency, from the point of view that our dispositions to act in a determined way may be unconsciously affected by social factors, namely habitus. However, our habitus is not only the product of unmediated structures; but also the result of a lifetime reflection upon experiences that include the structures. That is, we also act influenced by our subjectivity to evaluate and modify our dispositions due to our experiences, our reasoning capacities and how much value we place on commitments. Therefore, we can act non-consciously by our habitus, a set of dispositions produced by social conditioning or through reflexivity, thinking consciously about plans, beliefs and dispositions from our past and upon social circumstances.

This chapter, first of all, provides evidence on how language learners exert their agency and then moves on to examine to what extent learners' actions are morphostatic or morphogenetic. That is, whether the effects of social structure and learners' agency lead to reproduction or transformation of existing socio-cultural orders (see 3.6). The concept of personal identity is used to pinpoint how the students prioritise their concerns, which Archer (2000) terms as projects that influence how students come to choose a course of action. Students' agency is examined concerning their social circumstances, dispositions, personal identity and projects considering their individual trajectories and the fields of social activity, which impact, and might change their dispositions (habitus) to provide

causal explanations for their choices regarding language learning (Block, 2013a:147).

## 5.2 Causal explanations of agency

According to Elster (2005:7-5), all explanation is causal, intentions can serve as causes and many intentional explanations, however it has been challenged that agents are not always rational. The simple type of explanadum is an event, 'to give a reason of why it happened', by mentioning an earlier event as its cause. If we want to know what makes some students come to favour or resist English, we have to find out what the formative events were. For example, interactions with parents, peers, teachers or native speakers, in which the participants position themselves in specific ways with respect to social situations. Taking into account that making a decision is an event, the causal explanation might include beliefs from the past and intentions oriented toward the future that precedes the occurrence of the explanadum.

Regarding language learning, this is the input that reconfigures or activates the underlying causal mechanisms situated within pre-existing social structures that generate change within students' circumstances. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to examine whether the participants transform or reproduce the structures and practices and how they make their decisions and action implementation. That is, whether they take decisions and act through their reflexivity, co-determined by their thinking powers and beliefs or through their habitus, determined by their set of dispositions inculcated by the conditioning of their social position.

In all cases, data analysis is approached from the data itself. The examples provided below are a synthesis from data stored in Nvivo, my knowledge of the participants' background and my research notes. Data analysis and conclusions are drawn from the data itself and mapping the processes or pathways through which language learner's outcome is brought into being.

### 5.2.1 Mechanisms related to roles, position and practices

Mechanisms for the given roles e.g. customer service representative, student and daughter can position the learners in multiple and often unequal ways, leading to varying language learning outcomes that are also related to the expected way of

doing something. Key phrases relevant to theories and data interpretation are highlighted in the extracts.

**Example 5.1 Carmen**

From a synthesis of the data, it can be shown that Carmen demonstrates her agency by ***acting purposefully upon her given circumstances***. Carmen feels the need to improve her English to keep her job. However, she also deals with her life circumstances and given role positions. For example, her father gets sick, and she must take two full-time jobs to help pay the hospital bill and she has to stop studying for a semester twice ***(constraints)***. She wants to improve her language competence ***(project)***, but she has neither money nor much time because she studies and has a full-time job to support herself and help her family economy ***(dispositions)***. She changes jobs because of a restructuration in the company and due to family issues. It seems she is capable of doing the job because she is not only hired by a Canadian company, but is also even promoted ***(enablement),*** as is shown in the extract below:

CARMEN: **I have been promoted and now it was a pay rise, a raise in every sense**. I am in Customer service and LATAM (Latin American) administration **in NEXUS Tours a Canadian Company**…**My boss is British** and then, **he uses certain idioms that I don´t understand**. I even have to ask him if he can repeat it again because **he speaks very fast**…When we go to the meeting room and we put the phones is very funny because **some destination managers make some jokes on the English modes and some in the American modes so it's very difficult to understand. Yeah, very difficult.** For the other side the destination manager. **The CEO from vacations is from India so he spoke with Indian accent** Hello How are you? He spoke **very difficult English**. (Interview 2)

As illustrated above, she has to interact with a native speaker as an immediate boss and people with different accents, which makes her feel rather anxious and insecure *(see 4.2.5*)**,** so she feels the need to become more proficient ***(field).*** She looks for ways to improve her English by reading and summarising some texts, studying vocabulary online and doing her social service in the SAC ***(agency).*** Hence, she looks for ways to improve her linguistic competence by taking advantage of familiar practises ***(habitus).*** Moreover, while being a SAC helper she learns about the opportunity to take an English course for free, gets a scholarship for the TOEFL exam and takes both ***(enablement)***. Her result in the TOEFL exam is 67, which is rather low, so she decides to accommodate her

timetable to be able to take the English courses provided by the company *(agency)*.

Her purpose is to become more proficient and her drive the need to work and to keep her job. This relates to *habitus* and *field* because of the *constraints* exerted by the *field,* namely her work in the tourist industry. She has had some bad experiences with her native speaker immediate bosses (see 4.2.5). They seem to represent the *symbolic power relations* that make her feel she is not linguistically competent and in the tourist market English is an asset, a *symbolic capital.* It is her *habitu*s, her *dispositions* that make her generate possible actions that will enable her to overcome her anxiety about the language. Moreover, this fact seems to be linked to her childhood *experience* of living in the United States, not knowing English and attending school (see 4.2.3), where she seems to have overcome the situation. At that time, she might have felt in a similar disadvantaged *position*.  That is, the effect of her *habitus* equipped her with *dispositions* to behave in a certain way when interacting in English. Hence, her early *life experience* makes it possible for her to draw on a *course of action* that can help her achieve her purpose to be a more competent user of the target language. Not only has she been hired again by a former employer, but she has also been promoted to a better position.

Carmen struggles between her *roles or position* as a daughter, student and employee. However, she commits herself to acquiring English, the *linguistic capital* to legitimate her position in the *field of work (practices)*. She overcomes her fears and life circumstances *(personal identity),* which have led to a transformation in her *identity as language learner and user.* It is through Carmen's *habitus* as a product of early childhood experiences and socialisation in the work field *(practices)* as well as her *reflexivity* that makes her *act strategically* and *devises courses of action* to achieve her aim to be more proficient in English. **(Morphogenetic)**

### 5.2.2 Mechanisms related to beliefs and reasons

Language learners' reasons and beliefs lead to transformation or reproduction as these activate their agent powers to acquire the symbolic and material resources associated with the target language, which will help them increase the value of their cultural and social capital.

**Example 5.2 Tamara**

From an examination of the data, it can be shown that being exposed to English at a young age makes Tamara develop a taste for English *(dispositions).* It is when her family moves to her parents' hometown after hurricane Wilma that she realises she cannot learn more English there. As she could not learn English in her parents' home town she found a course *(agency)* in the capital city of the state and commuted to her course on Saturdays for two years (see 4.2.2). The extract below demonstrates Tamara's ***reasons and beliefs*** (event) behind investing in the target language.

TAMARA: Maybe is because I arrived there [family's hometown] and **I was more advanced than the others, and I thought I want to learn more.** I don't know how to explain but since I was in kindergarten, I studied English and **I really liked it**. When I was 8 or 9 years old I **watched the films with subtitles for the first time and after without subtitles, I was like** *terca* [stubborn] **in that**. But that was here [Cancun], there nobody was interested in English. Besides **English helps to get a job**,… When I was a teenager, **I listen to songs, look up for unknown words and try to translate to understand the ideas**. I have also realised that are different ways to say things and the English classes are boring because they usually teach grammar, and **when you need to communicate there are ways to make understand and if you don't use the correct form it is not very important**. The people you are talking don´t say you, no your present perfect is not correct. (Interview 1)

Her words illustrate that she has the ***desire*** and ***intrinsic motivation*** to learn English because she likes it, so she practices on her own to learn it as a child. In her parents' home town she realises that she cannot make more progress and decides to take a two-year course in the capital city of the state *(reflexivity)*. She sets herself the ***purpose*** of becoming the producer of such valuable ***linguistic capital***. She believes that investing in her education will allow her to have better job opportunities (see 4.2.4) so she has been continually looking for opportunities to use English *(personal identity).* She becomes a conversation leader at the university, and takes advantage of technology with all available means to communicate with her friends and foreigners to practice English e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, e-mail *(habitus)* (see 4.2.8). She works and saves money to help pay for her expenses to go on an exchange programme in the UK *(reflexivity).* Her commitment seems to have paid off as she is granted a

scholarship to assist a professor in his research at the university and gets a job at an American company the last semester of her studies due to her command of English.

Tamara's numerous efforts to learn and use English seem to have been co-determined by both *habitus and reflexivity*. Her early *experience* with the target language in Cancun gives her the 'feel of the game' in language learning, and through *reflexivity,* she becomes more proficient in the language. Her *project* is to be well prepared, which includes the *linguistic capital*, so she can get a good job and a more stable life than her parents have managed to have *(ultimate concern).* Her *personal identity* leads to transformation by her determination to learn and use English despite life circumstances *devising a course of action* e.g. leading conversation in the SAC, taking advantage of social media and participating in the international exchange programme **(Morphogenetic).**

**Example 5.3 Mariela**

From a synthesis of data, Mariela's agency to shape her language learning seems to be due to her *habitus,* as a product of her childhood *experiences* and exposure to English in Cancun, but her decisions also seem to be guided by her *reflexivity.* As a child, she listens to the tourists, her parents, and her mother with her friends speaking English, so she wants to understand what they say *(linguistic capital),* as illustrated in the extracts below:

**I have always like this language,** and **when I was a kid and went to the hotel zone. I listened the tourists speak in English and I wanted to know what they were talking about,** and **now I know more that I knew, but still I think that I can learn more** of this language and as **always I am trying to improve** the things that I know **and that includes the language**. (Language learner biography)

MARIELA: Bueno pues, es que a mí se me hacía interesante como aprender el inglés desde… no se siempre se me hizo interesante el idioma, tal vez porque a veces mi papá y mi mamá lo hablaban y no querían que yo entendieran lo que estaban diciendo y a veces escuchaba que mi mamá hablará con sus amigos en inglés y yo no entendía que decían. Y siempre estaba con esa inquietud de ¿por qué hablan en inglés? Tal vez porque no quiero que sepan, pero quiero saber cómo es que se habla. (Entrevista 1)

MARIELA: Well, the thing is that **for me it was interesting how to learn English** since… I don´t know, for me, **it has always been interesting the language**. Maybe **because my**

186

**dad and mom would speak it and they didn´t want me to understand what they were saying,** and **sometimes I listened to my mom talking with her friends in English** and I did not understand what they were saying. And I was always with that **intellectual curiosity**. Why do they speak in English? Maybe because they do not want me to know but **I want to know how to speak it.** (Interview 1)

Mariela's exposure to English in Cancun makes her feel the need to understand the foreign language. However, despite Mariela's words that she has always liked English and she wants to learn it, sometimes she omits saying the word English. This fact suggests distance from the target language because she might feel like she is in an inferior position or has less power because of that, thus she *desires* to acquire the *linguistic capital* to feel positioned as equal. On the other hand, her parents are aware of the importance of English**,** an asset in the market, so they make an effort to pay for the private schools and the language course *(enablements)*. They enrol her in a private nursery school, then in a government elementary school where she is given a discount coupon for an English course which her parents pay for, as well as paying for another one later. She also studies a couple of years in a private preparatory school [(see 4.2.2)](see 4.2.2)**.** As these efforts cannot last long and are interrupted because of their economic situation *(constraints)*, Mariela makes use of some resources and commits herself to learning English in several ways *(agency)*. In the public secondary school, she is the only one who carries a dictionary, she listens to songs with the lyrics and translates them, and she follows a teacher's advice to watch films with subtitles in English *(personal identity)* as illustrated in the extract below:

MARIELA:… luego está maestra me dijo, lee subtítulos y lo empecé hacer. Al principio como que no entendía muy bien pero ya luego, no sé ni siquiera me daba cuenta... no tengo conciencia de como poco a poco, se me fueron grabando las palabras… *Mortal instrument* es un libro de ciencia ficción, lo empecé a leer en español, pero en ese tiempo ya veía series en inglés sin subtítulos y me dije, bueno dije nunca he leído un libro en inglés ¿Por qué no lo intento? Y lo busqué en PDF en inglés y pues si lo entendí. (Entrevista 1)

MARIELA: …. then **the teacher told me to read the subtitles and I started doing it**. At the beginning it was like I could not understand very well but later I did … I was not aware of how it happened little by little, the words were recorded in my mind…. **Mortal instrument is a science fiction book. I started reading it in Spanish,** but at that time **I could watch sitcoms without subtitles. I said to myself 'well, I have never read a**

**book what about trying it', and I browsed for the PDF in English**…**I looked up the words on the smartphone, in the computer or I also have three dictionaries at home because I wanted to know what it meant including the context.. and I could understand it.** (Interview 1) TR

The paragraph above shows that by following the teacher's advice she gains confidence to start reading in English. The way she takes the decision to read in English clearly illustrates her *inner conversations*, when she says '**well, I have never read a book what about trying it'.** When she reads the book, she uses her smartphone, computer and dictionaries to look up the unknown words *(learner identity).* Moreover, she is so obsessed with the author's books (her words) that she starts following her on Tumblr and ordering books from Amazon U.S.A *(agency)* (see 4.2.7)*.*

At the university, she tries to get a one-month scholarship to study English in the United States, but she does not finish the procedure because of family issues *(constraint)*. She does her *social service* in the SAC to practice English, where she takes advantage of the preparation course for the IELTS, and she takes the exam achieving band 6.5 *(field/community of practice).* She maintains a good average in her undergraduate studies with the aim of applying for a scholarship to study a master's degree in an English-speaking country *(project),* but again for family reasons she must put it aside *(constraint).* After finishing her studies, she decides to change jobs, and she chooses to work in a place where she uses English, although it is not related to her field of study, while she makes up her mind about what she wants to do next *(reflexivity).* Mariela describes herself as analytical *(personal identity)* because she plans what to do next (see 4.2.4).

Mariela learns English driven by her *desire* to understand the target language because she is aware of the power of the *linguistic capital* in Cancun. She commits to learning it, practicing it and using it in several ways.  At the university, she develops a social network *(social capital)* as a SAC helper that positions her as more knowledgeable, and she realises the possibilities she can have to apply for studies abroad because of English (*field*). However, due to *life constraints* things are not always as planned, so she changes her plans and adapts them given her family issues and economic situation. Thus, her actions are transformative regarding her language learning, as she decides to choose a job where English is used *(reflexivity)*, which is evidence of her *identity as*

*language learner and user*, but it is because of her *habitus* that she relegates her project to comply with family duties **(Morphogenetic).**

### 5.2.3 Mechanisms related to relations and practices

Mechanisms related to learners' engagement in practices in which they interact in English with native speakers either face-to-face or through online communication as well as with their peers driven by their interests and needs. The students' participation in such activities encourages them to invest in the target language and as a result they become competent language users.

### Example 5.4 Diego

From an examination of data, Diego's *interest* in sports, music and business influences his *decision* to learn English to meet his objectives *(reflexivity).* He is an only child and his family belongs to the middle class. He starts studying English as a child in a private school and has private lessons, but it is in his teenage years that he decides to learn it as he explains in the extract below:

DIEGO: de niño mis papas trataron de enseñarme inglés y me llevaban a clases y no quería, no me gustaba. De hecho, yo aprendí inglés ya más grande, en la adolescencia. …Yo decidí porque por mis objetivos tenía que aprender el inglés. Entonces yo lo hacía con gusto porque tenía otra motivación y lo que me gusta pues trato lo trato de hacer lo mejor que pueda. ……. mi sueño antes de entrar a todo esto era ser estrella de rock. (Entrevista 1)

DIEGO: **When I was a child, my parents tried to teach me English** and they took me to private lessons**, but I did not want to, I did not like it**. In fact**, I learnt English until I was older, as a teenager**…. **I decided to learn it because of my objectives.** Then, I was happy to do it because **I had other motivation** and **when I like something I try to do it the best I can**….**before starting all this, my dream was to be a rock star**. (Interview 1) TR

Diego makes it explicit that he decides to learn English to meet his objectives, which means doing what he likes doing, such as learning about music, and playing basketball (4.2.8). He seems to have made his decision through *reflexivity,* that is, he did not learn English as a child when his parents took him to private lessons until he *consciously decides* to do it. It is music that engages him with English because it is the means by which he can understand the songs

and find information, '*in San Google'* (his words), not only about the history and interesting facts of his favourite rock music and bands but also about other topics of his interest *(personal identity).* Nevertheless, his taste of music seems to have emerged from his **habitus** as embodiment, given that his father is fond of rock music, and he grows up listening to it.  He loves music so much that he has a guitar, learns the songs and **dreams about becoming a rock star**. English is the symbolic capital that allows him to have access to rock music and be a member of the basketball team *(identity).*

He studies a degree in International Business in which English is essential, so he is aware that knowing English is an **asset** that can grant him access to the **wor**k **field**. He has taken some subjects in English and although he has finished his English levels, he often goes to the SAC to have conversation with his friends (**communities of practice/field**). Moreover, he proposes and organises the event of the Model of United Nations in English at the university, which is accepted, and where he is made the leader of the project. Therefore, the **linguistic capital** given by and valorised by the university community gives him status and a **position** at the university *(field)* as he has regular meetings with the professors and coordinates his peers for the event.

Diego's **agency** is related to his will to use the language, for his given **purposes**. His **dispositions** to do particular activities motivate him to invest in English, which is the means to achieve his objectives (his words). He has several **interests,** and although he does not seem to be very clear about what he will do after he graduates, whether to continue playing basketball professionally or set up his own business. Nevertheless, he understands English is valuable and useful for any of his **projects**. His **desire** to achieve his projects lead him to change his previous dispositions towards the target language (**Morphogenetic).**

**Example 5.5 Bernardo**

From a synthesis of data, Bernardo's contact and engagement with English is because of his **interest** in video games. He engages with English because he has the **need** to interact in the video games community he identifies with *(identity)*, and commits to doing it [(see 4.2.8)](). It is through this understanding that he demonstrates his **agency** learning English, shaped by his **habitus,** as he prefers to play in the American servers as he expresses in the excerpt:

BERNARDO: **the unique contact that I had with English was the one that involve videogames, since I was a child** ….Also it´s because of the online games (like star craft since the 90´s). **Lots of them don´t have south American, or centre servers**, and **people from south America in games are usually despicable**, so, **due to the Mexican culture its highly possible to know English, or maybe it´s just Cancun**, I don't know, so u rather like to enter to the American servers, and even if u don´t want, **you keep practicing English but I doesn't feel bad, even racism it´s fun involved in the videogames. I also play a trading card game, that community involves me even more in English; almost all of my hobbies involves me in English.** I know English since that, I started liking English since long ago, I consider it useful since after high school, and I think at least in Cancun when you´re not in politics, knowing English it´s a useful tool. (Language learner biography)

His words suggest that he feels more identified with the American servers and finds that the South American ones are very unpleasant, 'despicable' in his words *(beliefs).* This might relate to the fact that he feels more attracted to the American culture because of living in Cancun, where he can see so many of them, so this experience seems to have an impact on Bernardo's *identity.* This seems to be why he sees issues of racism and discrimination involved in video games as normal but dislikes the South Americans' attitude. Bernardo's language learning is motivated by the desire to interact with other players in English in the *field* of video games and later in the trading cards game. That is, his *habitus* of *the feel of the game* that individuals understand of how to behave and interact in everyday life. Moreover, he raises the point that knowing English is useful when you are not in politics, which suggests that being interested in political issues might influence your decision to learn English because it could be associated with negative events such as discrimination or *positions of power*. It is because of English that he gets a couple of jobs, in which he interacts with the tourists. He loves chatting and speaking English, so he often volunteers to be a conversation leader and later he *decides* to do his *social service* in the SAC *(agency)*.

Bernardo's *decision* to learn English seems to be influenced by his experience of living in Cancun *(habitus),* where the *linguistic capital* is highly regarded, and he engages and learns the foreign language through interacting in the *imagined communities (habitus).* He learns English by himself through interacting in the video games communities and other hobbies, and he is confident to use it *(personal identity)*, so he looks for opportunities to speak it in the SAC and in a

couple of jobs in the hotel zone. Thus, he is confident about using English and projects himself as a language user, who learns English by using it *(personal identity)*, which leads to transformation of his sociocultural orders **(Morphogenetic).**

**Example 5.6 Karina**

Karina's dispositions to English seem to have evolved from feeling insecure and reluctant to learn English [(see 4.2.1](#)) to start using it. Her change in behaviour seems to be as a result of being in contact with the  foreign language while living with her boyfriend *(habitus)* as they watch videos, films and surf websites together *(imagined communities)* [(see 4.2.8).](#) Her boyfriend is keen on English, is the singer of a rock band and becomes a good friend of the British language assistants. He speaks English not only with them, but also with other Mexican friends while he is with her. She realises that she can understand, and she questions her identity as Spanish speaker, as illustrated in the extract below:

KARINA: Quiero dedicar tiempo a estudiar inglés este semestre... Me di cuenta que cuando iba a Bahía Azul lo comprendía que decían, ya sé de qué hablan estos monitos, cuando me dicen pienso en inglés y decía porque vas a pensar en inglés si naciste en español.  Y comprendí a que se debía tuve ese pensamiento, pero en un momento porque estaba evidentemente pensando lo que iba a decir en inglés... Pues aparte yo me he evaluado y me he dado cuenta de que tengo problemas al comunicarme con las personas porque a veces soy pues no sé si ensimismada. Realmente me cuesta interactuar con la gente porque siento que tengo muchos pensamientos diferentes a lo *trend* y me cuesta entablar conversaciones... Y otra meta de este año es viajar... la India es como un sueño y he pensado mucho que a donde viaje hablen inglés para practicar... me he dado cuenta que mi nivel socioeconómico no me permite... quieres hacer muchas cosas, pero también necesitas tener ciertas medallitas para tener otro ingreso. *(*Entrevista 2)

KARINA: I want to devote time to studying English this semester...I realised that when I used to go to Bahía Azul, **I understood what they said**. **I used to tell myself, 'I know what these little monkeys are talking about when they talk to me, I think in English**. W**hy are you going to think in English if you were born in Spanish**? I understood that the reason why I had that thought, but in a flash of insight, because **I was obviously thinking what I was going to say in English**....**I have assessed myself**, **and I have realised that I have problems to communicate with the people** because **sometimes I am, like** I do not know if **lost in my thoughts**. I really find it difficult to interact with the people because **I feel I have views which are different** from the trend and **I have**

**difficulty getting into a conversation**.. …. **Another goal** this year **is to travel**. .India is like a dream and **I have thought a lot** that wherever I travel they speak English to practice it,…I have realised that **my socioeconomic status doesn't allow me**.. **you want to do many things**, but you also **need to have certain little medals to get another income**. (Interview 2) TR

The extract shows Karina's ambivalent feelings towards English. At the beginning of the extract Karina expresses her desire to improve her English, however it is also clearly illustrated how Karina has a dialogue with herself (*internal conversation)*, rejecting the idea to speak it that seems to be related to her Mexican identity. Karina demonstrates her *reflective self* as a mode of *subjectivity*, when she says that she finds it difficult to communicate with other people, also in Spanish. That is, she reflects and evaluates her **personal identity** that seems to mediate her language learning. She wants to travel *(project)* and she believes that she can practice while travelling, but she is **constrained** by her 'socioeconomic situation'. She is aware that first, she must get 'certain little medals', that is, more professional qualifications that will allow her to achieve her goals of having a better income and travelling.

In the last interview, she comments that she uses English in her job, and that after she breaks up with her boyfriend, she continues visiting websites in English and watching films with English subtitles. In her job, she has to read and work with some of the contents of the projects in English. She talks about her recent experience while watching the debate of the American elections, which is illustrated in the extract below:

KARINA: Para hacer mi trabajo muchas cosas, los contenidos tienen que ser en inglés, por ejemplo, ayer me eche el debate de Hillary Clinton y Donald Trump. Si sin subtítulos en vivo en el *livestream*. Fue súper padre porque es estar realmente estar. Fue súper padre porque fue tratar de comprender un dialogo completo, cuando me daba cuenta que me causaba cierto coraje o algo, decía que chido porque estoy comprendiendo la mayor parte de lo que están hablando estos dos. (Entrevista 3)

KARINA**: In my job**, I have to do **many things** which **are in English**; **the contents have to be in English**. For example, yesterday **I watched the debate between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Yes, without subtitles, in livestream**. It was super cool because it was like really being there. It was incredible because **it was trying to understand the whole dialogue** when I was aware of that something made me angry or something, **I**

**would say to myself how cool because I understand** most of what these two are talking. (Interview 3) TR

Karina's words show that she is satisfied and pleased with herself because she was able to understand the debate. She gains confidence in English by informally being exposed to it, which has helped to overcome her fear and anxiety towards the foreign language.

Karina's *habitus* has been influenced and re-structured by her encounters with native speakers and friends, either face to face and through in social media and at work, as well as by her engagement with films and popular series. She struggles between her projects and her family issues (see 4.2.2), which have made her change her plans several times, giving priority to her family *(habitus).* It has been a gradual process for her to start acquiring the *linguistic capital* and *getting positioned* in the work *field,* which has also been related to her *reflexivity*. That is, her decision to improve in the target language has also involved her *projects,* such as getting a better job and her desire to travel, which leads to transformation of her dispositions towards English **(Morphogenetic).**

### 5.2.4 Mechanisms related to practices and identity

The way that English becomes a custom or habit in the learners is reflected through their use of the language in their everyday routines; their identity changes across time and space and is reproduced and transformed in individual and social interaction.

### Example 5.7 Mónica

Mónica's **past experience** with English made her feel the need to know more English and look for more opportunities to practice it. Having used English and interacted with native speakers when visiting relatives in the United States during the summer (see 4.2.3) equips her with *the feel of the game*. Her experience in the United States makes her feel more confident about her linguistic competence, so she helps her friend as is illustrated in the extract:

MONICA: Like **my friend Sandra**, at the beginning **she was in the level 2 now she is in 3.** She doesn't know anything about English, but **I always tell her she needs to practice** and when I am with her sometimes whenever like **in other classes I speak to her in**

194

**English,** so she says what???? And **I say try to understand** so I think that in one semester. I think **she made some progress.** (Interview 1)

Monica speaks in English to her friend because this is what has worked for her *(habitus),* and it seems to work for her friend too. Therefore, she also follows her teacher's advice to be a conversation leader in the SAC, as the paragraph below shows:

MONICA: **Leading conversations helped me a lot**. When the British teacher told us we all had to give conversation in level 4, **it was rather challenging, but I used to go with Rebeca and little by little I started feeling more confident.** And this is how I did it….. for my classmates, **English is just like any other subject and for me is part of my life**. I mean, **all the music I listen to is in English, the sitcoms and films**…… **Insanity,** it is like **a workout**, like cross fit. **It is in a USB. A friend gave it to us**. (Interview 2)

She finds it challenging to lead conversation and starts doing it together with a friend to help each other. After she finishes the English courses, she continues going to the SAC to lead conversations where she also gets into conversation with the British language assistants *(agency).* She makes the point that English is part of her life as she does many activities in English such as exercising with Invictus, the American programme that she gets from a friend *(habitus).*

She also takes some subjects in English *(agency*) and is even a little critical about one of her teacher's English command, '*I think the teacher needs to polish her speaking. I mean, she knows the subject and the information is ok, but'*. She sounds disappointed, which relates to *field* because she believes the teacher is knowledgeable of her subject and high in *cultural capital,* but Mónica's words suggests that the teacher's English is not as it would be expected, as she questions her language competence to deliver the class in English. That is, given her understanding *(habitus)* of **the feel of the game** she questions how capable the teacher should be in *the **academic field**. Moreover, Monica's interest to have more opportunities to practice English makes her sign up to be an assistant in an international event *(agency*). She gets surprised when she learns she will be paid for that because she is more interested in the experience than in the money. After some time of not taking English class, she feels her English *'is getting rusty'* (her words) and decides to take an English course *(agency)* to be well prepared to take the IELTS *(reflexivity).* She would like to work in the United States in a company or have her own company in the future *(imagined communities).*

For Monica, English is part of her life since it is present in her daily activities *(habitus).* Visiting her relatives helps her improve her linguistic competence, so she gains confidence and looks for different ways to practise it, at the university and outside. She feels identified with the American culture *(identity)* because of her pleasant experience while staying with her relatives. Her actions to be proficient in English *(linguistic capital)* seem to be guided by her *habitus* related to her past and present experience with the language, which has contributed to her *project* of living and working in the United States *(imagined communities).* Monica's actions lead to transformation, which seems to be related to *habitu*s because her past experiences make her generate a wide repertoire of possible actions to become more proficient in English, the *linguistic capital* **(Morphogenetic).**

**Example 5.8 Diana and Luciano**

Diana and Luciano's *cultural capital and linguistic capital* is acquired due to the social spaces or fields, namely bilingual school, family and enablements offered by their social position, which allow them to be successful players in the 'game' of language learning(see 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.4, and 4.3.1) . Hence, Diana and Luciano's *habitus* creates a wide repertoire of actions to use English and continue learning it because English is ingrained in their *daily life and projects*. Luciano is informed and updated about the news and topics of his interest on the internet (see 4.2.7) while Diana watches South Korean sitcoms in English because her Korean is not that good (see 4.3.1), both of them watch films and sitcoms and chat in English by WhatsApp with the friends they made while being in the United States *(habitus).*

They choose to study a degree in International Business and look for opportunities to spend time in an English-speaking country because not only do they want to improve their linguistic competence, but also to have the experience of living the experience in the English-speaking country (see 4.2.4 and 4.3.1) *(agency).* They decide *(reflexivity)* to do their *social service* in the SAC and take advantage of the scholarships offered for the IELTS, Diana gets band 6.5 and Luciano gets 7.5 in the IELTS and 97 in the TOEFL exam *(enablements).* They want to apply for a master's degree, Diana in the United Kingdom *(project)* and Luciano in Australia.

Diana and Luciano's acquired knowledge of English, the *linguistic capital*, confers them with the *habitus* linked to their individual history. That is, *dispositions* to think and act by the *field* and in the *field* of the second language to develop **their language user identity,** as English is present in their daily life activities. By birth, they are given life chances that enable them to learn and practise English. Hence, their **habitus** as a product of their childhood experience and socialization **positions** them in the *field,* so they accumulate and legitimise the reproduction of the *cultural and symbolic capital*. Nevertheless, Luciano and Diana are also driven by the *project* to study a master's degree in an English-speaking country that makes them *devise courses of action (reflexivity)* to become competent language users to achieve their goal, which leads them to transformation. **(Morphogenetic)**

### 5.2.5 Mechanisms related to rights and power

The roles and accompanied responsibilities and expectations assigned to individuals within a pre-existing social system are related to rights (established rules) and power to the positions within a hierarchy. Max and Daniel have a deep desire not to identify with American native speakers. Their resistance to the language appears to be a measure against the threat the Americans represent to their perceived integrity as subjects.

**Example 5.9 Max and Daniel**

Max and Daniel's reason for not investing in their language learning seems to be related to the nationalist discourse, their Mexican *identit*y **(habitus) s**ince they seem to believe that investing in the target language *(linguistic capital)* can affect their social identity *(dispositions)*. The students' discourses are shaped by the historically unequal **power** relationships between Mexico and the United States as well as the Americans' attitude of superiority exerted in both countries *(field)* (see 4.2.6 and 4.3.2). This attitude appears to have an effect in the students' *dispositions* to invest in their language learning, as expressed by the student in the extracts below:

DANIEL: Mi problema es que no me gusta, no me gusta y creo que la cuestión aquí no por el hecho de aprenderlo pero a veces la gente… He viajado a cómo he podido y he tenido la oportunidad de estar en el Estados Unidos y si es cierto la gente luego tiende a ser como de pronto muy racista. (Entrevista 1)

DANIEL: My problem is **that I don´t like it, I don´t,** and the thing here is, **it's not because of the fact of learning it,** but sometimes people…. **I have managed to travel** and I have had the opportunity to be **in the United States**, and it is true that the **people tend to be like very racist.** (Interview 1) TR

Daniel starts by saying that, it is a problem because it is a mandatory subject *(field/education),* then he openly accepts that he does not like the language, and he repeats it twice as if to emphasise his refusal to learn English *(dispositions).* He adds that it is not that he cannot learn it, but that he does not want to do it *(dispositions).* It seems that he thinks the best way to explain his *position* is by stating that it is not easy to travel to the United States '*I have managed to travel and I have had the opportunity*', which suggests **material resources** that are not easy for him to get. It is during his trip to the United States where he witnesses or is perhaps subject to discrimination *(power)*.

DANIEL: Tengo un proyecto que es enseñar a leer a gente de las comunidades para que no sean engañados y pierdan sus tierras por ser analfabetas… Estoy convencido que en este país se necesitan hacer muchas cosas…… ¿Nos olvidamos de lo importante de la cultura o no? Hacemos menos a la gente por su posición social y apariencia, pero ellos representan a nuestra cultura. (Entrevista 1)

DANIEL: I have **a project that is to teach people from the communities to read [Mayan communities], so they are not deceived and lose their land because of being illiterate**…. I am convinced that **in this country many things need to be done**…. **We forget how important culture** is, don't we? **We look down on people due to their social class and physical appearance, but they represent our culture.** (Interview 1) (TR)

His words show that he is concerned about people in the communities, and he believes that being literate will help them protect their land and preserve their culture. That is another reason why English is not in his priority list and rejects Americans who are the ones that end up living in the areas that used to belong to the Mayans.

Max is reluctant to learn English because he does not like the attitude of the Americans *(power)* living in Cancun as illustrated below:

MAX: Bueno son esas cositas que se me meten en la cabeza que me bloquean. La gente vive aquí y no habla español. Por otro lado, acabo de ir a un congreso de turismo a Acapulco y un chavo de aquí de ingeniería me pregunta, 'oye tú hablas inglés' y yo le dije

no, y me dijo 'mediocre, eres un mediocre'. Y yo le dije si, 'si lo soy, pero no soy parte del montón'. (Entrevista 1)

MAX: Well, **those are the little things that get into my head that get in my way**. **The people live here, and they don´t speak Spanish.** On the other hand, I have just been to a **congress of tourism** in Acapulco, and **a guy from here in engineering asked** me '**hey, do you speak English?' and I said I didn´t**. And **he told me 'mediocre, you are a mediocre** person'. And I replied, 'yes, I am, but **I am not part of the crowd'**. (Interview 1) TR

He points out that he disagrees with the fact that Americans can live in Cancun without knowing Spanish *(cultural capital)*, which is something he has kept on thinking *(reflexivity).* He is disappointed because his peer calls him *'mediocre'* for not knowing English, so his answer implies that he has a mind of his own and he exerts his *right* to decide instead of just going with the flow *(agency).* That is, he has the *right* to choose which aspects of curriculum content are of relevance and interest to him, English is not one of them.

Max and Daniel's *habitus* operating at the level of society makes them demonstrate their *agency* by resisting to learn the language of the dominant country, as if trying to strengthen their identity as Mexicans and Spanish speakers. Since Max is Mayan and Daniel's parents are in the army, their accounts suggest that they do not want to conform to the norm of having to learn English due to the relationship between the languages and forms of political and cultural oppression which impact on their reluctance to communicate in the foreign language *(rights and power).* Their actions are reproductive in the form of negative dispositions towards English, which seem to be associated with issues of social position and power that make them reject the target language **(Morphostatic).**

### 5.2.6 Mechanisms related to roles, practices and resources in the SAC

Learners' beliefs are developed from their experiences, and they make decisions and do the familiar practices that result in natural change. In the SAC, students exercise their agency by taking decisions concerning their learning process, making use of the available resources, and more importantly, redefining their roles.

The SAC is the social setting where students gather to freely practice English and learn with and from each other in a non-formal setting (Murray, Fujishima, and Usuka 2014). It is the social space where students meet and interact with others (students, SAC helpers, language assistants, teachers and counsellors) in a relaxed environment. There is no one telling them what to do, and there are no rules, except to speak English. The students freely engage in familiar practices with their peers to practise the target language. The most common and popular activities are the ones that involve speaking practice, which work both ways to interact with peers and to develop their English skills (see 1.3.2 and appendix 2). Therefore, the level of participation in the SAC and the roles they choose to take is up to the students. Diana, Mariela, Luciano, Bernardo and Carmen choose to do their social service in the SAC as SAC helpers.  Tamara, Monica and Diego continue being conversation leaders after completing their English courses, and Daniel and Max only meet the requirement of their English course.

Luciano, Diana, Bernardo, Mariela and Carmen choose to do their *social service* in the SAC to have further practice of English. Nevertheless, they have different reasons to do so. Diana, Luciano and Mariela plan to study a master's degree in an English-speaking country *(project)*. Carmen needs to be more proficient because of her job *(employment)*. Tamara and Monica take the chance to practice the language *(personality)*, and Diego and Bernardo in order to socialise *(personal identity)*. All of them are a sign of the students' agency. Whereas Max and Daniel do not feel like going, they do so in order to comply with their English course *(habitus)*.

Therefore, this social SAC environment allows the students to take different roles or positions activating the mechanism related to practices and resources offered in the SAC, which are illustrated in the following examples.

**The SAC helpers**

The students who choose to do their *social service* –obligatory programme near the end of the undergraduate studies- in the SAC for one or two semesters. They lead conversation sessions, help with homework, and organise activities for special occasions, thus providing another source of peer learning in the SAC (Acuña et al. 2015: 317).

**Example 5.10 Luciano**

Luciano is a SAC helper who recognises having improved his English skills by spending his time in the SAC in an English speaking-environment *(habitus),* as shown below:

LUCIANO: **The SAC has helped me increase my listening skill** since **almost every conversation** that is taking place in the SAC **is in English**, so in the SAC you can get used to listen conversations in English all day long**. I describe the interaction among students as nurturing. I can always see the students with higher levels of English helping students in lower levels. They help them mostly with pronunciation and with words that they do not know yet. There is always respect between students, they never make fun when a student makes mistake, this helps the lower level student to feel confident when talking in groups**. The interaction between these three users of the SAC has always been respectful, **language assistants always help the students in need or in doubt while the professors always guide the students to the path they need to take. Students always respect both professors and language assistants. I believe that this peaceful interaction has made the SAC a really comfortable place to practice English.** (Interview 3)

He points out that being in the English-speaking environment helps him to improve his listening skill *(reflexivity).* He stresses the fact that students help each other in a friendly, relaxed and respectful atmosphere, which includes the teachers/counsellors who '*guide*' the SAC users. The social ambiance between novices and experts encourages learners to develop their language learning and aids them to gain confidence to use the target language (community of practice). Luciano emphasises that the SAC is '*the place to be exposed to English'*, as he expresses in the excerpt below:

 **It was the place to be exposed to English, so I could practice and not to forget by doing conversation, tutoring, and doing things in English. The most challenging thing** that I encountered **was to gain the confidence to start speaking in English, I was worried about my pronunciation but taking conversations** in the SAC **helped me to gain confidence and start speaking English.** (Interview 2)

First, he gives the example of the conversations with the lower levels, but then he also talks about his personal experience. He points out that it is mainly because of the conversations and tutoring that he also gains confidence in speaking, by overcoming his fear about not pronouncing the words properly *(personal*

*identity).* He recognises that by helping his peers he has extra practise that has helped him gain confidence and improve his speaking skill *(reflexivity).*

## Example 5.11 Diana

Diana is a SAC helper who is proficient in English, but a little shy. Her aim is not only to have extra practice of English but also to help her peers, as is shown in the excerpt:

DIANA: Well, **English** for me now is easy and **I want to show others that they can learn** English too. That it´s not that hard **if they put some effort** in it, mostly **motivate them** to learn English and to teach them and **show them it's not as hard as they think**….when I talk to them **I usually put my serious face**. You should, **you have** to, **you should because it is important** and they. **I think, they think about it at least**. (Interview 2)

Diana recognises that English is easy for her, and in her role as SAC helper she encourages her peers to learn it. However, her words suggest that she also takes on the teacher *role* 'I usually put my serious face. You should, you have to..' reproducing learnt *practices (habitus).*

## Example 5.12 Bernardo

Bernardo seems to enjoy the freedom to choose who he wants to interact with, which does not feel like being in a classroom:

BERNARDO: **Some students want conversations only with the professors and others don´t** want with the teachers. **It is more free. They don´t have to learn, they just practice, they just exist.** (Interview 1)

In the extract above, Bernardo illustrates how **practice** is carried out in the SAC. The students freely choose who they have conversation with, and from his perspective '*they don't have to learn'*. His words suggest that when a peer leads the conversation, this is more relaxed, as in his case, because of his *extroverted personality.* That is, in his conversation leader *role*, he engages with his peers in a conversation for the sake of doing so compared to having conversation with a teacher, who tends to pay more attention to the form and usage of the language. This might be good for some students but for others it seems that it makes them feel uncomfortable.

**Example 5.13 Mariela**

Mariela expresses the benefits of her *role* as SAC helper, which are illustrated in the paragraph below:

MARIELA: **It has helped me with my speaking and reading. I practice other things I didn´t practice before, for example, the verbs when I am giving conversation,** we practice the verbs in different forms and reading the magazines... **My friends ask me to help them** and I like it because if my friends have a problem and **if they don´t have the confidence to ask a teacher if I know I help them**. (Interview 2)

She helps her peers, but she also improves her linguistic competence by using some activities such as practising the verbs and reading (*agency).* She also points out that her friends prefer to ask her for help instead of asking their teacher, which emphasises that in the SAC the student can choose with whom they want to interact (*field/ communities of practice)*.

**Conversation leaders**

According to Acuña et al. (2015:316), these willing students from higher levels often lead conversation sessions with students from lower levels. Sometimes conversation leaders are not more proficient than their peers are, but they are students who, through their sustained participation in the SAC community, have become either more fluent or more confident. Thus, the students exert their *agency* while interacting in the SAC.

**Example 5.14 Mónica**

Mónica overcomes her fears and starts leading conversation, so she questions the reason why her friends do not dare to do it the same *(dispositions),* as shown in the extract below:

MONICA: When I go to the SAC, **I usually have a  conversation with my friends** who are in level 4. Well, **they could also start giving it because I started in level 4. I also felt ashamed at that time but not anymore because giving conversations helped me**....Yes, like leading conversation but **this semester I prefer going with Kirby (the British language assistant).** (Interview 3)

Her *beliefs* seem to be based on her personal experience *(habitus),* which makes her act in certain ways. That is, she takes the opportunity to talk to the British

assistants because it serves her **_purpose_** to become a proficient user of the language **_(reflexivity)._**

**Example 5.5 Tamara**

Tamara's **_dispositions_** to practice English make her spend time in the SAC several times a week. She is also willing to help her peers as is shown below:

TAMARA: Yes, **I give conversations because other way I couldn´t practice English**. M**any times, the students in conversation have problems to say things, but still I can practice.** And, **I like helping my peers** and **sometimes I have conversation with the teachers. Or I couldn´t have someone to practice. In my family nobody speaks English**… **When I came here [SAC] I said wow! When I saw all the materials, games, books, magazines, movies, etc. I couldn't believe it** ….But **there are some people who lead conversation and they don´t think much about the students or maybe they don't not know how.** (Interview 1)

She raises the point that the SAC is the only place where she can practice English **_(agency),_** and she does so on a regular basis with her peers or teachers **_(habitus)._** She likes helping peers **_(personal identity_**) who find it difficult to express themselves in the target language **_(dispositions)_**. She feels thrilled about all the **_resources_** at her disposal to improve her English and makes good use of them **_(agency)._** She believes that some students do not seem to be concerned about their peers' needs while leading the conversations with the less proficient students **_(dispositions)_**. This fact might relate to her understanding of how speaking practice should be carried out with beginner students.

**Example 5.6 Max**

Some students do not have the dispositions to practise and learn the target language. Max, for example, only cares about meeting the requirement of attending a certain number of hours (a mandatory in the English courses) stated by his teacher, as illustrated in the excerpt below:

MAX: Si iba a hacer lo que debía, leer un libro, los ejercicios, pero nunca me gusto estar ahí por gusto, sino era más por obligación cumplir con las horas, conversaciones solo así. (Entrevista 2)

MAX; Yes, I **used to go and do what I was supposed to**, read a book, the exercises but **I never liked to be there for pleasure, but for obligation to meet the requirement** of the hours, conversations only like that. (Interview 2) TR

He makes it clear that he only goes to the SAC in order to do the tasks and meet the course requirement, as opposed to other students who seem to enjoy their time in the SAC. He sees it as an obligation. Thus, his aim is not to take the opportunity to practise English and benefit from it, but simply to pass the English courses *(habitus)*.

To sum up, students negotiate their *roles* and *position*, so participation and learning seem to be linked in terms of the actions they take in the English-speaking context of the SAC; that is, the extent of their engagement in the social space shapes their development in language learning. Most of them are committed to investing their time and effort in the social context with a sense of *the feel of the game*. Some learners position themselves as experts, helping the novices, while novices develop the feel of the game by engaging in different activities in the SAC. Thus, the language learners' actions seem to be influenced by their habitus as they tend to do familiar practices, but also by their reflexivity regarding their reasons and purpose to learn the target language. For example, some participants had the intention to study abroad and they knew about opportunities for English courses, certifications and scholarships because of their regular visits to the SAC, so they took the opportunities afforded. Hence, the way the SAC operates greatly contributes to the development of the students' identity as language learners and users.

## 5.3 Summary

In conclusion, the findings suggest that learners' agency regarding what they do in order to learn, either initiating, taking part or carrying out actions, is to a greater or lesser extent affected by the contextual conditions. The individual social circumstances (enablements, constraints) and projects (desires and aspirations) that constitute the students' lives together with their social relations, influence the way they make decisions and the actions they take. Therefore, the participants' accounts show that their decisions are made partially unconsciously, because of a series of past events as embodied dispositions (habitus) influenced

by the social structure, and also through their internal deliberations evaluating their projects within their given circumstances and devising a course of action.

The participants (Carmen, Tamara, Mariela, Diego, Bernardo, Mónica, Diana, Luciano, Karina) have transformed their sociocultural orders, as none of their parents can speak English or they cannot do so as well as they do. They have not only learnt English, but they also have high expectations for their future, which exceed what their parents have achieved. Although they have different reasons, they all exhibit their agency. They do it through the actions they take in order to become more competent language users: Carmen, for working purposes; Mariela, to become the producer of the linguistic capital affected by the environment; Diego and Bernardo, encouraged by their particular interests and hobbies; Karina, to fit in the group and because of her job; and Tamara, Luciano and Diana, to have more academic opportunities and get a scholarship to study a master's degree in an English-speaking country. Thus, they purposefully act according to their needs, interests and aspirations.

For some of them (Tamara, Carmen, Mariela, Mónica and Karina), this involves combining a sense of belonging to both working-class homes and middle-class higher education, while for others it is their sense of belonging to the middle-class (Luciano, Diana and Diego) which provides them with confidence and entitlement to use the second language. On the other hand, Daniel and Max's language learner identity seems to conflict with their social identities of class and being Spanish speakers. These last two participants reproduce what they have lived and learnt by questioning the attitude of the Americans in their city of Cancun and rejecting the foreign language.

Therefore, students' agency can be linked to their purpose, needs and interests. The participants have shown to be active doers related to their felt and lived experiences with the target language through interacting with others in different settings. Language learners' agency was examined subjectively and as collectively emergent in social situations from across multiple time scales, in which the role of interaction has proved to be an emergent mechanism of mediation between students' actions in language learning and use and the social context.

# Chapter 6: Discussion

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together findings and issues reported in Chapters 4 and 5 to explore the main research question and the three sub-questions of the study raised in Chapter 1 [(see 1.2)](#):

1. Why do language learners choose to shape or resist their access to EFL?

1a. What is the nature of learners' dispositional formations towards English?

1b. To what extent are learners' actions dependent on existing social and cultural orders?

1c. In what ways do contextual conditions co-determine the EFL students' desire to invest in language learning?

Chapter 4 addressed the sub-question 1a broadly by outlining students' dispositions towards English and highlighting what seems to have caused them. Chapter 5 provides more evidence to substantiate specific issues and themes emerging from Chapter 4, to examine how students exhibit their agency within their trajectories. Chapters 4 and 5 then describe the complex interaction of causal powers and the explanation about the causal mechanisms and underlying structures responsible for language learning, subject to circumstances that bring about change in learners' actions.

The analysis of data, in chapter 4 and chapter 5, offered a close-up sense of the participants to get an insight on aspects that influence their behaviour regarding English. Their concerns and projects offered a sense of their personal identity, which affects the extent to which students manage to develop their second language identity or not. The analysis showed some emerging similarities and differences between the students' trajectories concerning their decision-making process and actions, either reproducing or transforming the socio-cultural orders.

Therefore, this chapter will look at the dialectic between the students' actions and the sociocultural context (enablements and constraints) that partially determine their investment in language learning. Learners' identity is interactive in creating

the constantly changing self, through education, real-life experiences and free learning, so that 'students are subjects in process', that is subjectivity (Kristeva, 1977). They make choices to act in the different settings and subjectivity 'helps understand how identity is constructed and recognised' and historically shaped (Kramsch, 2009), while language learners operate and interact to further explain the relevant aspects responsible for the students' outcome in language learning.

## 6.2 Reflexivity and habitus

In seeking to investigate and analyse the extent to which the contextual conditions have an impact on the students' desire to invest in language learning, it may be useful to first consider Bourdieu's (1990:53) habitus and Archer's (2003) reflexivity perspectives in the causation of human action. This section will look at the authors' theories, briefly discussing issues of both perspectives.

Bourdieu's habitus stresses that behaviour is determined by the social conditions of the field while Archer emphasizes the role of conscious reflexive deliberation of the individuals based on their life projects. Margaret Archer (1995, 2000, and 2007) has criticised Bourdieu on how he takes on structure and agency in his work (Block, 2013a:137). However, in the last decade several authors have argued that they can either hybridize or complement each other to understand how agency operates (see Elder-Vass, 2007, 2010; Akram, 2013; Akram and Hogan, 2015; Decoteau, 2016; De Costa et al., 2016; Block, 2013a, Farrugia and Woodman, 2015; Fleetwood, 2008). My data suggests that both theories can be compatible to understand how students take decisions and act in regards language learning influenced by their contextual conditions. This is in line with Elder-Vass (2007:325), who claims that human action is the outcome of a continuous interaction between dispositions and reflexivity, and Block (2013a:142) who suggests reconciling Bourdieu's and Archer's theories. He proposes making it clear how structures and constraints are important and how they work. That is, the way that socio-historical aspects shape the individual's ability to act as an agent (p. 144).

The notion of habitus has been investigated in education with a focus on social class and educational attainment. The emphasis has been on educational equality, looking at issues of privileged and socio-economically disadvantaged students in schools and university settings (Lehmann, 2013; Edgerton and

Roberts, 2014; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009, 2014). Studies have also examined the admission practices in academic institutions using the concept of field as a tool of analysis (Bathmaker, 2015), and the concept of cultural capital as an analytical tool for educational attainment (Tzanakis, 2011). In second language learning (Flowerdew and Miller, 2008) examined the issue of social structure and individual agency.  Case (2015) researches students' agency at university and the possibilities at such university, in light of the circumstances of their social class, using a social realist approach.  These scholars have tried to gain a better understanding of the different ways in which the students consolidate their studies in the middle-class culture of the academic field. Another strand of research, relevant to the present study, has looked at the strong links between habitus and the psychosocial (the mutual constitution of the individual and the social), in an academic context (Reay, 2015).

Language learners' ability to act as an agent is sociohistorically shaped, as presented in chapter 5. They are positioned differently according to their individual trajectories, and consequently their actions are transformative or reproductive of the socio-cultural orders. From the point of view that the participants' actions take place in their given conditions, and although their effects are partially known, acting in such conditions generates emergent properties. Students are the ones who choose to learn or not, who experience the consequences, and who make new choices based on their experiences interacting in a sociocultural context that facilitates or constrains their access to English.

### 6.2.1 Physical environment

The findings of this study suggest that in Cancun (1.3.1), people from different socio-economic statuses (SES) are aware that English is the linguistic capital that legitimates and gives 'distinction and privilege to those who possess and deploy it' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 cited in Tzanakis, 2011:77). Parents understand that knowing English is a form of cultural capital that will yield a benefit to their children to interact in a community structured on the tourist market. Castellanos (2010:72) argues that tourists' desires, national government, and multinational corporations generate the power structures, thus 'fluency in English is a requirement for most professional and upper-level positions', and even for unskilled jobs in Cancun. The increasing numbers of visitors, not only from North

America, but also from the emerging markets (Brazil, Russia and China), favour the investment of the government and stakeholders, and English is the international language of communication (British Council, 2015:51). Hence, tourism has led to the penetration of multinational hotels, food and clothing companies, and English is of paramount importance to provide the service and communicate with the clients (Boxill and Hernández, 2002:51).

English is the official foreign language in education throughout the country, but in Cancun it has a special standing, and is perceived as the second language, given that it plays a significant role in employment and business. In such context, 'knowledge of English is...framed as must-have' if people want to succeed professionally and economically (Block, 2015:11). In the touristic destination, people can be more exposed to English and they have either the need or opportunity to use it, compared to non-tourism areas of the country. However, the extent to which people are exposed to English depends on their need or reasons to spend time in the hotel zone or downtown (in the commercial area). In the periphery of the city, people may live without any contact with English unless there is something or someone linking or exposing them to the international language, such as schooling, visits to the hotel zone, or parents' jobs. Thus, students are usually exposed or realise they need English when they insert themselves in the job market.

The findings revealed that parents make choices in their children's language education because foreign language teaching is not successful in government schools, and based on their own experiences, influencing expectations for their children's future. Scholars offer that success in English language learning correlates with class position (Butler, 2013; Block, 2015; Shin, 2014; Gao, 2014; López-Gopar and Sughura, 2014). Although in Cancun it is not always the case, parents from both higher-SES and lower-SES understand that if their children learn the English language, they will be better prepared for work in a city based on tourism. The lower-SES parents' use of the target language at work was found to be influential in their decisions to invest in their children's language learning. For example, Tamara's father worked as a bellboy and at a towel stand, Mariela's mother at a hotel, Bernardo's father as a waiter, and Monica's mother wanted to be an English teacher (see 4.2.2.). Thus, their parents' experiences have contributed to their effort to pay for private tuition (Mónica, and Tamara), private

schools and language courses (Diana, Luciano, Tamara and Mariela), despite their socio-economic status (Tamara, Mariela and Mónica).

Some parents take or send their children (Diana and Mónica) to the United States to visit their relatives during summer, where they can practice the target language. Having relatives in the United States allows Diana's higher-SES parents and Mónica's lower-SES, to spend some time in the English-speaking country. Mónica's mother might not have either time or money for all the family, but she wants her daughters to practise English (see appendix 8). Hence, the participants' language experiences in the United States influence their perceptions and dispositions 'structured and structuring structures' of their linguistic habitus (Bourdieu, 1994d: 170 cited in Grenfell, 2014:50).

Diana, Mónica and Luciano's actions seem to be more related to their habitus, whereas Tamara and Mariela's actions appear to be the result of their habitus and their reflexivity to pursue the aim to learn English. Diana and Luciano's trajectories in bilingual schools have enabled them to be competent English users, and they are more likely to move smoothly toward attaining academic and job opportunities (see 4.2.4 and 4.3.1). Luciano says that he could not do without English *'English is very important, I use it every day, for example, I surf on internet, read the news, and look for new things on the internet'*, and Diana simply *says 'I like it because I grew up with it'.* Their words imply that their linguistic habitus provides them with 'a sense of self as learners and users of the second language' (Benson, 2012:173). Likewise, for Mónica, travelling to the United States influenced her predisposition (habitus), due to her positive experiences interacting in the English-speaking field (see 4.2.3). Nevertheless, it was sometimes challenging, but she overcame her fears and found a way to do it, namely leading conversation in the SAC with her friend (see 5.2.3), which seems to relate to second language-mediated aspects of personal competence.

In the cases of Tamara and Mariela, their early experience with English seems to have equipped them with dispositions towards English. These dispositions are constrained by the life circumstances that deprived them of the language learning experience, so they exert their agency to attain their language learning goals. When Tamara realises that she cannot learn English in the little town, she asks for

an English course as a present for her 15th birthday The extract is an example of how she takes her decisions:

> **I believe that a party is like money thrown to the bin because it is just one night**. You dressed beautifully, you invite people, but as it is so expensive people continue paying for or owing money for some time. **Whereas the course was an investment and in something I liked,** so I took advantage of it.

Her words suggest that she has had an internal conversation with herself and decided the English course to be more important than the one-day party, which points to her ultimate concern, to be proficient in English. She believes that '*English is the key that open doors'* because she lived in Cancun as a child, and learnt that English is an asset.

Similarly, Mariela finds the way to continue learning English by asking her parents to pay for a language course when she is at the elementary government school . Tamara and Mariela's actions point to their dispositions (habitus) and their sense of self as learners devising a course of action to pursue their aim through their reflexivity. They did it at an age when most children and teenagers in Mexico do not often care much about their education because they have other interests that keep them entertained. Moreover, the parents are usually the ones who take the decisions concerning their children's education, so children are not used to getting involved in such matters. However, Tamara and Mariela's intentions to learn English make them take a course of action, guided by their reflexivity as they monitor themselves in relation to their circumstances.

Carmen and Karina's circumstances are similar because both of them migrate to Cancun, study tourism, work full time, and deal with economic and family issues during their undergraduate studies. They do not only lack family support, but are also the ones who solve family and economic problems. However, they have different trajectories which influenced their dispositions towards English. Carmen's family immigrated to the United States, from a northern state of the country, following the American dream to achieve prosperity. Things were not as expected and they returned to Mexico after some time, and some years later they migrated to Cancun. Karina, on the other hand, migrated on her own from the centre of the country, and her parents left her on her own. During their studies, Carmen worked in the tourist industry and Karina in a company as an

administrative assistant where no English was needed. Carmen's experience of living in the United States seems to have equipped her with the feel of the game to cope with such situations. Her habitus linked her past experience to her present situation, where she has to interact in English with the customers and native speaker bosses at work and is also linked to her future as she works in the tourist industry. Her dispositions of the linguistic habitus have underlined her actions and contributed so that she could be 'active and creative' in the work field 'to maximise her position at work' in the tourist industry (Grenfell, 2014:52-53) (see 4.2.3, 4.2.5, and 5.2.1). Karina however, was resistant to English, and she believed that she was less linguistically competent than her peers because of not having grown up in Cancun. She takes her decisions through reflexive deliberations, for example, the way she decides whether to take or drop the English subject in some semesters, and her internal conversations about using English (see 4.2.1 and 5.2.3). That is, she evaluates her projects in the light of her circumstances, and her decisions are many times influenced by her ultimate concerns such as her economic and family problems. Nevertheless, she changes job and works in the planetarium where she has to read texts in English, and near the end of this study she is more confident about using English. The previous facts point to the psychosocial, 'how the exterior (social structures) is mediated by the interior, the psyche (Reay, 2015).

Diana and Luciano's experiences with English might be seen as shaped by the affordances of their middle-class habitus that makes them manage their achievement in English with relative ease. For example, they are selected for the scholarship programme, get a good result in the IELTS, and a good job after finishing their studies because of their English competence.  They are like 'fish in the water' (Bourdieu1989:43 cited in Watson et al., 2009:171) because of the comfortable ease of their linguistic habitus in the natural field of English. Tamara and Mariela's trajectories suggest that they are equipped with the linguistic habitus of their early experience with English. However, to achieve their accomplishments in English, they have to devise a course of action, such as taking a language course and participating in social media and networking through the use of computer or mobile phone. Tamara and Mariela could not conclude the procedure for the American scholarship programme due to family issues, but they did not give up in the face of such constraints. Both of them took

the IELTS exam, which helps them later on, Tamara is selected to participate in the international exchange programme, and Mariela is accepted at an international travel agency.

Although, their trajectories differ, Diana, Luciano, Tamara, Mariela and Mónica are aware that being proficient in English they can benefit from international perspectives, so they aim to pursue their postgraduate studies in an English-speaking country. While Carmen aspires to be linguistically competent to pursue a career in the tourist industry, and Karina is still struggling with the language but more willing to acquire it to get a better income that will give her economic stability to be able to travel.

The linguistic habitus acquired through past experiences provides Diana, Luciano, Tamara, Mónica, Mariela and Carmen with the feel of the game, which 'embodied them with dispositions' towards English 'after years of socialisation' in the language learning field (Zotzmann and Hernández-Gutiérrez, 2013:366). These dispositions oriented them as players who possess the linguistic capital, which has been an advantage in the field that has helped them attain the academic and job opportunities they want. Nevertheless, Tamara, Mariela, Mónica and Karina have also done it through reflexive deliberations, mediated between their circumstances and projects, in which they have to prioritise their most important concerns, to devise courses of action that have sometimes left English in second place, e.g. Karina (see 4.2.4).

The family socio-economic status and the extent to which students can acquire English skills seem to be related but does not determine it. Moreover, the decisions of the participants' parents regarding their children's language education are associated with their parents' job experiences. Nine of the eleven participants' parents migrated from other states, aspiring to achieve higher incomes and greater well-being. Diana, Luciano and Carmen's parents hold a university degree, but they are not proficient in English and seem to have experienced the need for the English language. Max and Daniel's parents are the only parents who were born in the State of Quintana Roo. Max's parents are from a town near Cancun and they are sole traders in the area of the regions of Cancun; and Daniel parents are from Chetumal, the capital of the state, and they belong to the army. This fact suggests that they do not need the foreign language

214

for their jobs and might be disappointed by the foreigners' constant presence in their state, which might have influenced their children.

To sum up, the success in language learning is related not only to material resources and learning experiences, but also to their parents' experiences and expectations for the future of their children. The situated English practice in Cancun is the generative mechanism that serves as motivation for parents and students to invest in the linguistic capital, so the children can be prepared to insert themselves in the job market of the city. However, locals in Cancun hardly ever interact in English until they must do so at work. Therefore, in this context, knowing English is a motivation emergent from relations between the participants' intentions and the social world, instead of an individual feature (Sealey and Carter, 2004:206). Thus, student agency should be understood in all its dimensions, defined by experiences in the physical environment and social interaction, existing as the power that mediates language learning and its constraints (Case, 2015).

## 6.2.2 Between imagined communities and communities of practice in the era of globalisation

In the globalised world, students are part of different social groups in English, so they communicate and negotiate their membership in social media in communities that interest them. Giddens (1990: 64 cited in Block, 2008:1) defines globalisation as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities.' All the participants report using English every day, except for the resistant students, Karina, Daniel and Max. Bernardo, Luciano, Diana, Diego and Mariela use it as part of their daily activities. Most of these activities involve the use of internet e.g. browsing for information, getting updated, watching videos and films, listening to music, and on social media gathering with people around a common interest e.g. video games, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, video blogs etc. By engaging in different communities, the students expand their social network with people from different countries and English is the international language of communication. Hence, students' investment in language learning is related to their needs, desires, interests, aspirations and expectations, which are also influenced by their past and current experiences.

The focus for Bernardo is to develop his English language skills to be able to communicate in the video game community. His intention does not include academic English but is conversational, as his aim is to speak well enough to convey his ideas. Luciano is keen on playing video games with the international community, and he can recognise different English accents. Nevertheless, he interacts through writing because he is not confident about his speaking skills. He is interested in being more proficient, so he uses English every day e.g. reading the news and browsing the topics of his interest. Thus, interacting in English through video games did help both Luciano and Bernardo to develop their English skills, but they have different interests and expectations about what they need English for and what they want to achieve with it.

Tamara is aware that she can improve her English skills by taking advantage of the internet and technology, so she is an active participant in social networks, such as Facebook (to meet people and interact in English), and WhatsApp (to be in touch with the people she has met in England and at work). Similarly, Diana, and Luciano keep in contact with friends they made in their one-month course and Diana keep in touch with people she met in her two-time job experience in the United States.  They communicate with their friends through Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. Moreover, Luciano is going out with a girl he met in the States and they communicate through Skype. Diana, Tamara and Luciano are concerned about becoming more linguistically competent and maintaining high grades, which help them to be selected to spend time in the English-speaking countries (see 4.2.4 and 4.3.1). Through technology therefore, students expand their social network, which points to their second language identity as they use English in the real world.

Many times the students' intention is simply to entertain themselves, and use English indirectly e.g. via internet, television and books. They do different activities in which they do not necessarily interact e.g. watching cartoons, films, videos, and video blogs, listening to songs, browsing topics of their interest. Mariela, Diana, Carmen and Tamara watch popular cartoons in English, not only American ones, but also Korean (Diana) and Japanese (Carmen) ones. Mariela and Carmen like browsing fashion blogs, and Carmen looks for recipes in English because her boyfriend is a chef. Luciano is interested in motorcycles and follows an Australian video blogger and Diego browses for information about rock stars

and famous singers. Mariela and Diana are also fond of reading books in English and even buy them on Amazon to read them in the original language. Listening to music has also been influential in their language learning development. Bernardo likes singing his favourite songs using YouTube with the lyrics. Mariela feels pleased with herself when realises she can understand the lyrics of a song and Diego practises songs while playing the guitar.  As for films, TV and series, these are a common practice reported by Luciano, Mariela, Mónica, Tamara, Daniel, Karina and Diego. Tamara, Mariela, Mónica and Luciano start watching them with subtitles in English, and when they feel more confident, they watch without them. Karina is socially oriented and likes reading social and political memes. Although she is not very confident about her English competence, she does it because she is interested in the topics. Hence, technology and physical objects of their interest and at their reach, positively contribute to the students' engagement with the foreign language.

The different ways in which the participants informally participate in the English content, whether consciously or unconsciously, contributes to their language learning gains. It is the students' habitus from their individual experiences, more or less consciously, in the different fields that form the basis for their actions and interactions, in which they are both product and/or producers of the embedded practices. The material conditions they can have access to, generate the possibilities that shape their sense of what is possible and desirable for them, and what is likely becomes what they actively choose and do. The students have technology and internet at their reach, and they use them for their entertainment, as in many other places. In a city like Cancun however, it is the window to learn more about the world, as there are not many activities to do apart from going to the malls and the beach, and the latter cannot be easily accessed, as it is full of hotels that do not allow locals to pass through to the beach.

Out of the eleventh participants, only Diana and Luciano made it clear from the beginning of the study that they want to pursue postgraduate studies, Mariela and Tamara deciding to do so while studying at the university. The latter students learnt about such opportunities at the university, but Mariela has been unable to do so because of family issues. The rest of the students seem to do activities in English without any other objective in mind, simply to do things they are interested in and like doing; even Daniel, one of the reluctant students, watches

films. As for Max, the other student who appears resistant to English, he is the only one who does not report to be engaged in any of the activities above.

Social structures in the form of social relations – with relatives, friends, peer students, co-workers, tourists and teachers- have causal powers on how students engage in particular practices exercising their agency. Diana started reading books in English as a child, with her cousin, at a library, in the United States, and she continues doing so. Mariela watches films without subtitles and listens to songs because of a teacher's advice to improve her linguistic skills, and when she realises, she can understand the lyrics of a song, she decides to read a book in English. Mónica leads conversation because of her British teacher's advice and she continues for several semesters after she finishes her English courses. Karina however, evolves from being resistant to English to starting to use it (see 4.2.1 and 5.2.3), as a result of the time she lives with her boyfriend who is keen on English. For example, she reads texts at work, browses social media, and participates as a staff member in the event of TED Cancun (informal conversation). These facts emphasise the central role of social interaction in students' language learning.

In the SAC, Bernardo, Tamara and Diego decide to lead conversation sessions, so they take advantage of the opportunity afforded. Tamara does so with the aim of practising with the teachers and her peers, whereas Bernardo does this because he loves talking to people and helping his friends. Diego on the other hand, starts doing so because his friends ask him to, then he realises this practice allows him to socialise; he comes from a private institution and finds it difficult to fit in a government university. The SAC is the meeting point at the university and its social environment invites students to negotiate new ways of learning and practising English with the assistance of others. It offers a space where the students freely accommodate in the position and level of participation in which they feel more comfortable.

Language practice in the SAC involves a field of knowledge in which English, the linguistic capital, is valued, and positions the students in different roles depending on their linguistic competence, and on their interest to invest in the language. Since its social configuration allows students the freedom to negotiate the position contributing to their identities, as SAC helpers, conversation leaders,

regular or occasional users, they can choose their degree of engagement in language practice

Given the fact that developing a second language identity is a process that implies moving from feeling like an outsider to be an insider, the students negotiate their membership in the different communities that seem to shape their investment in language learning. It is through the students' participation in social media, social networks and in the SAC that they become part of the communities with other members with whom they share interests, and where they challenge conventional modes of expression and use innovative forms, that gives them a sense of belonging that favours a more natural use of the second language. Thus, it is when people undertake some projects that the exercise of the causal powers of language are activated, by means of sociocultural interaction (Sealey and Carter, 2014:273).

The students exhibit their agency by choosing what they engage with, the greater or lesser extent of their engagement and where they do so, that affects what they learn and how they change through their commitment, and 'English offers an expanded community of users' (Pennycook, 1994:325). The line that separates the real communities and the imagined communities has become blurred, and learners' identities navigate in community transitions (Vasilopoulos, 2015:65). They learn several things through their participation in different fields, so learning and participation involve their subjectivities and identities. The participants create for themselves 'patterns of their linguistic behaviour to resemble those of the groups' they want to identify with, or in order to be different from those groups they wish to be distinguished from', and 'these are acts of identity and evidence of agency' (Sealey and Carter, 2004:123). The emergence of new subject positions is expanded through the language learners' membership in the SAC and international on-line communities, fostering the development of their second language identity. Students' actions point to their second language identity as they operate in such spaces expressing the desired identity as learners and users (Benson, et al. 2012:173), hence their actions are linked with the social structure through their social relations (de Souza, 2014) that Lopez and Scott (2000:98), labelled as embodied structures (structure is contained in people).

## 6.3 Emerging insights

The results of this study have some significant implications related to the themes that have emerged through the literature review and the research. The data brings to light the relationship between the language learners' agency and their individual trajectories that are co-determined by material and symbolic resources, and other human subjects that culturally and historically shaped them. These elements are related to the earlier discussion of conceptions of social structure and agency and their dual correspondence. Furthermore, every learner has a unique learning trajectory, personality, desires and projects and he/she is also subject to circumstances which have significant implications for the decisions and actions taken regarding their language learning and use, both in the context of this study and more generally.

Based on the description and discussion above and the overall findings of the study, I summarise emerging insights about students' EFL learning. As Block (2007 cited in Vasilopoulos, 2015:65) suggests, EFL contexts are extremely varied in terms of English learning, the relative importance of English and the purpose of learning English. Language is not always the objective but the means to pursue interests and goals. The learners are social beings with different needs, aspirations and expectations related to social, cultural and material entities. This fact implies students' agency is constantly shaped by the social context and interactions. Furthermore, they negotiate their identity across time and space, and such negotiations interact with their agency. As a result, to account for language learners' agency is to examine their actions 'within the contexts which are constitutive of their meaning' as sociohistorically shaped to provide causal explanations (Sayer, 1992:128). In order to do this, I want to make explicit the dominant themes/issues that affect students' agency in language learning. Some of them are obvious, but there are others, which are not always perceived in the teaching context.

### 6.3.1 Education

In Mexico, like in most countries of the expanding circle (Kachru's 1985 model cited in Kachru, 1996:1), people's first contact with English is through formal learning at school. Students' general characteristics and patterns are associated

with their previous learning experience at bilingual schools, government schools or private lessons, which influence their pathways to language learning. Schooling in two languages affords children an advantage in language development and a powerful positive impact on language learning. Children are more open to specific customs and institutions, in which they socialise and adapt more easily to the circumstances, acquiring specific habits of thought and behaviour (Hodgson 2004: 168-9 cited in Fleetwood, 2008:187). Moreover, they are not intimidated by peer pressure, and 'have not formed stereotypes of their own identity' (Preston 1989 cited in Ellis, 2008:312), as is the case with older learners. However, not many students can access such bilingual programmes, and at government schools English is taught in secondary school during their teenage years, in which they are highly emotional and susceptible to criticism. Sometimes therefore, they prefer to pretend that they do not care instead of trying and making mistakes, which suggests a relationship between students' agency and what they think is possible.

On the other hand, Layder (1993 cited in Lamb, 2012:17) highlights that the psychobiography –psychological make up, character or motivation- of subjects and their social activity are 'always embedded in wider, national and cultural settings'. Although English has been mandatory in secondary school and high school for many years all over the country, and despite several announcements of the Ministry of Education that it would be taught as of the last year of nursery school, the National English Programme in Basic Education (NEPBE), has only been implemented in a few states. According to the British Council investigation (2015:7), some key findings are that NEPBE has been introduced in 18% of Mexican public schools and that it is suggest that over 80,000 additional English teachers should be recruited and trained to achieve the government goals. Thus, the report highlights that the national English language policy 'is a formidable task, with outcomes that, in the near-term, may not be easily gauged or measured' (p.4). Moreover, Despagne (2010:62) argues that despite educational reform, 'English teaching is known to be deficient as the teachers have no specialised didactical training; moreover, some of them do not even speak the language at an advanced level'. These facts reflect the broader social, cultural and economic environment in which students find themselves. They experience and interact with the resources offered by the social context at schooling (teaching

and classroom practices), which have a significant effect on their dispositions and motivation to learn English.

## 6.3.2 Identity

The students exposed to EFL at either an early age, formally (at school, language courses) or informally (video games, listening to tourists or relatives), influence the development of their second language identity. They confidently use the language for different purposes and do not feel different to other English speakers. They exert their agency by finding ways to improve their English skills, using it in their everyday life, and communicating with English speakers, since their linguistic habitus (dispositions and attitudes) influence them to generate a repertoire of actions. They invest in English with the understanding that it can help them obtain 'symbolic resources' (language, education, employment, friendship) and 'material resources (money), and at the same time increase the value of their cultural capital and social power (Bourdieu, 1990 cited in Norton, 2013: loc. 247).

Students who were exposed to English at an older age, in their teenage years at government secondary schools, may not have the self-confidence or desire to commit to learning the foreign language.  They are not willing to devote their energy to investing in it, even when they are aware of its importance for employment and academic fields. They make their choices responding to social forms, e.g. language teaching, learning content, United States hegemony, including the attitude and behaviour of Americans in Cancun; institutional norms (English as mandatory second language), which interfere with the development of their second language identity.

Personality traits affect the motivation, easiness or difficulty students' identify with other communities' identity and the development of their second language identity. For some students, learning English is the attraction to escape from their reality, and they identify with English-speaking singers, bands, TV programmes and communities, whereas others feel anxiety, which might relate to their personality and socioeconomic status that limits their life opportunities. Kramsch (2013) suggests that identity 'is not only psychological self-awareness but also political consciousness' so reluctant students might have a 'sense of uncertainty

about rules not about who they are or whom they represent, but whom to trust' e.g. situations, people, events. Then, she proposes subjectivity as a better term because of perspectives and emotions that may change, such as in the case of two of the resistant learners. One of them changed her views about English when she was more in contact with the language while being with her peers, and another one because of the understanding and support of two English teachers, when he went through two difficult situations. Those events had a positive impact on their language learning behaviour. Moreover, opportunities such as being able to travel to an English-speaking country that increase cultural capital, participation in social media, and desire to belong to imagined communities can foster learners' motivation to invest in the target language.

It is worth mentioning that gender was not discussed because I did not find anything significant in the range of features analysed concerning the participants' decisions and actions towards language learning and use. The findings differ from Pavlenko and Piller's (2011:29) study of multilingualism, SLL and gender, in which gender is the intrinsic relationship between gender and agency in the process of L2 learning and use. They explain that in some contexts, gender, as a system of social relations and discursive practices, emerges as one of the main factors influencing the decision-making process and outcomes of second language learning and language shift. In my experience, this is more likely to happen in the classroom setting when language is not that meaningful in an instrumental sense, and girls are usually more interested in language learning than boys are. In the present study however, most of the participants were very instrumental about what they were doing in English, that is, for practical reasons of present and future utility. Their present use of English is 'highly implicated in the cultural practices of young people' (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2012 cited in Henry and Cliffordson, 2013:285) and as part of the environment in which they create their identities as members of different communities, such as social media and video games, e.g. Luciano, Bernardo, Diego, Tamara, Carmen, and even Karina who evolved from being resistant to being a language user. A view of future usefulness entails postgraduate studies and professional opportunities for success, e.g. Diana, Mónica, Luciano, Tamara, Carmen, Mariela, Diego and Karina. Thus, this lack of a gender difference seems to indicate that English is a 'must-have skill' in the transnational city of Cancun.

To sum up, students' experiences are responsible for the degree of ease or discomfort with which they feel as they move across different fields in time and space developing their second language identity, that is, 'the ability to function as a person and express desired identities in a second language setting' (Benson, 2012:173). Therefore, identity is strongly linked to students' agency, which has an effect on their dispositions to the foreign language. Students create their identity in particular ways based on what they experience and decisions they take, drawing on their habitus or through reflexive deliberations that give meaning to their life history, and consequently guide their actions in language learning.

### 6.3.3 Expectations, aspirations, and interests

The learners' particular interests, expectations and aspirations influence their decisions and the actions they take. Students' actions are mainly oriented towards the past, present or future based on their experiences in different contexts and affected by social relations, which in turn has an impact on their interests, expectations and aspirations. First, a distinction is made between expectations and aspirations, which researchers sometimes use interchangeably, given that they have quite different meanings. The Oxford dictionary provides the following definitions: an expectation is to think or believe that something will happen, while an aspiration is to have a strong desire to have or do something. Students' expectations, therefore, relate to a sense of entitlement, the feeling of having a right to things in life, by assuming, predicting and considering something likely. Students' expectations in language learning vary in the extent to which they assume and predict they can do and feel worthy of such position because they will belong to the English-speaking community. Other students have low expectations and predict they cannot do it because they do not consider they fit into such environment, which points to a state of emotional being, a feeling of worry or embarrassment. Hence, students' expectations depend on many factors, such as the society in which they grew up, the socioeconomic status to which they belong, their upbringing, personality traits, and the people they associate with that have an effect on what they expect they can achieve in language learning.

Students' aspirations refer to what they dream about a possible future life, which is associated with their desires, dreams, hopes and wishes. Some students' desires are connected with the use of English, such as postgraduate studies, travelling, and working or living in another country; other students' desires are beyond the foreign language. For example, two of the resistant language learners have the dream to do something to help the disadvantaged groups, namely the Mayans; one of them promoting environmental education and developing environmental projects (see 4.3.2), and the other with a project to teach them to read and write (see 5.2.5), so they will not lose their land because of being illiterate. These facts suggest that sociocultural and academic features have an additional impact on language learners' aspirations that do not always include the foreign language.

Students show interests that are driven out of class learning, through which they build their agency. They practice and use English voluntarily in self-initiated activities that interest them (films, songs, social media, video games) helping to improve their linguistic skills.  Through the experience of such activities, they become more motivated to invest in them over a long time. The experience of interest is 'a dynamic state that arises through an ongoing transaction among individuals' goals, activity characteristics, and the surrounding context' (Sansone and Thoman, 2005:175-176). From this perspective, the students' interests can work both ways, they have the goal to be more proficient and they engage in some activities, or they are interested in the activities, and as a result, become more proficient in English.

With regard to the surrounding context, this can have a positive or a negative impact on the students' interest in English. Most students are interested in learning English because of living in Cancun, a tourist destination, in which the foreign language is highly valued. Nevertheless, there are others who lack interest because they disagree with certain attitudes of the Americans, particularly those who live permanently in the city and do not care about learning Spanish (see 4.2.6, and 5.2.5), and these students disagree with the USA's behaviour in international politics, so they decide not to invest in language learning.

Therefore, language learners' agency can be understood as belonging to collectivities, but also subjective as it is activated by related mechanisms in the

action context responsible for learners' dispositions and reasons to act. Then, as teachers, if we want students to be willing to learn, and we should make our classroom a vibrant space, get them involved in projects in which they are interested, and learn about our students. Knowing our students better can help teachers to deal with the concerns they bring into the classroom, and we should help them understand that learning a language is not about adopting other culture, but rather improving their own.

## 6.4 Summary

In this chapter, the key findings from research instruments and research questions have been discussed and interpreted with plausible reasons. The qualitative data analysis revealed that students' investment in language learning correlates with the language skills they need or think they need and the attributed importance to English, developed from their experiences and events in different contexts in which they negotiate using the target language. The findings are consistent with some previous research and provide new empirical evidence of the extent to which the contextual conditions have an impact on language learning. In light of these findings, several issues were discussed and interpreted.

The first issue relates to the social nature of agency; students' agency is exercised to certain purposes and within historical sociocultural and material circumstances, and it might be enabled or constrained by such circumstances. Agency is closely interwoven with students' beliefs, interests and purposes. Learners' agency cannot be separated from their contextual conditions because it is through their experiences of interacting with others in different settings that they develop beliefs and dispositions to act in particular ways towards the TL. Reasons vary depending on their need for the language and the purpose of using it, whether English is essential to achieve their projects, pass the subject or engage in activities of their interest.

Secondly, there are key findings of how students make decisions in language learning. Their decisions are partially determined by their dispositions, as a result of past events (academic background, affordances and constraints to use the language), personality traits, current situation and personal projects (expectations and aspirations). Circumstances are sometimes beyond the language learners' control (family issues, economic problems) and interfere with

their objectives, while the language learning of others is fostered by particular situations (the need to use English at work).   Thus, language learners either take decisions partially unconsciously, determined by embodied dispositions (habitus), or they consciously do it through reflexive deliberations by devising a course of action to achieve their goals.

Thirdly, overall, the findings showed that students' agency is interwoven with identity, as they enact their identity responding to contextual conditions. They start learning English mainly for instrumental purposes, to pass the course or to get a good job, and they gradually develop their second language identity, using the language for exploration and discovery of new horizons, knowledge and other cultures in the world.

The development of second language identity involves students' interests, aspirations and expectations of belonging to specific communities with which they identify and negotiate their participation. These communities range from the classroom community and imagined communities, to English-speaking communities. However, there are external factors, mainly sociocultural (discontent with teaching, rejection of people or English-speaking country) and economic, as well as internal factors related to personality traits (perfectionist, analytical, self-conscious) that hinder the development of SLL.

Lastly, autonomy is not the focus of this investigation, but the findings show that students exert their agency by choosing to do activities on their own or in collaboration with others, which develops their ability, skills and knowledge to learn the target language while also controlling the contextual conditions (Murray, 2011:6). That is, 'language learners naturally tend to take control of their learning' (Benson 2011b:16).  Thus, I agree with Benson and Huang (2013:21), who suggest that agency can be considered as 'the origin of autonomy', and that agency, identity and autonomy are interrelated in SLL.

# Chapter 7: Conclusions

## 7.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I refer to the main findings from the interpretation and explanation of my data and link those findings to my research questions (see 1.2). I use my findings to approach my overarching research question to provide causal explanations for students' agency in language learning. I offer the contribution and limitations of this study as well as implications for ELT.

As pointed out in Chapter 1, this thesis started by following Block's (2013a) call to clarify the interrelationship between individual agency and social structures in language and identity research, and the potential benefits of including a more psychological angle when most research tends to be social. Block also suggests critical realism as the best approach given that this theory conceives language and discourse as social realities, while also recognising that there is a material reality out there, which exists regardless of language and discourse. Using his ideas as the starting point, this study used critical realism to examine how in a city which has been developed around and economically based on tourism, a group of undergraduate students exhibit their agency in second language learning, considering the social and structural relations.

## 7.2 Contribution of the study

The findings of this research reveal that students' outcome in EFL is influenced by contextual conditions, but its influence is not deterministic, as students' actions are also driven by their interests, future orientations and personalities, that is, the person (self). Thus, language learners' agency can be best understood through examining their trajectories in relation to certain purposes and within historical sociocultural and material circumstances.

The current study was able to reveal: (1) the way in which students' contact with institutions and organizations (family, education and employment), and their participation in social practices contribute to their language learning dispositions; (2) how students' actions in language learning are dependent on social and cultural orders, but do not determine them; and (3) how language learning could be better understood as a product of generative relations between students and

contextual conditions at micro-level (social interactions) and macro level (social structures). The findings in this study support that to a greater or lesser extent, choices open to students (scholarships, exchange programmes, postgraduate studies, and jobs) are constrained by issues, such as low English level and economic resources, as well as opportunities offered by virtue of their social position, such as education, employment and travels to English speaking countries.

This section aims to respond to my research question that deals with the nature of learners' dispositions towards English.

### 7.2.1 Language learners' dispositions

This research reveals various structural relations that influence students' dispositions and beliefs in language learning. The findings show that living in the City of Cancun affects their learning dispositions (6.2.1). Most participants, except for two of them (Max and Daniel) (see 5.2.5), understand English has a purpose and an immediate use in their current and future lives. This view seems to have been influenced and supported by their parents, who despite their socio-economic status make an effort to provide them with English instruction (see 4.2.1 and 4.2.2) and other opportunities to practice it (see 4.2.3 and 4.2.7). English might start out as an instrument for students to pass the course or a means to have better life opportunities, which is external motivation. However, students engage in certain practices in which they use English, such as listening to music, playing video games and participating in social networks, in which without students being aware of it, English becomes a habitus, 'a way of being, a habitual state ... and, in particular, a predisposition , tendency , propensity or inclination' ( Bourdieu 1977b: 214 cited in Grenfell, 2014:50). Hence, dispositions are features of students which are part of the structures, and both are interrelated, 'the 'outer' and 'inner' self shaping each other' (Ibid. 49). Structures are then, the mechanisms or external forces that interact with the individuality of learners, who possess 'unique identities, personalities, histories, motives and intentions' (Ushioda, 2009 cited in Gao and Lamb, 2011:2). My findings suggest that education, family and employment have a strong influence on students' dispositions towards language learning, but that these structures are interrelated with personal factors, such as personality traits, motives, and perceived linguistic

competence, which act as the mechanism that link institutions to students' agency.

Although Cancun's economic life is driven by tourism, students do not have many opportunities to use English before they insert themselves in the job market. For most participants, the SAC was the only place where they could interact face to face in English. In the SAC, with its material and ideational structure, students' English practice evolves as they reproduce and create new practices. Identity is a negotiated experience as they can decide on their level of participation, so they develop dispositions to behave differently in language learning. The social structure of the SAC is 'the vehicle for the development and transformation of identities' (Wenger, 1998:13). Collier (1994:140 cited in de Souza, 2013:145) states that '[o]ur social being is constituted by relations and our social acts presuppose them. Yet relations and the related individuals may be ontologically independent'. The findings show that the participants in this study chose the role and position they decided, as conversation leaders (Mónica, Diego and Tamara), a SAC helper (Diana, Luciano, Mariela, Carmen and Bernardo), an occasional participant (Daniel and Karina) or a non-participant (Max) (see 5.2.6). Their level of participation implies a sense of agency within their reality. They are part of the SAC structure, and with their knowledge of the social practice, they act by reproducing or transforming its social structure (habitus). Nevertheless, as Elder-Vass (2010:110) points out, participants 'from the same social group have different styles of reflexivity', which contradicts Bourdieu's habitus, since it is through language that learners make sense of themselves and their subjectivity is constructed (Weedon, 1997 cited in Norton, 2013, loc. 195). Students have different reasons for their level of participation in the SAC, which include their personality, interests and aspirations. Hence, the context enables them to choose and negotiate their level of participation, meaning that students' 'motivation and identities develop and emerge as dynamically co-constructed processes" (Ushioda, 2011:21-22 cited in Lamb, 2011:72).

Furthermore, students' context of action is closely related to interests that go beyond the formal context, such as music, sports, video games and social networks, which encompass material and physical resources at their reach. They use English to accomplish something in the world and use the linguistic resources available to them. English may facilitate or constrain what they want to do, so in

the interplay between English and its practice, language is 'emergent from embodied practice within the world', thus there is a 'crucial connection between language and reality'. (Sealey and Carter, 2004:82). Students expand their existing networks and create new ones, developing their English skills by means of digital devices in imagined communities and/or social networks, and it is in such context that English becomes significant for them in online communities of practice and/ or imagined communities. These sites let students construct a version of themselves, an 'imagined self' (Sanderson, 2008; Zhao et al., 2008; and Sessions, 2009 cited in Kelley, 2010), thus students invest in these identities through interaction at global reach.

The findings show that the experience of spending time in an English-speaking country, namely the United States and the UK, had a significant impact on the participants' second language identity (Benson's 2012). Having such experience motivates them to seek opportunities to study, work and travel to English-speaking countries, so they invest in obtaining an international certification of English.

Therefore, the findings suggest that the participants' investment in language learning is related to cultural capital, in terms of the status they can obtain through mastering the highly valued language in Cancun. Sealey and Carter (2004:207) agree with Bourdieu's claim (1986) that 'cultural capital shapes the contexts in which social agents act' and suggest that 'successful learning of L2 is an emergent product of cultural capital in combination with a cultured habitus and learners' motivation'. The participants who were exposed to English at an early age by attending bilingual schools, language courses and spending time in the United States were highly motivated and willing to invest in English, making them successful language learners. The linguistic habitus offers students a sense of social value and a place in the linguistic markets concerned with their 'feel for the game', so their investment is mediated through their habitus concerning anticipated profit (social capital) (Shin, 2014).  Nevertheless, some of them seem to have had reflexive deliberations in order to take decisions on the choices they made (see 5.2.2 and 5.2.4). Their language learning success was determined by their habitus and by their reflexivity, which is in line with authors who provide that Archer and Bourdieu's theories can complement each other (see Elder-Vass, 2010; Elder-Vass, 2007; Vogler, 2016; Farrougia and Woodman, 2015; Akram and

Hogan, 2015; Pöllmann, 2016; Akram, 2013; Decoteau, 2016). Thus, this research supports the view that applying Bourdieu' habitus and Archer's reflexivity can help to better understand the interplay between language learners' agency and social structure.

## 7.2.2 Pre-existing social structures do not determine students' actions

In the present research, the historically embedded individual trajectories of research participants were examined to comprehend the impact on them of the fields of social activity in which they interact. Out of the eleven participants, only three of them seem to belong to a higher-SES and the other eight to the lower-SES (see appendix 5.1). There was not much difference between the participants' clothing as most of them wore blue denims, t-shirts, and blouses to go to the university, except for three female students who sometimes wore dresses or skirts. This fact illustrates that the participants 'may share certain judgments of taste' such as clothing and particular activities but are different from one another in terms of their particular class of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984), although 'a social class itself does not have a habitus' (Pöllmann, 2016:4). The findings show that students who belong to the same socio-economic status can have different outcomes in language learning, as it is their interaction in English speaking settings and their individual features, expectations and aspirations that make them act with determination to achieve the language learning goal.

To some extent, the participants' discourses echo popular discourses about the importance of English in the Mexican society, and to a greater extent in the city of Cancun, as an essential asset in employee selection criterion (Gao, 2010). There is an even more macro level of context to consider. Cultural norms and values influence institutions, social activity and students' beliefs and behaviour. English is regarded as a springboard for mobility and is an asset that brings social and cultural advantage or disadvantage.  English is needed for postgraduate studies in non-Spanish speaking countries, but is also considered an obstacle, as many students fail to reach the required standard (British Council, 2015:51). What can be a demotivating context for one learner may be an inspiring one for another. Students have different expectations and aspirations, and identity in practice is always the interplay between the local and the global (Wenger, 1998:162). There are some students whose expectations are not related to becoming proficient in

English, but to being competent enough for their purpose of using English, such as being fluent enough to interact in English in sports, video-games' communities and social media. This fact might be related to their individual reality; they might not have had contact with something or someone that triggers their desire, or they might feel that it is too difficult for them to achieve.

The choices students make regarding language are influenced by their past and new experiences with the language in formal and informal contexts. The findings suggest that having a life project generates the participants' agentic behaviour, in terms of future development, which is interwoven with their self-identity in terms of future development and their interpretation of the need or interest in the target language. They visualise what they want to achieve, and this desire drives them to action or choice, language is 'a way of getting in touch with oneself, of finding personal significance... through articulation and meaning' (Kramsch, 2006:102). Students are much more than subjects who learn new knowledge and skills, they 'act as feeling and willing subjects who actively prioritise, choose and consider what is important and worth aspiring in their life and future' (Eteläpelto et al., 2013:62).  Thus, for some students, English can be a priority for their personal projects, or they can simply be attracted by the culture associated with it, e.g. music, video games or films and they invest in language learning, but for others it might not be a priority in their personal projects, or it is subjected to their individual circumstances.

The different ways in which the participants use English and the reasons why they do so constitute representations of site, time and agency in relation to the effect of social structures enablements and constraints. They invest in English with the aim to 'acquire symbolic resources (language, education, friendship) and material resources', and consequently they 'increase the value of their cultural capital and social power' (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1991 cited in Norton, 2013, loc. 247). The interrelationship of students and their contextual conditions works both ways. Students seem to evaluate their chances of succeeding consciously or unconsciously depending on the situation, and how they understand their possibilities for the future; thus students' reflexivity 'operates from within and not outside of habitus' (Akram and Hogan, 2015:605), but it is greatly influenced by  social structure. The findings in the present study corroborate that when 'linguistic and personal outcomes intersect' learners' second language identity

emerges (Block 2007; Norton 2000; Riley 2007; Wolf 2006 cited in Benson et al., 2012:174).

### 7.2.3 Language learning as a product of generative relations and contextual conditions

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of previous work in the field. Van Lier (1996:170 cited in Murray et al. 2011: 61) points out that learning is the outcome of 'complex and contingent interactions between individuals and the environment'. Learning a language involves communicating with others through spoken language or texts in different social contexts, which has an impact on learners' identity, that is, 'language creates and shapes who we are, as subjects' (Kramsch, 2006:100). The participants live in a linguistic landscape in which Spanish, English and Mayan are used (see appendix 1.6). They negotiate different roles in several settings, such as students, employees, gamers (in video games and sports), and participants in social networks, which have an impact on their social identity and language learning out of experience via the process of belonging to multiple communities (Wenger, 1998). These networks of social relations, either face-to-face or online, generate learners' actions and contribute or hinder the development of their second language identity.

However, second language identity is not only related to the social dimension, but also to the economic and the political dimensions, as is the case with the two resistant learners, Daniel and Max. They reject investing in English that represents the power of Americans settled in Cancun, and the unjust social structures, which are reproduced daily in the city, so they resist an identity that they feel is imposed on them. This fact makes evident how social structure influences students' feelings of inequality, which includes the affective dimension of the learners rejecting existing power relations in Cancun. Norton (2013, Intro.) argues that 'language is not just a neutral form of communication, but a practice that is socially constructed in hegemonic events, activities and processes that constitute daily life'.

Therefore, the development of second language identity involves both social aspects and personal identity, as 'language is also a means' that leads to 'self-definition and transformation' (Nunan and Choi, 2010).

## 7.3 Contribution of research

This study makes a novel contribution to research in applied linguistics by using critical realism as a philosophical and an interpretative framework. I present here the suggested main contributions of my research with particular reference to the important insights gained during the process of this research.

### 7.3.1 Critical realism as an explanatory framework

Critical realism is based on the assumption of the existence of a real world independent of our knowledge of it (Bhaskar, 1998); given that reality is conceived as being stratified in three domains: the real, the actual and the empirical (see 2.3.2). As Easton (2010:23) argues, we see the tip of the iceberg, yet the invisible is connected to what we see. In order to understand language learners therefore, it is necessary to find out what causes their desire to learn or not to learn the target language, which is not easily perceived.  My findings suggest that to understand language learners it is relevant to understand that there can be multiple causes for their desire to invest or not in language learning, which are related to pre-existing structures that generate such outcomes.

Critical realism allows for an examination of the interplay between the participants (agency) and social structure in the real domain, which consists of structures and objects, both physical and social, which have an impact on students' language learning. Given the fact that language learning is a social phenomenon, students are 'involved in processes resulting from a number of emergent features of the social world', and 'language itself is another emergent feature' (Sealey and Carter, 2004:16).  My findings suggest that students interact in English with others to pursue their interests, which are beyond the classroom, and thus, English can sometimes be a means, and at other times the aim.

Critical realism, therefore, offered a suitable framework to study language learners and existing structures within their individual reality as an open system and through interdisciplinary research. Critical realism holds that some theories can be closer to reality than others, and 'there are rational ways to assess knowledge claims' (Bygstad et al., 2016:84), hence theories of social science were applied to better understand the language learning phenomenon.

### 7.3.2 Methodological level

Methodologically, the combination of language learner biographies, individual interviews and field notes provided a useful way to understand the components and network of the entities, as mechanisms emerge from various layers (Bygstad et al., 2016:84). Nevertheless, it was challenging to carry out this research, as research on this area has not sufficiently described how data could be analysed to identify the causal mechanisms of the structural components and their evolution over time through social interaction. Critical realism ontological assumptions do not restrict methodological choices, although there are important methodological implications that need to be taken into consideration, such as identifying demi-regularities instead of general laws and the process of retroduction see 3.6). (The retroduction phase aims to seek agents' reasons for action or non-action and search for social structural forces operating in a given context in which the reasons make sense (Sayer, 1992 cited in De Souza, 2014:149).

The phase of retroduction was the toughest part of the research, in which I had to hypothesise the causal explanations for students' agency, since mechanisms are associated with both the nature of the underlying structures in the real domain and the relations between them. In order to do so, data was mapped to make connections and discover underlying patterns. I then described significant features and possible causes in the participants' trajectories to identify the generative mechanisms at work.

Therefore, this study contributes to inform the theory, methodology and scope for the application of critical realism in applied linguistics research.

## 7.4 Limitations of the study

As mentioned previously, this study adopted critical realism as a philosophical assumption, and an interpretative framework with an ethnographic approach to attempt to explain the language learning phenomena. The methodology used for this research has a number of limitations. Firstly, there are no studies in SLL or SLA which have followed this approach. It was my understanding of the methodology that led me to link participants' rich accounts to various layers of social structure. Moreover, I used Nvivo to store and analyse data, in which I was not experienced, so I had to learn and use it at the same time. Thus, I believe I

could have taken more advantage of it if time constraints had not prevented me from becoming more familiar with the software.

The number of participants was potentially too large for the nature of this study, given the need for in-depth analysis and interpretation of data. This may be seen as a limitation of this study; however, I believed that having a larger number of participants provided greater breadth, and it was presumed that several participants might drop out of the study at some point. I started with 12 participants, and only one participant did not continue because she dropped out of university. My suggestion for further research below includes evaluating advantages and disadvantages regarding numbers of participants.

## 7.5 Implications for ELT

This research would not have made sense for me as a practising English teacher if it had not led me to some conclusions of immediate application for language teaching and learning. My findings corroborate the idea that by removing constraints and through scaffolding learning, language learners can develop the potential to exert their agency and develop a positive second language identity. The views developed here on English language learning and use, and the interrelationship between learners and contextual conditions, have implications for ELT in similar settings. It is relevant for teachers to be aware that learning a second language entails social aspects and personal identity. Students are not empty slates in the classroom; they arrive with baggage. There are external causes beyond the classroom that affect students' desire to learn the foreign language, which teachers cannot control but should be aware of. They have a life outside the classroom, unique stories and individual circumstances, and they may be caught between different academic and social expectations, as well as dealing with economic issues that affect their language development. Ushioda (2009 cited in Mercer and Williams, 2014) urges us to regard the learner as a real person instead of a 'theoretical abstraction', and McKay and Wong (1996) argue that 'learners are extremely complex social beings with a multitude of fluctuating, at times conflicting needs and desires' (p. 603).

What learners need is a positive language-learning environment where they feel accepted and valued for who they are, and not criticised for making mistakes; in an environment in which peer-collaboration is encouraged through activities that

allow them to share experiences and English skills. Such activities should involve visual, musical, and dramatic or multimodal means according to their interests, in which they use English and their talents to express themselves. Learners' actions are underpinned by their beliefs of how capable they are in English and their perceived need of the language, and by providing opportunities to experience success, they can positively interpret their performance and gain confidence in themselves to exert their agency in language learning.

Most students at government universities usually spend their time in class and at home or work after school, and do not have many other activities, which limits their range of experiences, not only in the TL but also in terms of life in general, which does not help to stimulate their curiosity. Students need to be guided to expand their possibilities, imagination and potential inside and beyond the classroom, by engaging them with available resources inside and outside the classroom. Although students are digital natives, sometimes they do not know or feel capable enough to carry out particular activities in English, so they need guidance and encouragement to imagine themselves as functional users of English in a globally connected world. Learners who invest in L2 can envisage future selves, which Dörnyei (2010:79) coined as the ideal L2 self, 'a powerful motivator to learn the L2'.

On the other hand, learners should be given freedom to make choices, as even limited choices can have an impact on them. They can make decisions on some tasks, activities and experiences according to their needs, preferences, and goals, which entails reflection and awareness of learning. In other words, learners should be in a social space where they can make choices and decisions about what to do and who with, such as the SAC in this study (see 1.3.2, 5.2.6 and appendix 1.6), thus exercising their agency. Furthermore, in the SAC, proficient students help their peers and become role models of what less proficient learners can achieve and as a result, learners are engaged in English and learning can be more effective.

In conclusion, what is needed is a pedagogic practice that takes into consideration the social and psychological aspects that influence learners' willingness and commitment to learning, in order to heighten students' desire to invest in language learning. The social aspect involves the social infrastructure

and resources that constrain and enable language learners, which teachers are unable to control, except in the classroom setting. The psychological aspect relates to students' feelings and thoughts, such as anxiety, attitude and motivation, which can affect language learning positively or negatively. Considering such aspects entails the following: fostering a sense of belonging, namely identity; stimulating students' curiosity and imagination (ideal L2 self), and developing students' awareness of their learning (reflect). Consequently, students can develop a sense of self-competence and a language learner identity to exert their agency through their engagement in the language learning process, which in turn can enhance the teaching practice.

There is still much to be investigated in this field: how teachers can improve, if possible, to help counteract contextual conditions that prevent students from exhibiting their agency in language learning; promote the development of learning environments that allow language learners to make decisions; and to create such learning environments institutionally in order to foster language learners' agency.

# Appendix 1: The origin Cancun



Photograph 1. The lighter colour in the photograph shows the area filled with sand to have more beach (Uluapan, 2011).



Photograph 2. The Mexican government recognised the potential of this strip of land or peninsula between Nichupte Lagoon and the Caribbean Sea (Uluapan, 2011). Development began by building a bridge between Cancun Island and the Cancun mainland.

## Appendix 1.1 Hotel Zone



Photograph 3. The construction of many hotels and tourist establishments extend across 23 kilometres (15 miles) along the sea and the lagoon (Santisteban, 2018).
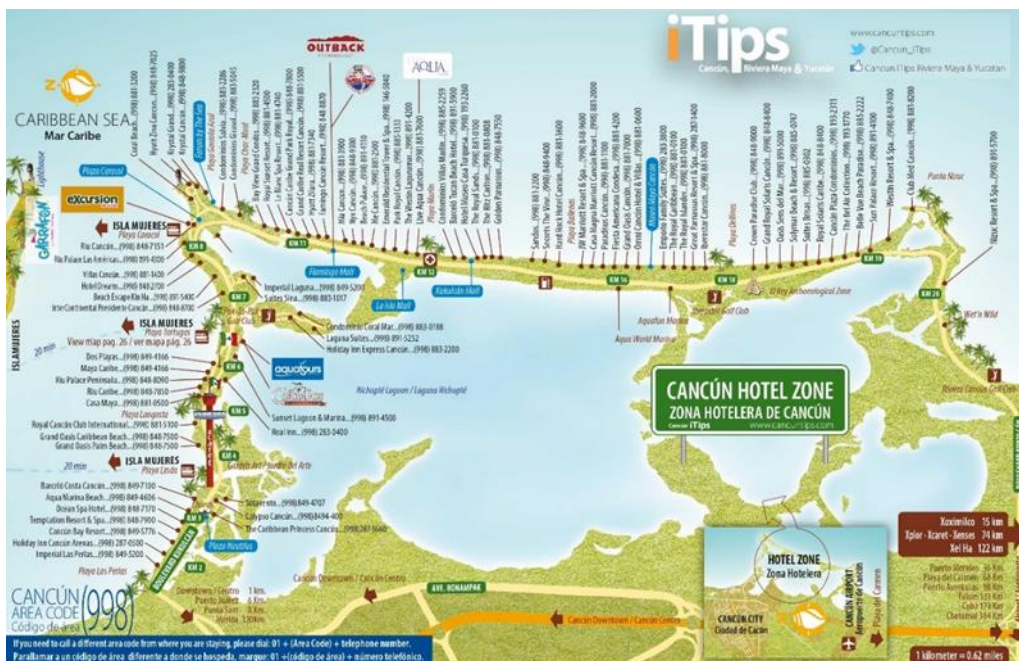


Photograph 4. The hotel zone map illustrates the narrow island in which hotels, resorts and villas line the beaches of the tourist zone (Cancun iTips 2018).

Photograph 5. Hotels offer private beach not allowed to locals (Santisteban, 2018).



Photograph 6. Party centre (Santisteban, 2018).

Photograph 7. Classy shopping centre where famous brands are sold ((Santisteban, 2018).



 Photograph 8. Mexican family at a Christmas event in the shopping centre (Santisteban, 2018).

Photograph 9. Gun-toting cops mingle with holidaymakers in Cancun (Breeden, 2019).



Photograph 10. Armed cops patrol the white sandy beaches of the expensive resorts (Breeden, 2019).

## Appendix 1.2: Downtown



Photograph 11. The closest road to hotel zone, and to the right, the entrance to Puerto Cancun, a marina and exclusive land development (Santisteban, 2018).



Photograph 12. Aerial view from the modern forty-year old city (Santisteban, 2018).

Photograph 13. City centre map (Cancun iTips 2018).

Photograph 14. City Hall with three people walking towards to the front, and two of them are wearing traditional clothes, the man a 'guayabera' (shirt) and the woman a 'huipil' (dress) (Santisteban, 2018).



Photograph 15. Street life, close to the coach station, on a main road with flats, houses and several businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, convenience stores, and schools (Heidenbluth, 2018).

Photograph 16. Handicrafts market (Cancun Pictures Online.com, 2018).



Photograph 17. A sign in English in a shop of Mexican handcrafts (Santisteban, 2018).

Photograph 18. Tourists walking down between two pedestrians and a graffiti drawn on an abandoned building (Santisteban, 2018).



Photograph 19. A tourist who wants to experience where 'Cancunenses' eat (In the loop travel, 2013).

Photograph 20. Locals attending to an event showing their tickets written in English (Santisteban 2018).



Photograph 21. Hybrid texts using English and Spanish for the brochures and the pins at a weekend workshop Santisteban 2018).

**Panorama is a non- profit civil association that coordinates national and international artists for painting the city walls. Ray Santisteban is one of the four young partners involved in the project of improving the city.**



Photograph 22. Mural in English suggesting that youngsters are part of an emerging global culture of youth (Santisteban, 2017).



Photograph 23. The mural pictures the Mayan culture in an attempt to preserve it (Santisteban, 2017).

# Appendix 1.3: The '*regiones*'



Photograph 24. Commercial area with several second-hand shops
that trade on discarded goods from hotels for people who cannot afford to
buy brand new things (Santisteban, 2018).



Photograph 25. The government announced the construction of outdoor gyms,
but there is no gym equipment and sport fields would be more appealing for
children and teenagers (Callejotv, 2018).

Photograph 26. Potholes and without proper sidewalks (Las noticias de Tulum, 2015).



Fig. 27. Roads with buildings without maintenance and in which not all the luminaries work properly making streets not very safe for pedestrians (Nefmex, 2015).

Photograph 28. Vehicles used to transport people or goods (Noticaribe, 2017).



Photograph 29. A family at the entrance of their home without any services. The government announced they would provide funds for the city, but the newspaper article questions that it only benefits the hotel zone (Al momento, 2014).

## Appendix 1.4: Cancun a city of contrasts



Photograph 30. Puerto Cancun, marina and land development that include a golf course, hotels, condominiums, shopping mall, time shares and spaces for retail businesses (Santisteban, 2018).



Fig. 31. Luxury condominiums sold in dollars in Puerto Cancun (Santisteban, 2018).

Photograph 32. *La Donceles*, an area downtown close to Puerto Cancun developed for the first settlers with no access to the beach (Santisteban, 2018).



Photograph 33. A house that seems abandoned but a family lives there. (Santisteban, 2018).

Photograph 34. An aerial view from the Supermanzana 50, where middle and upper-class people live in detached, semi-detached houses and flats (Santisteban, 2018).



Photograph 35. The road in one of the Supermanzanas where there are buildings, houses and flats for middle-SES (Santisteban, 2018).

# Appendix 1.5: Mayan Culture

**Indigenous culture tries to preserve its customs, its clothing, and its beliefs. However, indigeneity is used as spectacle, prop, and entertainment in the tourism industry**



Photograph 36. People celebrating the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the street. They pray and sing in Spanish (Santisteban, 2018).



Photograph 37. Mayan Ceremony or *Xukulem t*o show gratitude and request blessings, healings and withdrawal of bad energies (Santisteban, 2018).

# Appendix 1.6: Languages in Cancun

**Language use in Cancun is adapted at different sectors of the population**



Photograph 38. Local newspaper in Spanish, Mayan and English Spanish is used mostly, some sections or ads are in English and one or two articles on the last page written in Mayan (La Jornada, 2018).



Photograph 39. Free local magazine advertising a bilingual school, and other services in English for the locals. Even the name of the magazine is in English (In your hands,2018).

Photograph 40. Job add showing English is the first requirement (Asociación de Hoteles de Cancun & Puerto Morelos, 2018).



Photograph 41. Bar tender required: 70% English (Pinterest, 2018).

# Appendix 2: The SAC



Photograph 42. Conversations chart for students to check and schedule their conversations (Avila, 2016).



Photograph 43. SAC helper leading a conversation with a board game, designed by the tourism students and donated to the SAC (Avila, 2016).

Photograph 44. Language assistant having a conversation with the students. She is using cue cards, and one of them is carrying her baby. Featuring the informal and relaxed atmosphere the SAC fosters: on the table, there are several objects: a cup of coffee, a bottle of water, mobile phones, conversation records, notebooks, pens and cue cards. At the back, a student is reading while another one is listening and smiling (Avila, 2016).



Photograph 45. A teacher playing a board game with students. Some teachers ask what the students prefer whether to have a small talk or to play a board game. The board games are displayed along the SAC (Avila, 2016).

 Photograph 46. Students practising vocabulary and short dialogues with a conversation leader using one of the available posters. (Avila, 2016).



Photograph 47. Conversation leader using cue cards as prompters and miming a word they cannot understand, while students at the back are having a conversation, and using the computers. (Avila, 2016).

Photograph 48. SAC helper and students having a conversation while another one is working on her project in her laptop (Avila, 2016).
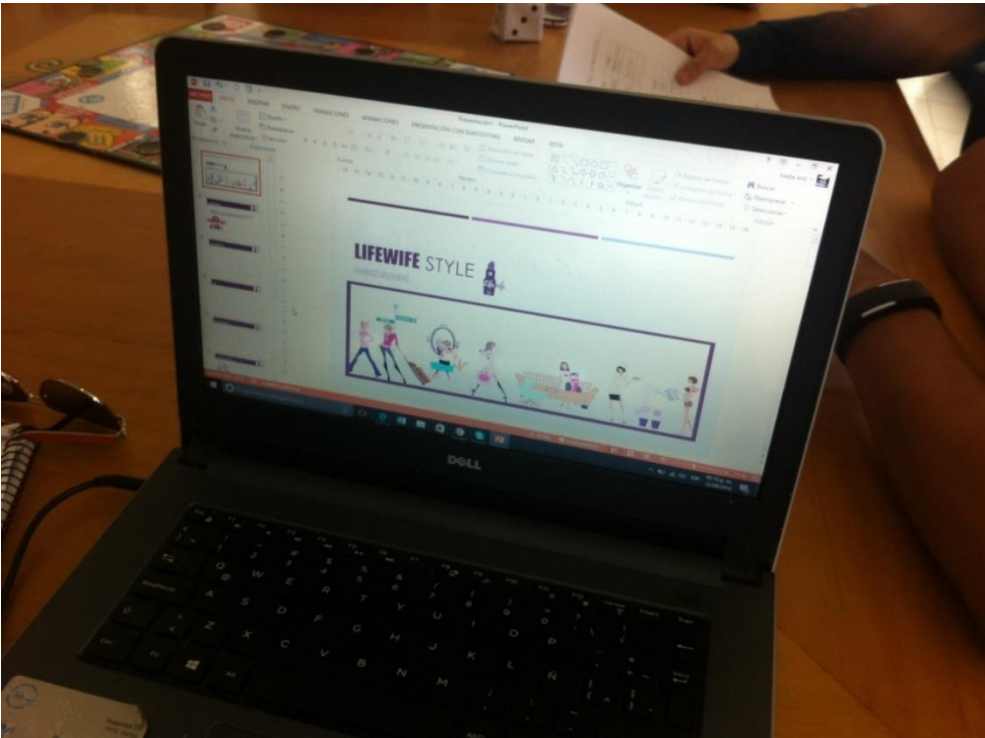


Photograph 49. The student's project (Avila, 2016).

Photograph 50. Students doing homework together. They like working with their peers (Avila, 2016).



Photograph 51. A student has to read a book and his friend is helping him to look up for unknown words in the dictionary (Avila, 2016).

Photograph 52. A student is helping his peer, a common practice, to save his homework from the e-book because he did not know how to do it (Avila, 2016).



Photograph 53. Students enjoy watching films together (Avila, 2016).

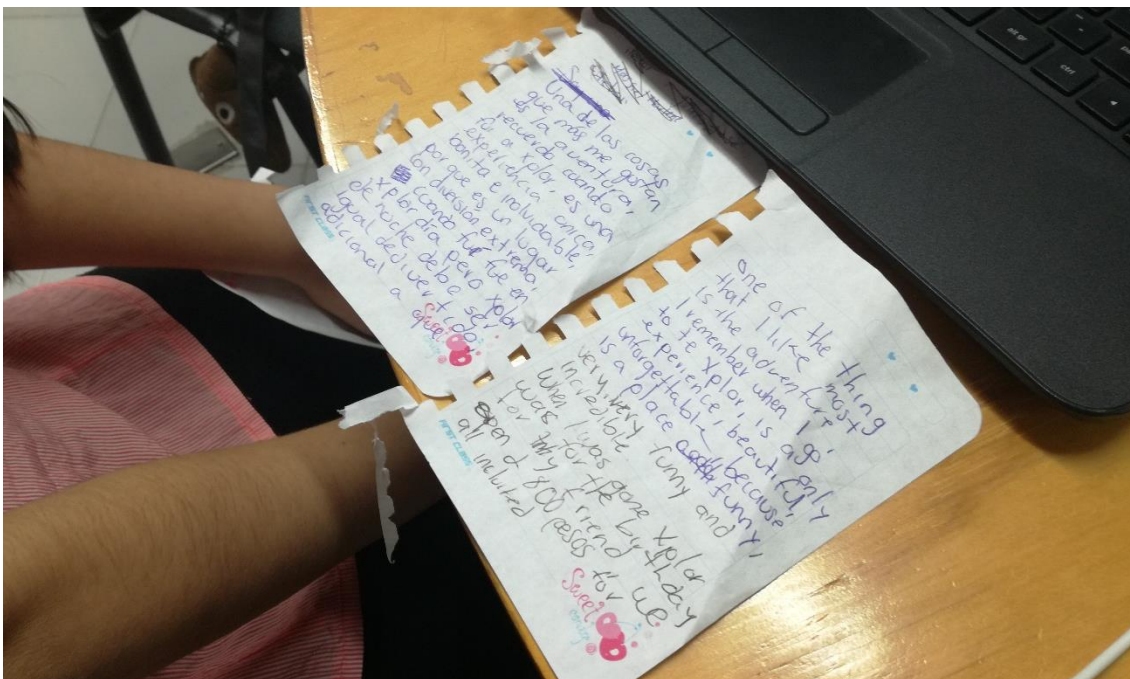Photograph 54. Students singing along while reading the lyrics from their smart phones (Avila, 2016).



Photograph 56. Students playing a game and reading the instructions (Avila, 2016).

Photograph 57. Student practising the verbs on her own (Avila, 2016).



Photograph 58. Student translating her composition. Being a basic level, she wrote it in Spanish and then, translated to English using the dictionary (Avila, 2016).

Photograph 59. Student reading a novel he chose from the bookshelf (Avila,2016).



Photograph 60. The language assistant giving a lecture about English food. This kind of events are announced beforehand, and it is not mandatory to attend. However, there is a high turn out because students enjoy them. At the back, a teacher is working at her station (Avila, 2016)

# Appendix 3: Language Learner Biography

**Language learner biography**

The first part is concerned with your personal history and family background. The following questions will help you frame your writing, answer as many as you like and include any other information you find relevant or you would like to share:

- Where were you born?
- How old are you?
- What do you study? Why?
- Who are the people in your family (father/mother/older brother(s)/ older sister(s)/younger brother(s)/younger sister(s)/other)?
- In your family, who has studied at primary or high school?
- Who has studied at university?
- Who has postgraduate studies?
- Who has lived in another country?
- Who has a job? Where and what they do?
- Who knows English better than you?
- How much of your time do you usually spend with the people in your family?

The second part records your language learning experience, whether inside or outside the university, formally (e.g. attending classes) or informally (e.g. by working or socializing with native speakers or other foreigners):

1. A summary of your experience of learning and using English including the learning period (from-to) and the context of learning (school, special course, informal, etc.).

2. English learning experiences that you particularly value and/or that made a strong impression on you.

3. Periods of residence, study or work experience abroad (if any).

4. Ways in which you have engaged with the culture(s) associated with English. For example, with film, theatre and dance; art and architecture; newspapers and magazines; radio and television; novels and poetry; fashion; cuisine, etc. Note down cultural similarities and differences that have struck you.

5. Heritage language(s) that you know (if any), how you learnt it/them and how you use it/them.

Adapted from the European Language Portfolio (accreditation 29.2002) and Palfreyman (2006).

Palfreyman, D., 2006. Social context and resources for language learning. System, 34(3), pp.352–370. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0346251X06000601 [Accessed July 9, 2014].

European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education 2013, European Language Portfolio, Available from http://www.cercles.org/en/publications/elp-european-languageportfolio/file/13-elp-spanish [Accessed 6 October 2014].

# La Biografía Lingüística

La primera parte tiene que ver con tu historia personal y contexto familiar. Las siguientes preguntas te ayudaran a organizar tu composición, contesta tantas como gustes e incluye cualquier otra información que te parezca importante o que desees compartir:

- ¿A dónde naciste?
- ¿Qué edad tienes?
- ¿Qué estás estudiando? ¿Por qué?
- ¿Qué personas componen tu familia (papá/mamá/ hermano(s)/ hermana(s) mayor(es), hermano(s)/ hermana(s) menor(es)/ otro(s))?
- ¿Quién de tu familia ha estudiado primaria, secundaria o preparatoria?
- ¿Quién ha estudiado en la universidad?
- ¿Quién ha estudiado un posgrado (especialización, maestría, doctorado)?
- ¿Quién ha vivido en otro país?
- ¿Quién(es) de tu familia trabajan? ¿A dónde y que hacen?
- ¿Quién(es) saben más inglés que tú?
- ¿Cuánto tiempo pasas con tu familia y cuándo?

La segunda se refiere a tu experiencia en el aprendizaje del inglés, en la universidad o en otro contexto, formalmente (en un curso) o informalmente (trabajando o socializando con hablantes nativos o con otros extranjeros):

1. Un resumen de tu experiencia en el aprendizaje del inglés, incluyendo el periodo de aprendizaje (desde-hasta) y el lugar (escuela, curso, informalmente, etc.).

2. Experiencias de aprendizaje de inglés que consideras de gran importancia y/o que influyeron fuertemente en tu aprendizaje del idioma.

3. Periodos de residencia en el extranjero por motivos de estudios o trabajo, (si los hay).

4. Participación en experiencias o actividades asociadas con la cultura derivado del aprendizaje y del uso del inglés, por ejemplo: películas, obras de teatro, espectáculos de danza, arte y arquitectura, periódicos y revistas, radio y televisión, novelas y poesía, moda, gastronomía, etc. Menciona las semejanzas y/o diferencias culturales que te hayan llamado la atención.

5. La lengua (s) patrimonial (es) que hablas o entiendes, como la(s) aprendiste y como la(s) usas.

Palfreyman, D., 2006. Social context and resources for language learning. *System*, 34(3), pp.352–370. Available at: http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0346251X06000601 [Accessed July 9, 2014].

European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education 2013, European Language Portfolio, Available from http://www.cercles.org/en/publications/elp-european-languageportfolio/file/13-elp-spanish   [6 October 2014].

# Appendix 4: First-phase Study

**5 Sociocultural configurations emerging in ongoing interaction: field or location (Bourdieu 1984), CoP (Lave and Wenger 1991)**

## CoP

The basic argument made by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1998) is that CoP are everywhere and that we are generally involved in a number of them - whether that is at work, school, home, or in our civic and leisure interests. In some groups we are core members, in others we are more at the margins.

I have finished my English levels but I decided to continue being a conversation leader in the SAC, otherwise I could not practice my English. Although most of the students have a lower level, I can practice it and I also like helping my peers. Besides, sometimes I can have conversation with the teachers.

I have a male friend who lives in another city, who studied a degree in English Language Teaching so whenever we get in touch we do it in English, this can be face to face, by mail or WhatsApp. . **(Interview, Tamara 3rd semester of Sustainable Tourism, finished ESP courses in second semester, 31 October 2014)**

I am currently looking for a hotel to do my second training period where I can practice both English and French as I have been studying French for the last year. **(Interview, Tamara 3rd semester of Sustainable Tourism, finished ESP courses in second semester, 31 October 2014)**

I feel that having conversations in the SAC has helped me gain a little  bit more confidence because I have realised that I am not the only one who makes mistakes that can be overcome through practice. **(Interview, Claudia Irasema 7ᵗʰ semester of Sustainable Tourism, second ESP course)**

When I was nine years old and I lived in Yucatan. At that time, I started to get interested in the English because I saw my cousin doing her English homework. I asked her to teach me and she taught me some words. My younger sister has just started to study at the university. She has English class and is doing SAC hours so we practice English at home. Sometimes we spend all afternoon speaking English that even my mother has started picking it up and she asks us how to say some things as well as my father. You know, sometimes we (my sister and I) are speaking and they have started to understand.

Talking to the teachers make you feel that everything you say is wrong, whereas if you talk to young people like us in the SAC we feel more at ease and can get into real conversation, like with the British students. I have some relatives who live in Houston, Texas, they come from time to time and I love talking in English with them. I like the way they speak so I prefer to speak English to Spanish with

them because they also help me and correct my English. **(Personal story, family background and Interview, Beatriz 3rd semester of International Business, first ESP course)**

I really enjoyed talking to the British students. As a matter of fact, I had several conversations and got along very well with them. Talking to them I felt at ease, we talked and learnt from our countries and other things, which is different to having conversation with the teachers.

 I also practice English with my girlfriend because she can speak better and she also helps me with my homework. I have some cousins who live in LA, they come more or less every summer and they stay in my house. Their parents are Mexican but they do not speak much Spanish so we speak English and when we go out and I cannot understand my girlfriend helps me. **(Interview, Raymundo, 5th semester of International Business, in the first ESP course, 27 November 2014)**

I had a teacher, who I don't consider like a good person because her manner was cold and disrespectful with the students who didn't know English. **(Language learner biography Xhivani, 5th semester of International Business, first ESP course, 30 October 2014)**

Last summer I worked in Eco-colour tours as a receptionist and I was so worried that I did not want the telephone to ring because I was afraid not to give the tourists the proper information. Nevertheless, I managed to put myself-together and I would tell the tourists "please speak slowly", all of them were nice and understanding and everything was fine. As a result, the owner was so pleased with my work that he wants me to work there next summer

I have relatives living in the States and I have realised that native speakers speak differently to the way English is taught at school. For example, I get nervous thinking about the proper tense to use and I have noticed that my relatives do not care that much about how I use the tenses. We just engage into conversation. I have noticed that they do not use complete sentence and sometimes we say also say words in Spanish.

I sometimes speak English with my father, for example, when I am angry or I do not want other people to understand what we are talking. **(Interview, Andrea 3rd semester, first course of ESP, 20 November 2014)**

My family is from a town in Yucatan and I have many relatives who live in the States. They go quite often, and we gather three or four times a year. When we get together in the village, I speak English with my cousins. They can't speak Spanish very well and I don't know some words in English. Thus, we speak in both languages, switching from one to the other. Now there is an American woman living there, she went with my uncle and stayed there so I speak with her in English because she cannot speak Spanish. I want to go to the States with my grandmother, she wants to go but she doesn't want to go on her own. We have to

wait one year, now we are in mourning because my aunt, my grandma's sister has just died. **(Interview, Saul 5ᵗʰ semester of International Business, first ESP course, 20 November 2014)**

**4 Psychologically based, embodied dispositional formations: Bourdieu (habitus), Layder (psychobiography), Laihre (embodied, individualised folds of the social)**

# Habitus

The excerpts provide information about habitus, there is a clear association between reflexive awareness and action in terms of the students' individual trajectories and agency. They seem to have been generating a wide repertoire of actions which have enabled them to pursue their goal of learning English. According to Bourdieu (1990b in Reay 2004:433) as a system of dispositions to a certain practice, the effect of the habitus is that agents who are equipped with it will behave in a certain way in certain circumstances. These dispositions which make up habitus are the product of opportunities and constraints….inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions (Bourdieu 1990a:54 in Reay 2004:433). Moreover, habitus as a complex interplay between past and present is linked to individual history (Bourdieu 1990c:86 in Reay 2004:434)

I have studied English since nursery school and I really like it. When I was 8 or 9 years old I used to watch films with subtitles for the first time and   without subtitles the subsequent times. As a teenager I would listen to songs, look up for unknown words and try to translate them to understand the ideas. In secondary, the English lessons were really low, so I asked my parents to pay me an English course, as a present form my fifteenth birthday, in a language centre in Villa Hermosa (the capital city of the state). This is at an hour and a half from my hometown and I took English lessons for two years on Saturdays. Thus, every Saturday, I would wake up at 5 to catch the bus, study from 8 to 13:30 hours and arrived back home at around 3 or 4 p.m.  I felt good after finishing all the levels and I think that it was worth it, not only the time invested but also the money because it was the course fee plus the coach fare.

I have realised that are different ways of saying things and that English classes are boring because they usually focus on grammar, however when you need to communicate there are ways to get the meaning across and if you do not use the right tense it is not that important. I also believe that if you really want to improve you do not really need to pay for a course but to take advantage of the many resources that there are in the world, such as internet websites, watching films with close caption, songs etc. **(Interview, Tamara 3rd semester of Sustainable Tourism, finished ESP courses in second semester, 31 October 2014)**

I met Tamara because she sits at a table with her book and sign offering conversations in the SAC. She has finished her English courses but she says she does not want to forget her English. Bourdieu (1967:344 in Reay 2004:434) claims schooling "acts to provide a general disposition, the cultural habitus which is what Tamara does because she has transcended her social position at the university by creating herself more opportunities for learning and practising English in many ways, raising her individual expectations. Hence, Tamara's habitus seems to be more linked to cultural capital.

I arrived to Cancun about nine years ago and I asked which the best place to work at was, where you could make good money. I was told that it was Lorenzillo's, a lobster house, which was the fanciest one at that time. Thus, I went there, and the interviewer asked if I spoke English and I replied I didn't. However, he said he wanted me to work there that I would start as a busboy or bar tender. It was because they look for people who are quite good looking, I should be grateful I am. Then, I started like busboy and I was making from $800 to $1000 per day. When I saw that the waiters were making the double, I thought that I had to learn English. Fortunately, I was working together with a very experienced, enthusiastic and talkative waiter so I paid close attention and I also took an English course for restaurants.  I learnt to speak it well enough to become a waiter in about a year. It is not that difficult because you kind of always use the same phrases and vocabulary, you see, such as taking orders, offering and explaining dishes, etc. I worked there for nearly four years and I managed to buy a detached home, as a matter of fact I just finished paying my house last year. I worked there for three years but I got involved with a Cuban girl who was also a waitress, she got pregnant and I had to leave that job. Thus, I started selling tickets for the nightclubs. I learnt a lot about sales because we earned only commissions so if you don't sell you don't eat.  It has been a good experience speaking English with the tourists because you can meet people from many places and different accents. Currently, I am working at Mandala, a company which runs most night clubs in Cancun. I supervise the promoters (around 30 of them), who invite tourists to go to our night clubs. They sell bracelets for the clubs at a cheaper price than paying the entrance in the clubs. **(Interview, Michel 3ʳᵈ semester of International Business, first ESP course, 27 November 2014)**

Michel was enrolled in my English course (first ESP course). He is sensible and has high expectations. He has a well-paid job and managed to pay for a detached house in four years, which is not common in Mexico. Therefore, he has a more general notion of habitus at the level of society since his drive for learning English is to get a better life and social position related to economic capital.

 I hate working at hotels or travel agencies. I mean, having to interact with the tourists. I would like to work in something related to tourism but in the field of planning, administrative formalities or environmental consultancy. I feel that Mexico adapts too much to the States because of the American tourists who come every year. Then, we are the ones to adapt or make things easier for them, when

they should be the ones to adapt to our country. This is something in my head that I cannot stop thinking, it is not that I don't like English but …it is like not cooperation, what is the point in being part of the herd who speak English. Why is it that we cannot speak other languages? Or open other touristic systems, for example, for Brazil, Russia, and China. **(Interview, Max 7ᵗʰ semester of Sustainable Tourism, second ESP course)**

I met Max because I asked his English teacher for the names of some students who were enrolled in the course. His attitude suggests that his dispositions are the product of opportunities and constraint famed by his earlier life experiences. He is about to finish his degree so I assume that he might have had a bad experience while doing his professional training (three time within their undergraduate studies). He is and looks Mayan and in Cancun there is a great discrimination "their past and present position in the social structure 'at all times in all places, in the forms of dispositions which are so many marks of social position" (Bourdieu 1990:82 in Reay 2004:434). At the hotels, a nice-looking person has more opportunities to be hired than a graduated who is not so good looking even if they are not skilled or experienced.

**3 Concrete organizations and institutions (religion, education, employment and family)**

# Education

### Teaching of English in secondary school, high school and university

English as a foreign language is included in the curriculum of the three years of the secondary and preparatory school, which are a total of six years the students have been studying English before starting their undergraduate studies.

The English programme at the Universidad del Caribe comprises six English courses. There are four General English courses: Level 1 (elementary), Level 2 (pre-intermediate), Level 3 (intermediate) and Level 4 (upper-intermediate); and two Topics courses (ESP) related to their field of study. Before starting the first semester at the university, the students take a computer-based placement test and have an oral interview to know their English level

My first contact with the English language was in secondary school but I do not think I have learnt anything there, I learnt a little **in high school/ upper secondary/ preparatory school** but it was until I studied at the university that I started to speak it. To put it some way, having started from level one (basic level) has helped me to reinforce the knowledge I had as well as to fill in the gaps of the basic knowledge. On the other hand, I have also realised that if I do not practice the language I can also forget it. **(Language learner biography, Claudia Irasema, 7ᵗʰ semester of Sustainable Tourism, second ESP course, 2 December 2014**)

It was until I started studying English here, at the university that I have taken English more seriously. I have only been studying English for seven years. I started learning in secondary. I think that now I am learning and using more English at the university. **(Language learner biography Xhivani, 5th semester of International Business, first ESP course, 30 October 2014)**

I think I have improved because I started in level 1 (basic). I mean, I had had English since secondary but neither the teachers nor the students take it that seriously, it was more like a game. We had the class but, it might be the Mexican culture that any other subject, but English is important**. (Language learner biography, Raymundo, 5th semester of International Business, in the first ESP course, 16 November 2014)**

I think that I have improved my English very much compared to when I started the university that I didn't know anything. I started in level 2 (basic) and I repeated level 3 (intermediate) and level 4 (upper-intermediate). I can say that now I can understand some songs and videos in English. **(Language learner biography, Estephany 5th semester of International Business, first ESP course, 27 November 2014)**

In the secondary and preparatory school the teachers did not care much whether we learnt or not. **(Language learner biography, Karen 5th semester of International Business, first ESP course, 30 October 2014)**

English is a subject that I find rather difficult. It might be that I did not pay much attention neither in secondary nor in preparatory and, as a result I cannot express myself properly. I have managed to improve my English at the university so now I can understand and read better, however I consider that my pronunciation is still inefficient. **(Language learner biography, Bryan 5th semester, first ESP course, 30 October 2014)**

Most participants interviewed said they did not learn much English until they started the English courses at the university. As a result, they usually start in the basic level when they enter to the university. Although English is included in the Mexican core curriculum in the secondary and preparatory schools in Mexico, the general consensus is that neither the teachers nor the students take the English subject very seriously. One of them expressed that it might be the Mexican culture but then he hesitated and added that it might be that every other subject is more important than English. However, he might have wanted to say something else but he decided not to or he did not know how to explain it. On the other hand, several students also commented that they have taken it more seriously, thus they have started understanding and using it more. For example, reading, listening to songs and watching videos. This may suggest that the students think they have learnt more English because the courses are better, or it might just be that they have taken the subject of English more seriously because it is relevant to their field of study.

It was in first grade of secondary school where a teacher called Heidi taught the best English classes. She was very dynamic, she also asked us to read the dictionary and we wrote the song's lyrics. Ever since then, I have never had problem with English. **(Language learner biography, Gabriela, 3ʳᵈ semester of International Business, first ESP course, 30 October 2014)**

As far as I can remember I have always studied English. I also took English classes at different language centres and I sat the CAE (Certificate of Advanced English) of the University of Cambridge in preparatory school. **((Language learner biography Oscar, 1ˢᵗ semester of International Business, first ESP course, 4 November 2014)**

My English courses at the university have been inefficient, that is, they have either had low content or they have not been attractive enough as to make me want to learn. I started in level 2 (pre-intermediate), the professor just attended to class and his activities were not dynamic; in level three (intermediate) the teacher used several dynamics and made us work collaboratively;  level four (upper-intermediate) was rather noisy and there were students that should have been in lower levels which made difficult the exchange of ideas;  topics 1 was entertaining, dynamics, activities and games were used to entertain the class;  topics 2 (ESP) was similar to level 4 so it was not appealing to me. **(Interview, Max, 7th semester of Sustainable Tourism, second ESP course, 4 December 2014)**

From all the 22 students of the pilot study only two of them stated that they do not think they have learnt more English at the university and only one of them seems not satisfied with the university English courses. A female student considers she had the best English class in secondary school because they practice how to use the dictionary practice and listened to songs. This seem to be a practice that provided her with tools or strategies for the TL, and the reason why she has such a good opinion of her teacher. There is only one student who entered the university with a proficient level of English from all the ones in the pilot study. Therefore, it seems that the majority of the students is satisfied with their progress at the university.

## Employment

I decided to study this major (Tourism) because it is the principal economic activity in Cancun. **(Interview, Lizette 7ᵗʰ semester of Sustainable Tourism, second ESP course, 4 December 2014)**

I hate working at hotels or travel agencies. I mean, having to interact with the tourists. I would like to work in something related to tourism but in the field of planning, administrative formalities or environmental consultancy. **(Interview, Max 7th semester of Sustainable Tourism, second ESP course, 4 December 2014)**

These are two opposite perspectives of the students of tourism who were in the same semester and English course. Lizette decided to study it because it is the main economic activity while Max says he hates working with tourism. The same reality and two different views which might reflect how people perceive the reality of the city. Why is it that he hates working with tourists?

If you want to apply for a job, they (the employers) ask for at least the 50% of English. For example, I worked in the call centre in AMSTAR (a travel agency) so in order to get the job, there is an interview where they give you some situations and ask you how you would respond in such cases. **(Interview, Fernanda 3<sup>rd</sup> semester of International Business, first ESP course)**

I worked at Mandala and I had to sell tickets to the tourists so English is essential to talk to them. For example, with the Russians, they don't speak Spanish and I don't speak Russian so English is the language of contact. We just had a meeting with the managers of the Outback restaurant and one of them was an American, who pointed out the need to be able to speak English because of the number of foreigner tourist who go to the restaurant**. (Interview, Raymundo, 5<sup>th</sup> semester of International** Business, in the first ESP course, 27 November 2014)

Everybody asks for English here, at the hotels, restaurants, and other companies. In the job adds they put 70% English required and in the job interviews the first thing they say is "How good are you at English? What is your English level**? (Interview, Gabriela 3<sup>rd</sup> semester of International Business, first ESP course, 27 November 2014)**

### Family

I live with my parents and two younger brothers. I am from Cancun but we moved to Teapa, Tabasco, my parents' town, after hurricane Wilma in 2005. My father has worked as a supervisor in construction sites and as a taxi driver but he has just set up a transportation business and my mother distributes a brand of quilts and bed-sheets. My family lives over there but I came to study tourism to Cancun. At first, I lived with my aunt but now I am living with a friend in a flat near the university. I am grateful with my father to have always paid for my studies. Currently, my parents are paying for all my expenses so I do not have to work and I can devote all my time to studying**. (Interview, Tamara 3<sup>rd</sup> semester of Sustainable Tourism, finished ESP courses in second semester, 31 October 2014)**

Tamara says she is grateful to her parents because they are supporting her which is not that common as many of her classmates have to work part-time or full time to pay their studies. Hence, she recognises how lucky she is.

My parents went to live to Calgary, Canada for three years but my brother and I stayed in Cancun with my grandparents. My father and my brother know more English than me.  My father has always worked with tourists and lived in Canada

but he cannot write it, whereas mother did not learn much over there. My mother also works selling silver stuff at the souvenirs market. As for my brother, he has learnt it at school and working with tourists. He is a little rebel so he did not want to continue studying.  I am not very good at English, although I know I need it because I study Tourism but I do not know what happens that I cannot learn it. Although my parents came back, I still live with my grandparents. Since they are old, I decided not to let them live on their own**. (Personal history and family background, Dallanae 7ᵗʰ semester of Sustainable Tourism, second ESP course)**

Dallanae's parents lived in Canada and she recognises she needs English, but she says she cannot learn it. Her parents are back, however she decided to stay with her grandparents. It might also be that she is a little upset for having been left behind and this might interfere with her English learning. Her brother works with the tourists, but she does not mention if she has ever worked or has helped her parents to sell the souvenirs or silver to the tourists.

I live with my parents and 2 of my brothers.  Both of my parents hold a title of professional technicians and my three brothers hold a university degree. My sister is the only one who has taken English courses. My parents are **traders/ merchants**, my elder brother has his own company, which is related to developing networks and systems, my sister is an assistant in the human resources department at a five-star hotel and my other brother is as supervisor at a construction company. I understand a little Mayan because of my ethnical origins, my family (grand-grandparents, grandparents, parents, uncles) speak this language.  **(Personal history and family background, Max, 7th semester of Sustainable Tourism, second ESP course, 28 November 2014)**

Despite Max's family is Mayan he says he does not speak it. This might be because of the family achievements that they are reluctant to speak it. Since his parents hold a title as professional technicians and his brothers and sister university degrees. Thus, moving to an upper social level makes them feel ashamed of their Mayan ancestors so he decided not to speak it.

## Religion

Although our life has not been always perfect, the strength of the hand of   God has always supported us.  (Personal history and family background, Xhivani, 5ᵗʰ semester of International Business, in the first ESP course, 30 October 2014)

Xhivani points out that they had been able to overcome hard times because of God.  It seems she comes from a very religious family; however, she might not be Catholic but Christian because they are the ones who talk like that. In the state most people are Catholic but there are many other religions and a great number of Christians who seem to be the most religious and united to their family.

# Appendix 5:   Students' profile

Table 4: Students' profile

| Name<br><br>Degree<br><br>Starting level | Semester<br><br>English course/<br><br>Certificate | Language learning experience | Personality traits, future projects, desires and constraints |
|---|---|---|---|
| Tamara<br>Sustainable<br><br>Tourism<br><br>Level  4 | 4th<br><br>Finished<br><br>IELTS B2 | Bilingual school in nursery school, asked for a two-year language course as a birthday present. Looks for opportunities to practice through social media e.g. leading conversations in the SAC, Facebook and WhatsApp with foreigners from all over the world. Spent a semester in a British University. Has also studied French and Portuguese. | Proactive, perseverant, goal oriented and resourceful. Looking forward to getting a scholarship to study a master's degree in an English-speaking country. |
| Diana<br><br>International<br><br>Business<br><br>Topics 1 (ESP) | 6th<br><br>Finished<br><br>FCE<br><br>IELTS (C1) | Bilingual school, travelled to USA to visit relatives, by means of a scholarship and to work in Disneyland. Hosted World Economic Forum Disney and Social service in the SAC to practice English and help her peers. Has also studied French, Korean and Mayan. | Responsible, hardworking, committed, organised, and goal oriented.  Kind and helpful with her peers. Wants to get a scholarship to study a MA abroad. |
| Luciano<br><br>International<br><br>Business<br><br> Level 4 | 4th<br><br>Finished<br><br>IELTS (C1+)<br><br>TOEFL 97 | Private schools, English is part of his everyday life. Keen on computers and video games, which encouraged him to learn English. Searches for information of all sorts in English, follows an Australian video blogger and loves the accent. Became a SAC helper to improve his speaking skill. | Sensible, responsible, committed and goal oriented. Looked for opportunities to develop his English skills to be more confident to communicate orally. Wants to get a scholarship to study a master's degree in Australia. |
| Mariela<br>International<br><br>Business<br><br>Level 3 | 6th<br><br>Finished<br><br>IELTS (B2) | Government and private schools took private English lessons as a child and in a language institute, but not for too long due to family's economic situation. Eager to learn to be able to understand the tourists and her parents when they spoke English.  Likes reading books and watching films in English. | Mature, analytical, and perseverant, but a little insecure. Had to change her projects because of family constraints. |
| Monica<br>International<br><br>Business<br><br>Level 4 | 2nd<br><br>Topics 1 | Private English lessons travelled to USA to visit relatives. Uses English in everyday activities e.g. doing exercise with an American programme, watching films and listening to music. | Enthusiastic, responsible, and self-disciplined, willing to help her peers with her English. Hopes to be able to live and work in the States. |
| Carmen<br>Sustainable<br><br>Tourism<br><br>Level 2 | 8th<br><br>Topics 2<br><br>TOEFL (67) | Living in the States as a child (six months) made her feel confident about her English. Not very proficient, but good enough to work in the touristic industry, where has had several jobs using English. Fond of Japanese series anime that watches in English. Has also studied Japanese, Portuguese and French. | Cooperative, enthusiastic, creative, resourceful, easily distracted, and sensitive. Contributed to family economy and overcame several family problems of all sorts. Would like to live in Canada with her boyfriend. |
| Diego<br><br>International<br><br>Business | 2nd<br><br>Topics 1 | Private school and private English lessons, trained basketball in English (foreigner players), keen on music and films, and business oriented. Browses topics of his interest in English. Got a job because of English at a five-star hotel. | Introverted, appreciates art, and ambitious Wants to stand out either as a businessman or basketball player. Used to wear berets. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Level 4 | | | |
| Bernardo<br><br>International<br>Business<br><br>Level 3 | 7th<br><br>Finished | Picked up English mainly playing video games but also working at a hotel, browsing internet, watching films, and talking to tourists at the beach or mall. Social service in the SAC doing what he likes, talking. | Sociable, creative and easy going. Enjoys talking to people especially in English. Does not think much about the future, just lives the day (his words). |
| Max<br><br>Sustainable<br>Tourism<br><br>Level 2 | 7th<br><br>Topics 2 | Resistant to learn English. Dissatisfied with the English courses and poor classroom management of some teachers at the university. Wishes other languages were offered and students could choose what to study. | Introverted, analytical, critical, serious, responsible, and socially oriented. Interested in environmental issues particularly those concerning the social aspect. |
| Karina<br><br>Sustainable<br>Tourism<br><br>Level 2 | 4th<br><br>Topics 1 | Resistant to learn English formally. Felt in disadvantage compared to her classmates, who grew up in Cancun. Preferred to learn the grammar structures watching tutorials. Learnt and uses some vocabulary, in the middle of a conversation in Spanish, browsing social networks and topics of her interest as well as listening to her friends talking to foreigners. | Anxious, self-conscious, creative, energetic, independent, and introverted. Worked full-time to support herself and was in charge of her family not only financially but also emotionally so she always gives priority to the other subjects. |
| Daniel<br>International<br>Business<br><br>Level 1 | 3rd<br><br>Level 3 | Government schools and reluctant to learn English. Recognises its importance but disagrees with the politics and agreement between the two countries. Brief trips to USA and Canada. | Analytical, critical and socially oriented. Wants to set up a business to help the indigenous communities. |

# Appendix 5.1: Participants' attributes

Table 5: Participants' attributes

| Language learners | Age | Degree | English level | Gender | Parents education | Place of birth | SAC | Social class | Use English |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cases\\People\\Bernard | 19-22 | International Business | Intermediate | Male | Preparatory | Cancun | SAC helper | Low-SES | Everyday as part of life activities |
| Cases\\People\\Carmen | 23-26 | Sustainable Tourism | Intermediate | Female | University studies | Monterrey | SAC helper | Low-SES | Always at work |
| Cases\\People\\Diego | 19-22 | International Business | Upper intermediate | Male | University studies | Cancun | Conversation leader | Middle - SES | Everyday as part of life activities |
| Cases\\People\\Daniel | 26+ | International Business | Pre-intermediate | Male | Preparatory | Chetumal | Very seldom | Low-SES | TV programmes |
| Cases\\People\\Diana | 19-22 | International Business | Advanced | Female | University studies | Merida | SAC helper | Middle - SES | Everyday as part of life activities |
| Cases\\People\\Karina | 26+ | Sustainable Tourism | Pre-intermediate | Female | Unassigned | Mexico City | Required by teacher | Low-SES | Sometimes at work |
| Cases\\People\\Luciano | 23-26 | International Business | Advanced | Female | University studies | Mexico City | SAC helper | Middle - SES | Everyday as part of life activities |
| Cases\\People\\Mariela | 19-22 | International Business | Upper intermediate | Female | Preparatory | Cancun | SAC helper | Low-SES | Everyday as part of life activities |
| Cases\\People\\Max | 19-22 | Sustainable Tourism | Pre-intermediate | Male | Associate degree | Cancun | Required by teacher | Low-SES | Journal articles |
| Cases\\People\\Monica | 19-22 | International Business | Upper intermediate | Female | Preparatory | Chetumal | Conversation leader | Low-SES | Social networks |
| Cases\\People\\Tamara | 26+ | Sustainable Tourism | Upper intermediate | Female | Preparatory | Cancun | Conversation leader | Low-SES | Social networks |

# Appendix 6: Interviews timetable

Table 6: Participants table

| Interview | Participant | Date | Length | Language |
|-----------|-------------|------|--------|----------|
| 1 | Tamara * | 10 Oct 2014 | 25:56 | English |
| 1 | Karina * | 14 Nov 2014 | 10:02 | Spanish |
| 1 | Max * | 2 Dec 2014 | 27:17 | Spanish |
| 1 | Diana** | 15 Nov 2015 | 15:31 | English |
| 1 | Carmen* | 10 Mar 2015 | 19:23 | English |
| 1 | Diego** | 20 Mar 2015 | 17:54 | English |
| 1 | Mónica** | 20 Mar 2015 | 18:46 | English |
| 1 | Mariela** | 29 Apr 2015 | 26:58 | Spanish |
| 1 | Bernardo** | 4 Sep 2015 | 27:03 | English |
| 2 | Tamara* | 27 Mar 2015 | 17:92 | English |
| 2 | Diana** | 30 Apr 2015 | 34:52 | English |
| 2 | Karina* | 22 May 2015 | 45:46 | Spanish |
| 2 | Mariela** | 29 Jun 2015 | 29:06 | English-Spanish |
| 2 | Max*** | 13 Jul 2015 | 31:15 | Spanish |
| 2 | Carmen* | 4 Sep 2015 | 28:39 | English |
| 2 | Diego** | 17 Nov 2015 | 22:03 | English-Spanish |
| 2 | Mónica** | 24 Nov 2015 | 18:10 | English |
| 2 | Bernardo** | 18 Jan 2016 | 26:03 | Spanish |
| 3 | Diana** | 11 Nov 2015 | 20:03 | Spanish |
| 3 | Tamara** | 7 Jan 2016 | 15:09 | Spanish |
| 3 | Karina* | 7 Jan 2016 | 36:59 | Spanish |
| 3 | Mónica** | 20 Jan 2016 | 15:20 | English |
| 3 | Mariela** | 15 Jan  2016 | 18:20 | Spanish |
| 3 | Diego** | 10 Mar 2016 | 14:23 | English |
| 3 | Carmen* | 24 May 2016 | 15:26 | English Spanish |

**\*Tourism Degree**

**\*\*International Business Degree**

# Appendix 7: Interview sample questions

1. How do you feel about your English level?

2. What has been the most challenging thing about studying English?

3. What are some of the best and the worst things about studying English?

4. What would be your ideal job?

5. How do you imagine yourself 10 years from now?

6. If you could choose any place in the world to live, where would that be?

7. What role do you think English will play in your future life?

8. What is your opinion of the SAC?

9. How would you describe the interaction among students, professors and language assistants in the SAC?

10. Besides school, are there other places where you can interact with other speakers of English?

# Appendix 8:   Interview 1 example- Mónica

**Participants**

**Mo- Mónica, Ma-Magdalena (researcher)**

Ma:  How long have you studied English?

Mo: I started when I was little with English classes, I remember at the university of Chetumal at the UQROO.. and my mom took me there, I remember the first class and.. I hated it because I only wanted to play, other things, but my teacher was very good so she always.. like.. teach me like.. other things to not make it boring

Ma: Did the teacher used to speak mostly in English or in Spanish?

Mo: In both English and Spanish because we were little

Ma: Ok. You wrote that you also took private lessons at the age of thirteen or fourteen

Mo: Yes, my mom took English classes at a school. She wanted to be an English teacher, but she gets nervous. ...I don't remember.. it was

Ma: Interlingua?

Mo: No..

Ma: Harmon Hall?

Mo: Yes, she met this teacher and she gave us English classes

Ma: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Mo: Yes, you know her

Ma: Yes, I remember, your twin sister

Mo: Yes, she told me.. you confused us

Ma: (laughs) Yes, she told me, no no I am her sister. And, tell me, for instance, when you come to the SAC.  What do you do?, Do you only come for conversation or you do something else?

Mo: Well, yea, most of the time I give conversation because of my sister, she always ask me so I always come. So I lead her a conversation, or I come and play with Rebeca Ma: Oh Rebeca, she is so nice. Have you been friends with Rebeca for a long time?

Mo: just since I get the university

Ma: And when you give conversation. Do you usually give conversation to the same people?

Mo: Yes, to my friends

Ma: To your friends then,

Mo: But I usually say to others if you want to join the conversation that's ok because I like   to know more people

Ma: Do you play a board game or you just chat.

Mo: I like Cathy's cards but they are about work and we don't work so I don't know what to say because I don't work

Ma: I see, you don't work.. When you give conversation? Would you say that your friends   really make an effort to participate?

Mo: Most of the time they make an effort but most of the students are shy because they don't ... they think they can speak it, they can speak; they can sound different or wrong maybe. I don't know.. I think they are shy

Ma: So you mean that they don't participate much, then.

Mo: They try to participate, but I think they want to say more but they don' know how to.. say it. When I always speak with my friends they try to say more but at the end they don't say anything because they don't know how to say it.

Ma: Have you noticed if your friends have made some progress?

Mo: Yes

Ma: I mean in the two semesters you have been here?

Mo: Yes.

Ma: Can you think of an example or why do you say they have made progress?

Mo: Like my friend Sandra.. at the beginning she was in the level 2 now she is in 3. She doesn't know anything about English but I always tell her she need to practice and when I am with her sometimes whenever like classes I speak to her in English so she says what???? and I say try to understand so I think that in one semester.. I think she's made progress because she speaks more English.

Ma: Good for her.

Mo: In speaking at least

Ma: And so that means that when you are in other subjects you speak in English to her.

Mo: Sometimes

Ma: Why do you want to learn more English?

Mo Because I have family in the States

287

Ma:  And?

Mo: Because I have family in the U S so every time I.. I.. go, I have been there two times in  the summer, so my friend, is like my aunt.. she live in Chicago but her husband doesn't speak a lot of Spanish so at the first time when I was with him, we didn't know how to        communicate well because he uses  another like vocabulary so sometimes it was hard to understand him so I always try to learn more Ma: Is he an American?

Mo: And he is like in business and he tried to teach me some new vocabulary.

Ma: Well, that sounds good. Do you think you could work with him, now that you are studying International Business?

Mo: Yes, I think so. If I go next year I want to do my internship there.

Ma: Oh! That sounds great. What kind of company does he work for?

Mo: He is, I don't know the exact thing that he do but he is like an accounting but he is the one who goes to meetings, and meet people and try to sell, I don't know what he does but he tries to sell the product or service of the company.

Ma: A sort of  a sales representative?

Mo: Yea, kind of, but he is like... also... like the director I don't know because he

Ma: Oh I see, he has a high position. And your sister. How come you have a higher level of English than her?

Mo: She is like at the same level but she. At the beginning she didn't want to get in this university, so she didn't come to the interview to see the level, so when she got here. She, they put her in level two so now she is in three but she is in the same level but she is in level three.

Ma: So you give her conversation, although she could also give conversation herself- Oh! Good, interesting. And how many times have you been to the States? Do you usually go with your parents or do you go on your own?

Mo: Last year I went just with my sister, and we stayed there like for a month Ma: And do you like going there?

Mo: Yes, because my aunt is like a baby sitter so she takes care of a lot of kids and I like kids so every time I go

Ma: And you can learn a lot interacting with the kids, can't you?

Mo: Yes, so every time I go. I baby sit the.. my .. I don't know how to say it my aunt's.. Ma: Your aunt's... Does she have a son or a daughter?

M: A son

Ma: Your cousin, so your aunt baby sits others and you baby sit your cousin

Mo: Yes,

Ma: What else, have you studied over there? What kind of things do you do when you go over there? Mo: We go to new places; she has family there so we always go to parties.

Ma: And do they hang around with Latin Americans or Americans?

Mo: Both, but most of the time Americans

Ma: Oh, it's a good opportunity. No wonder you have such a good pronunciation. Mo: I remember the first time I went with my mom Ma: How old were you?

Mo: Fifteen, one of the neigh-boors said I didn't sound like Mexican

Ma: Why did you sign in for the ad of the event in May? Because of the paid, because of the experience?

Mo: I didn't know they are going to pay. Because I want to learn more, to have more experience, and because for my... CV

Ma: Good. And let's come back to the SAC. When you come to the SAC do you only have conversations or do you do something else?

Mo: Most of the time conversations.

Ma: Do you find different the old SAC to the new SAC.

Mo: I think in the old SAC there were more people, now it feels lonely. It is strange. It was a lot of people in conversation, doing other things like watching movies.

Ma: Yes, I know. Unfortunately, we are not fully settled in here.

# Appendix 9: Observation sessions

Table 7: Observation sessions

| Observation | Participants | Date | Setting | Activity/Position |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Tamara | 10 Oct 2014 | SAC | Conversation leader |
| 1 | Karina | 14 Nov 2014 | University radio station | Coordinator |
| 1 | Max | 2 Dec. 2014 | SAC | Remedial work |
| 1 | Luciano | 22 Jan 2015 | SAC | Talking to coordinator |
| 1 | Carmen | 18 Mar 2015 | SAC | SAC helper |
| 1 | Mariela | 24 Mar 2015 | SAC | SAC helper |
| 1 | Diana | 26 Mar 2015 | SAC | SAC helper |
| 1 | Diego | 26 Mar 2015 | Classroom | Class work |
| 1 | Bernardo | 3 Sep. 2015 | SAC | SAC helper |
| 1 | Daniel | 17 Sep 2015 | SAC | Conversation session |
| 1 | Mónica | 24 Nov 2015 | Classroom | Final presentation |
| 2 | Tamara | 10 Dec 2015 | Work | Inside sales executive |
| 2 | Mónica | 10 Feb 2016 | Home | Visit |
| 2 | Diana | 16 Mar 2016 | Family home | Visit |
| 2 | Karina | 18 Mar 2016 | Work | Astronomy presenter |
| 2 | Carmen | 5 April 2016 | Work | Reservations Manager |
| 2 | Max | 16 September 2016 | University auditorium | Speaker at Sustainability Symposium |
| 2 | Bernardo | 19 May 2016 | Family home | Visit |
| 2 | Diego | 21 November 2016 | University | MUN Organiser and secretary |

# Appendix 9.1: Observation 1 example- Tamara

## Observation 1 Example-Tamara

### At the workplace

Time- 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Goals- To sell the services required and satisfy the customers beyond their expectations Feelings-Tamara looked confident and she seemed to enjoy her work.

### I spent two hours at her work.

Tamara agreed to have me observed her in her job. She works part time at AMSTAR as Inside Sales Executive, for Travel Agencies, which are mainly American. She works 6 days per week, from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.  She talked to her boss, the manager of the Sales Department who allowed me to go there.

Tamara sent me a WhatsApp with the location of the company located downtown in a three-storey building and warned me they have strict rules of security. When I arrived the security officer asked who I was going with, he called and Tamara came down to show me the way. First, she introduced me her boss. He is a middle-age Mexican man. He wanted to know what the study is about, so I told him as well as the reason why I have chosen Tamara. Then, he explained what his company does. We also talked about the fact that they promote having students in the company. Since students can do their internship and later work with them part time of full time after they have graduated. He also raised the point that the CEO, Alejandro Zozaya is Mexican.

He explained that Alex's outstanding contributions to international hotel business earned him recognition as one of Travel Agent magazine's "100 Rising Stars", plus inclusion on Expansions' list of the 100 most important and influential businesspeople in Mexico.

### The company

The headquarters of AMSTAR Mexico are located in Cancun. Amstar is a division of the Apple Leisure Group (ALG)—a leading seller of all-inclusive vacation packages in the U.S. and number one worldwide in the sales of leisure travel packages to Mexico. ALG holds a unique niche in the U.S. travel industry so their main customers are American.

Amstar is the official destination management company for brands such as: Apple Vacations,

American Express Vacations, Travel Impressions, Cheap Caribbean, Unlimited Vacation Club, RCI, Air France, British Airways, Stella Travel Services, Tropical Sky as well-known award-winning resorts such as Secrets, Dreams, Zoetry, Breathless, Now and Sunscape.

There are three sections within the same side of the building, to the left there is the manager's office, that it is only divided by glass walls so he can see the

employees. To the left of his office there is the customers in transit section and to the right the inside sales section.

## Categories of Ethnographic Data (adapted from Spradley 1980)

**Space**- It is an office with several cubicles facing to the wall. There is a screen on the wall displaying the numbers of the cubicles, who is providing some service, and the time spent in the call.  All around the office there are quotes promoting the values and principles of the company. For example, 'Deliver Excellence' 'Surpass customer expectations and go that extra mile'.  There are a row of six cubicles and Tamara's is the last on the left corner. It is around 70 cm. wide so there is hardly any space. On the desk there were the computer's screen, next to it there is a box with 3 pens and 2 pencils, several brochures of activities, a Tupperware with fruit and bottle of water. The PC is placed on the floor and she keeps her handbag on top of it.

**Actors**- Tamara was wearing a navy-blue jacket, a navy-blue pair of trousers, a blue blouse and black shoes. The uniform is a blue blouse or shirt with a white print, but she says she does not have it because she has just got the permanent contract. She wears a little make up, eye liner and eye lasher.

**Activities**- She can provide service (transfers, tour and activities or hotel accommodation) to the travel agents or directly to the customers, in any of the main beach destinations of Mexico, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Dominican Republic or Hawaii.

**Objects**- Computer, tours and activities brochures, desk, pens and pencils.

**Acts**- She sits at the computer, switches it on, wears the headset and opens AMSTAR's webpage (in English), clicks an icon and it appears a telephone. While she waits, she starts checking mails and answering some of them. Most of them are in English as the travel agents are from different American companies. When the telephone rings, she answers (speaking English fluently), greets – 'Amstar travel agency, how can I help you?"- , and she takes notes on a section of the computer connected to their network. First, there was a call that she passed to another department (I think that it was something related to customer service), then there was another call asking for a transfer, she checked the rates, booked the service, asked for a credit card number, stood up to collect the credit card machine and did the procedure to charge the service. To provide the service or reply some of the e-mails she opens and close windows (all of them are in English).

While waiting for other call, she opened a website with some arithmetic tasks to practice for an exam. She did some exercises and stopped when she got another call. She greeted and took some notes, asked the customer to wait, checked some brochures, open a window, checked some prices and gave them to the customer.

She briefly talked several times to her peer sitting to the right, once to borrow something and the second to comment on the recent call. The supervisor call her to his desk and they were talking for about 15 minutes checking some documents against the computer. They spoke in Spanish but the

**Events**- Answer telephone calls or e-mails to provide a service, such as giving prices, booking and charging a service, passing the call or forwarding the e-mail to the correspondent department.

**Afterwards, we had a short conversation**

R- It seems you had quite a lot of mails to reply. Didn't you?

Tamara- Yes, once I have met a travel agent over the phone they usually prefer to contact me by mail

R- Yes, I guess it is faster. But changing the subject. Why do you have some maths exercises in the computer at work?

I applied for a call to compete for a scholarship. I passed the first filter, but I have to present the GMAT (Graduate Management Admission) and the TOEFL so I am revising for the exams. You know that I have applied twice to go to the States but the first time I could not go because I was starting the degree and the second. Well, …. It was when my father was kidnapped so I did not continue with the procedure. But I am excited about getting this one.

R- Oh, yes. I remember. Thanks god everything is ok now. And talking about your parents. Hve you told them that you are applying for the scholarship?

T- I phoned them but they are opening a new business and they did not say much. I think,… Well, they are very busy, so I prefer to tell them later.

R- Yes, that is a good idea. And what about your grandma is she still with you?

T- She is in Cancun, but she is not living with me. She is with my aunt. Tomorrow is my day off so I want to see her, although I do not like very much the idea of visiting my aunt.

R- Why? Well, if you want to tell me.

T-Mmmh, yes. The thing is that I used to live with my aunt when I came to study to Cancun but one day, she told me she needed to move so I had to look for another place. But I moved and she still lives in the same place. I think she just wanted me to live from her house and this is the reason why I don't feel so happy to go. However, I am also going to go there for Christmas because they are my family and I want to be with my grandma.

R- Well, family is family. Where are you going now? Are you going home?

T- I am going to Plaza Las Americas mall to buy a Christmas present. We are going to exchange presents in the office and I have to buy a present for the reservation's manager. The good thing is that she gave me three choices of books. When I had to write what I wanted it was difficult to say because I have not read much lately but I would also like a book.

R- Well, before it was very common to ask for CD's but now things have changed, haven't they?

T-Yes, one of my peers asks for a CD and I thought why asking for a CD when he can download it from internet, ha-ha.

R-Yes, you are right. Come on. I'll give you a lift.

# Appendix 10: Coding categories and definitions

## SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND AGENCY
Nodes\\Themes

Table 8: Coding categories and definitions

| Name | Description | Sources | References |
|------|-------------|---------|------------|
| Actions outside the institutional context | What students do or did to practice or use English. | 19 | 45 |
| Cancun | Geographical terrain and neighbourhood in which learners live. | 7 | 11 |
| Conscious reason | after a process of conscious consideration that contribute causally to decision regarding language learning. | 18 | 45 |
| Dispositions | A person's inherent qualities of mind and character. Language learner tendency to act in certain way. That is, habitual patterns of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and acting. | 51 | 397 |
| Beliefs | Beliefs are recognized as part of student's experiences and interrelated with their environment, and attention is given to beliefs in conjunction with actions and possibilities within particular social contexts (Barcelos (2003:124). | 22 | 74 |
| Self-efficacy | the choices they make, their aspirations, how much effort they mobilize, how long they persevere in the face of difficulties and setbacks, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, the amount of stress they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and their vulnerability to depression. | 31 | 87 |
| Desires | A strong wish to have or do something. | 22 | 41 |
| Feelings | Emotions expressed by the students related to target language. | 15 | 26 |
| Intention motives | Intentions or goals of the acts. | 8 | 12 |

| Name | Description | Sources | References |
|------|-------------|---------|------------|
| Negative attitude and opinions | The way that learners think and feel towards English. | 8 | 19 |
| Positive attitude and opinions | The way that learners think and feel towards English. | 18 | 24 |
| Economic situation | In which the learners are embedded. | 11 | 27 |
| Education | The kind of formal education the participants have been exposed to, English learning experience and other foreign languages. | 18 | 38 |
| English course | Language learners took private lessons. | 6 | 8 |
| Other languages | Learners have studied or would like to study. | 3 | 3 |
| Private school | Learners attended to private schools, which seem to have positively influenced their language learning. | 9 | 13 |
| Public school | Learners have only attended public schools. | 6 | 11 |
| Experiences | From learners' accounts that have somehow affected or influenced the learner's life and the way they think and behave. | 28 | 90 |
| Family | Abstract discursive and concrete material either affordances and/or constraints imposed on learners thought and behaviour. | 30 | 121 |
| Social class | Social stratification in which people are grouped into a set of hierarchical social categories, the most common being the upper, middle, and lower classes. | 13 | 22 |
| Travelled to an English-speaking country | Experience in a native speaking country, language learner has either lived or travelled to the States. | 7 | 20 |
| University studies | Parents or brothers holding a degree or postgraduate studies. | 8 | 10 |
| Identity | The way students build their identity negotiating the meanings of their experience of membership in social communities. | 25 | 60 |

| Name | Description | Sources | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| Imagined communities | Through imagination, we can locate ourselves in the world and in history, and include in our identity other meanings, other possibilities, other perspectives. | 9 | 18 |
| Physical objects | Which aid and/or promote the use of the TL. | 6 | 15 |
| Political situation | In which language learners are embedded. | 6 | 17 |
| Projects | Personal projects to which learners commit themselves (Archer 2000)  the formation of projects is always an interactive, culturally embedded process by which social actors negotiate their paths toward the future, receiving their driving impetus from the conflicts and challenges of social life (Emirbayer and Misher 1998:984). | 21 | 37 |
| Relationships | People the language learners have interacted with that seem to have had an influenced on them. | 23 | 63 |
| SAC | Ongoing interactions in the SAC and how these act collectively in social formations. | 27 | 163 |
| Conversation sessions | The most popular activity in the SAC, in which learners seem to be exerting their agency. | 17 | 52 |
| Environment | What the context is like in the SAC, as perceived by the learners. | 17 | 40 |
| Other activities | What other activities students do apart from conversation sessions. | 16 | 33 |
| Symbolic capital | Objectified-embodied, acquired over time, acquired through systematic process of inculcation, express the outer habitus of the inculcating agency in its field, bring value to an agent the extent of his personal (inner) habitus is well formed relative to the field, and differ in transposability across fields. | 23 | 63 |
| Work | The abstract discursive and concrete material constraints imposed on thought and behaviour. | 25 | 88 |
| Abroad | Learner's opportunities and experience to work abroad. | 2 | 7 |

# Appendix 11: Participants' dispositions table

Table 9: Participants' Dispositions table

| Participants | A : Dispositional formations | B : Beliefs | C : Self-efficacy | D : Desires | E : Feelings | F : Intention motives | G : Negative attitude and opinions | H : Positive attitude and opinions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 : Bernardo | 34 | 13 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 2 : Carmen | 20 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| 3 : Diego | 32 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| 4 : Daniel | 38 | 13 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 3 |
| 5 : Diana | 11 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| 6 : Karina | 39 | 12 | 11 | 11 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| 7 : Luciano | 35 | 12 | 15 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 8 : Mariela | 16 | 1 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| 9 : Max | 27 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| 10 : Mónica | 31 | 1 | 18 | 7 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| 11 : Tamara | 14 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
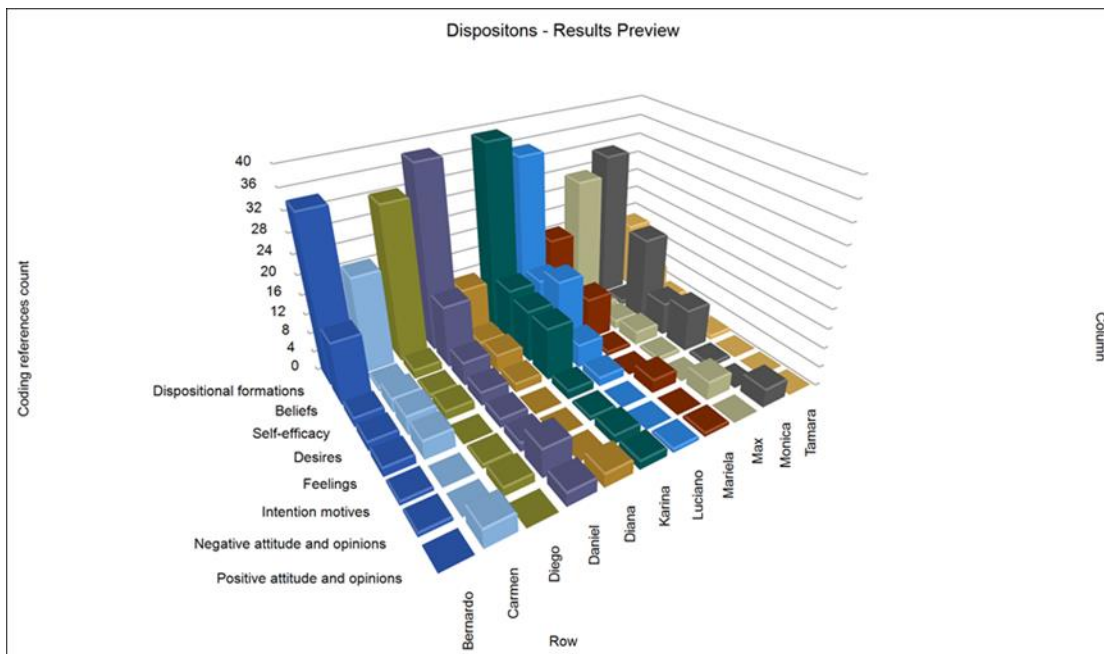


Figure 5: Dispositions- Results Preview

# Appendix 12: Max and Diana attributes
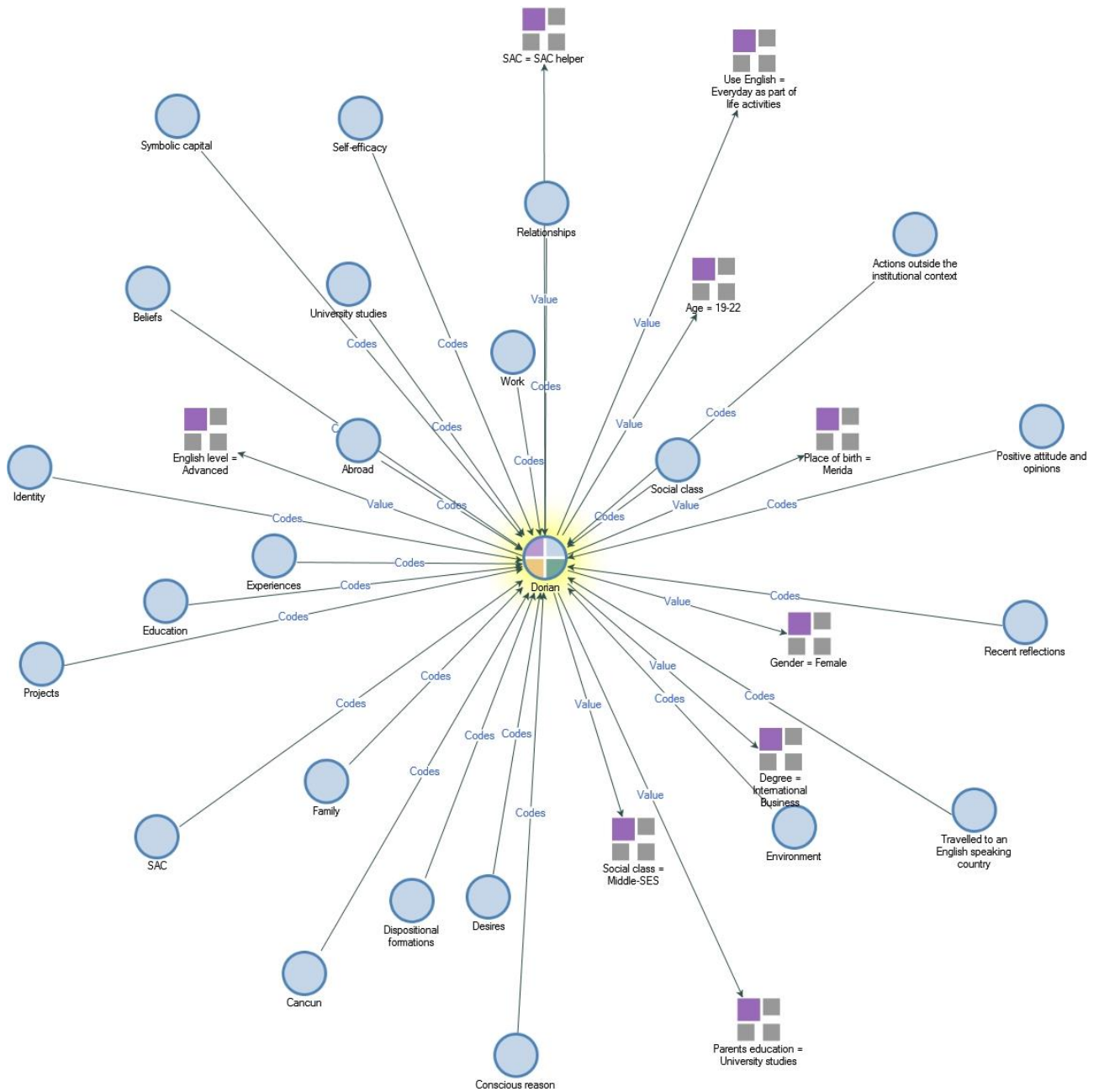


Figure 6: Diana's attributes and codes diagram
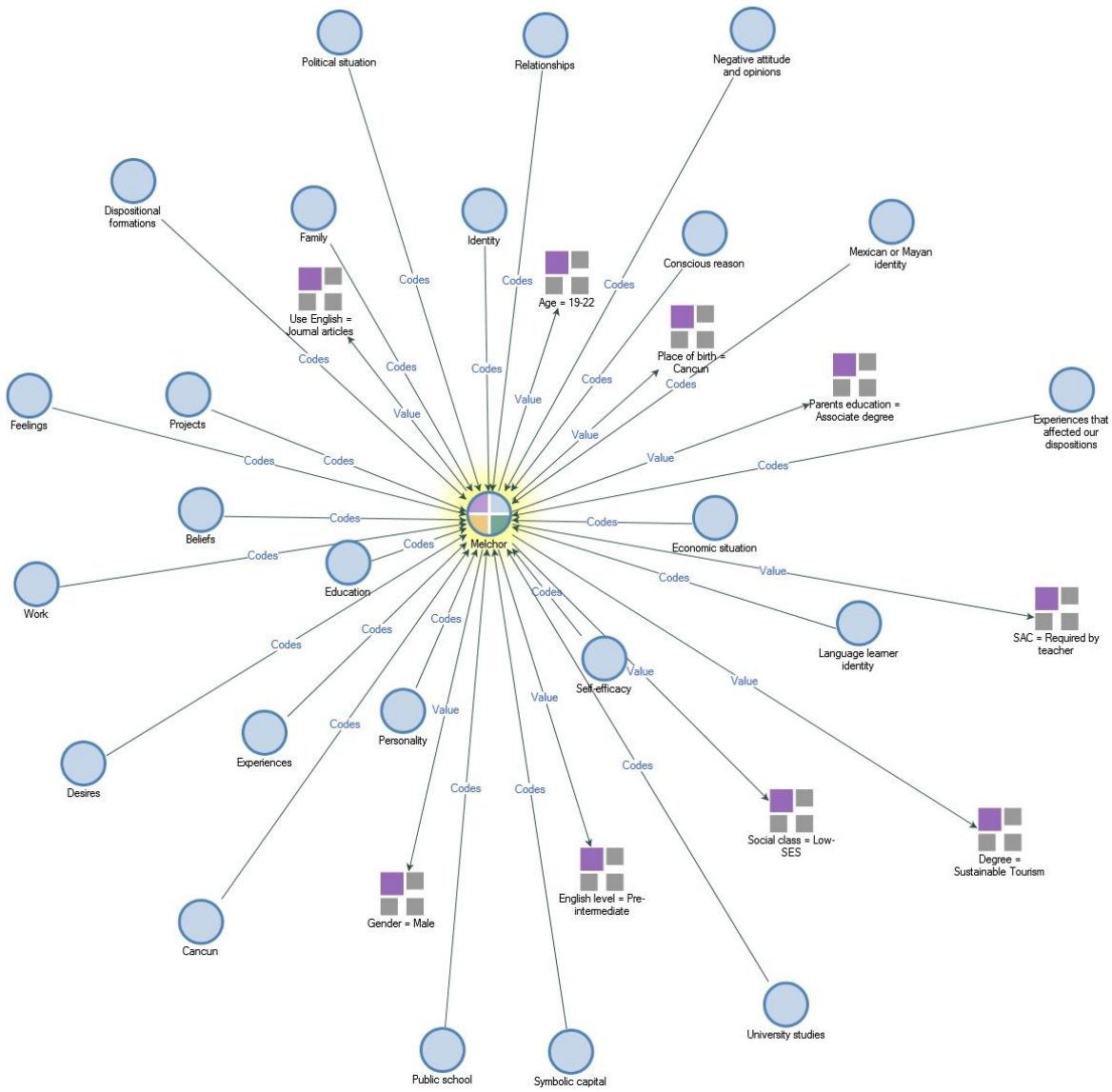
Figure 7: Max's attributes and codes diagram

Figure 8: Comparison diagram 'Max & Diana'

# Appendix 13: Connections and underlying patterns with NVivo



Figure 9: Looking for emerging themes



Figure 10: Word Frequency Query 'All sources'

Figure 11: Tree map



Figure 12: 3D Cluster Analysis

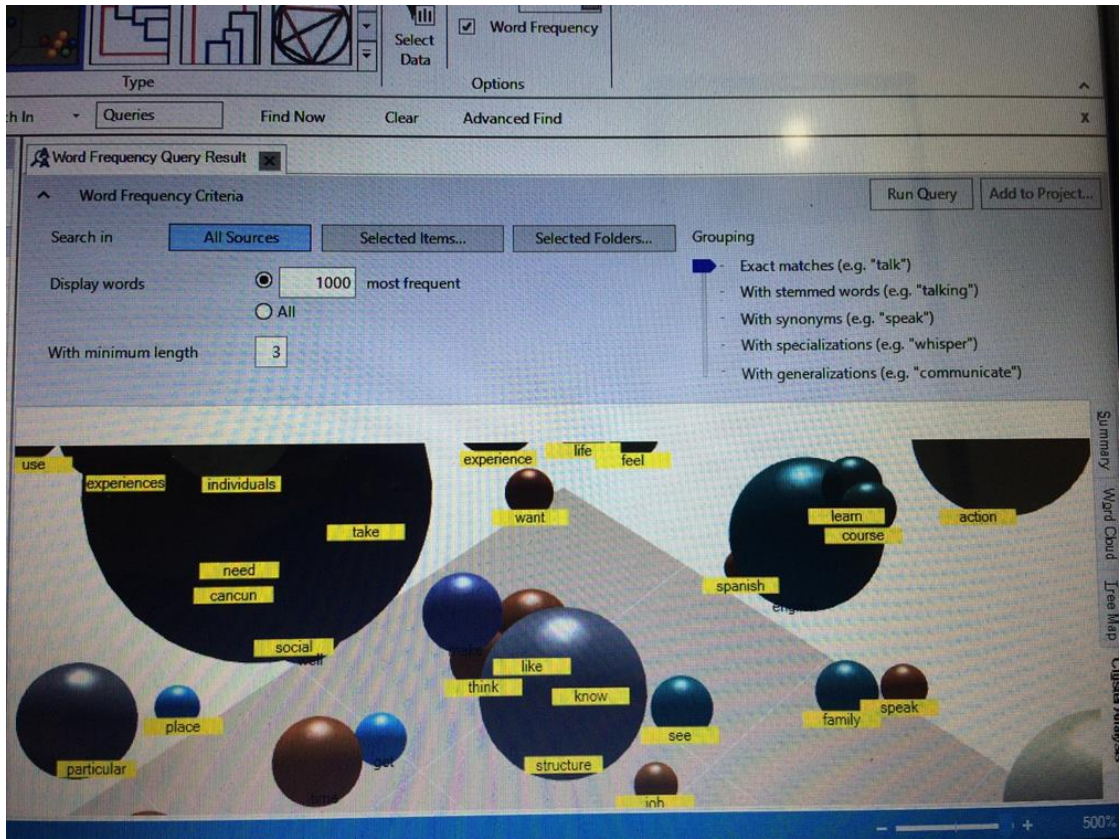**Identification of the generative mechanism or causal structures at work**



Figure 13: Cluster analysis 1

Figure 14: Cluster analysis 2

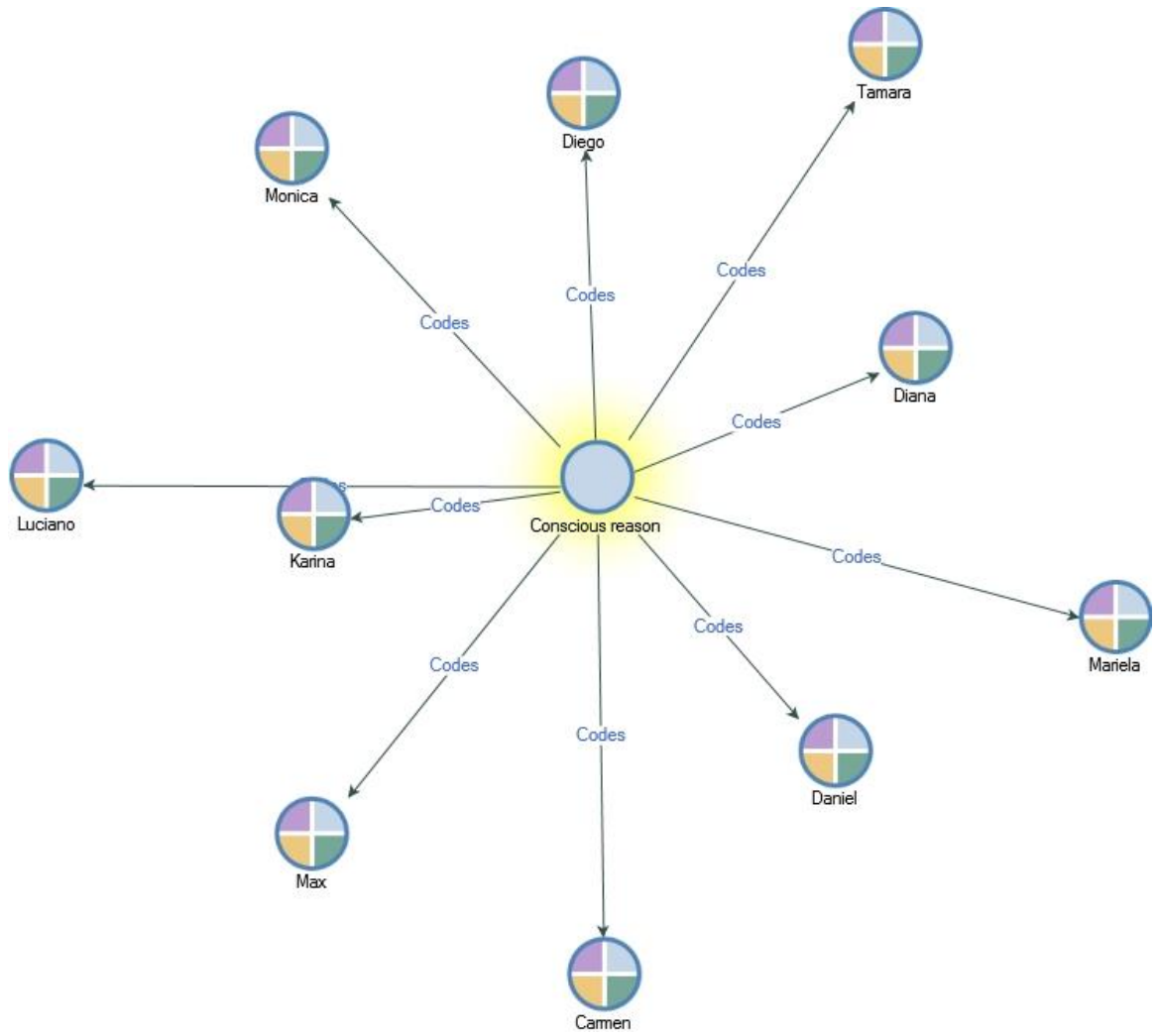**Identity**
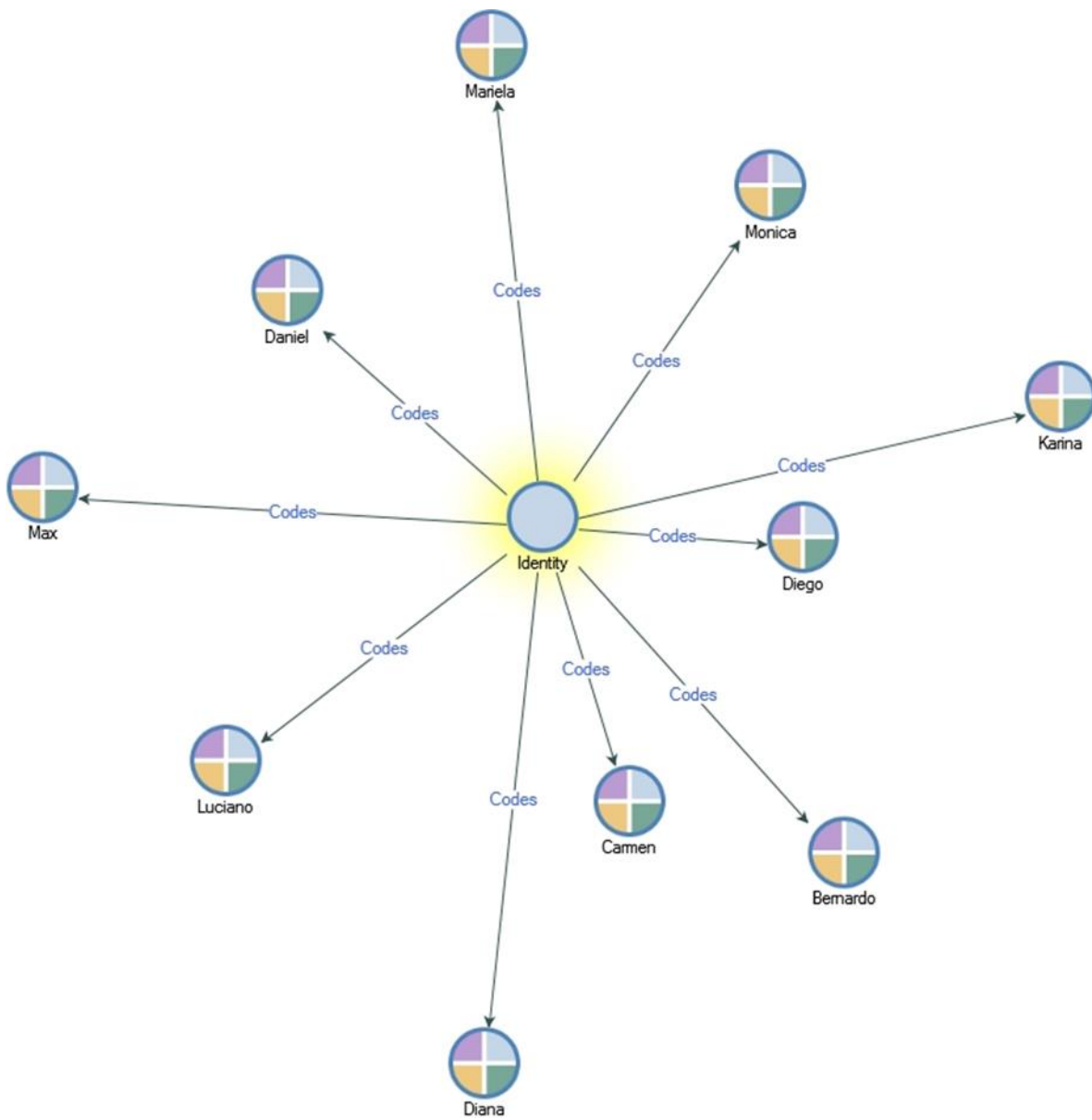


Figure 15: Identity

**Conscious reason**



Figure 16: Conscious reason

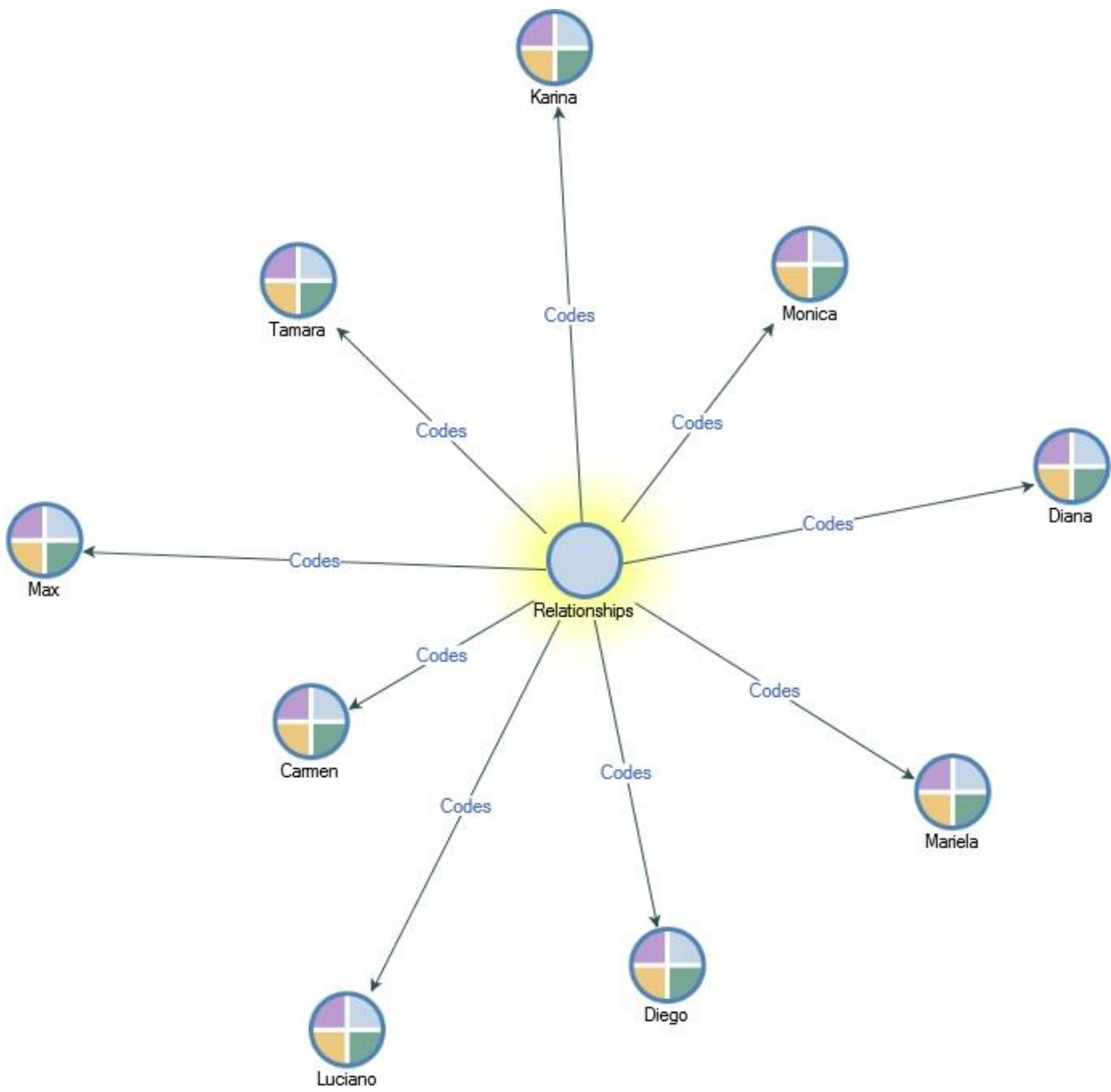**Social interaction**
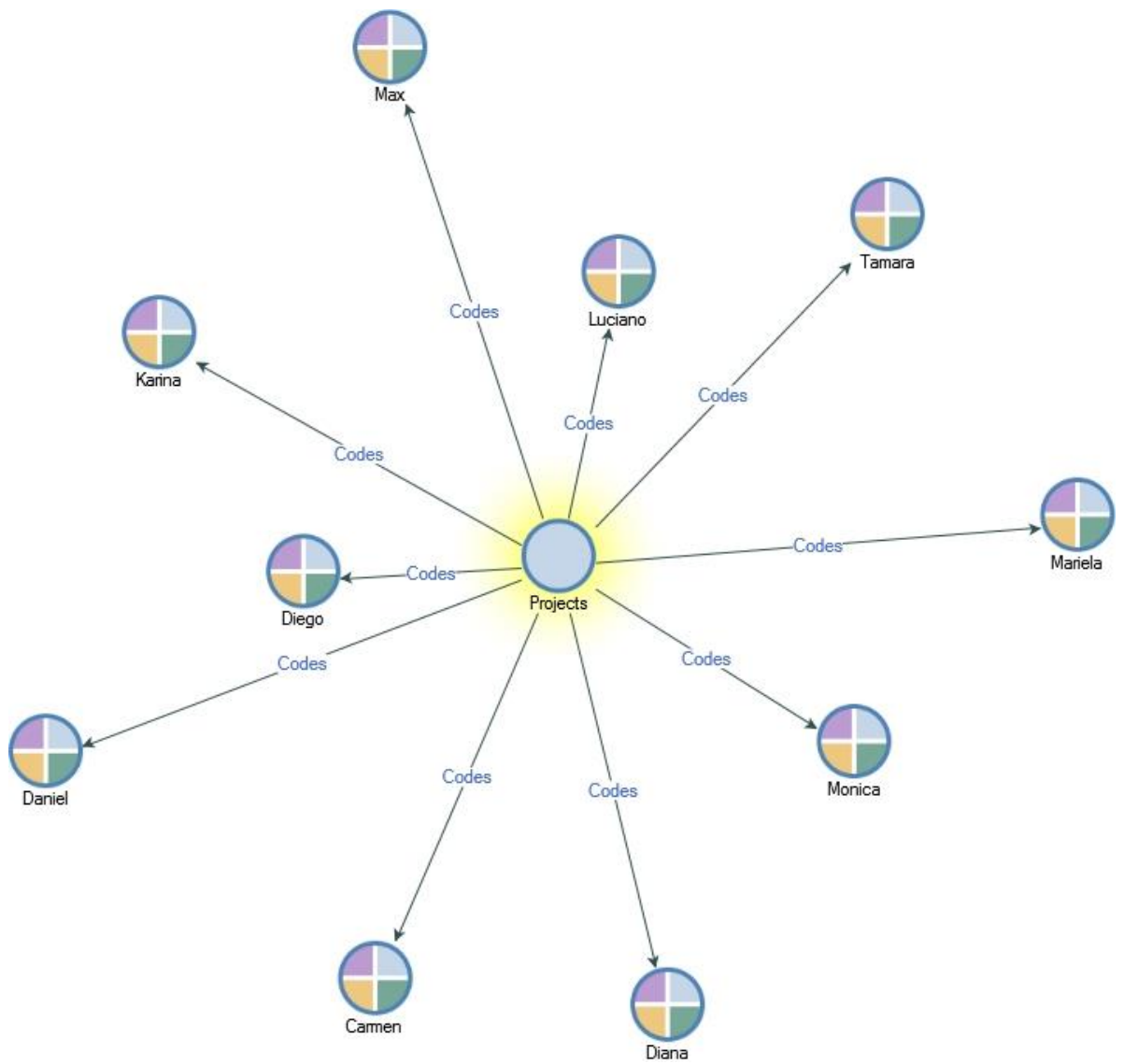


Figure 17: Relationships
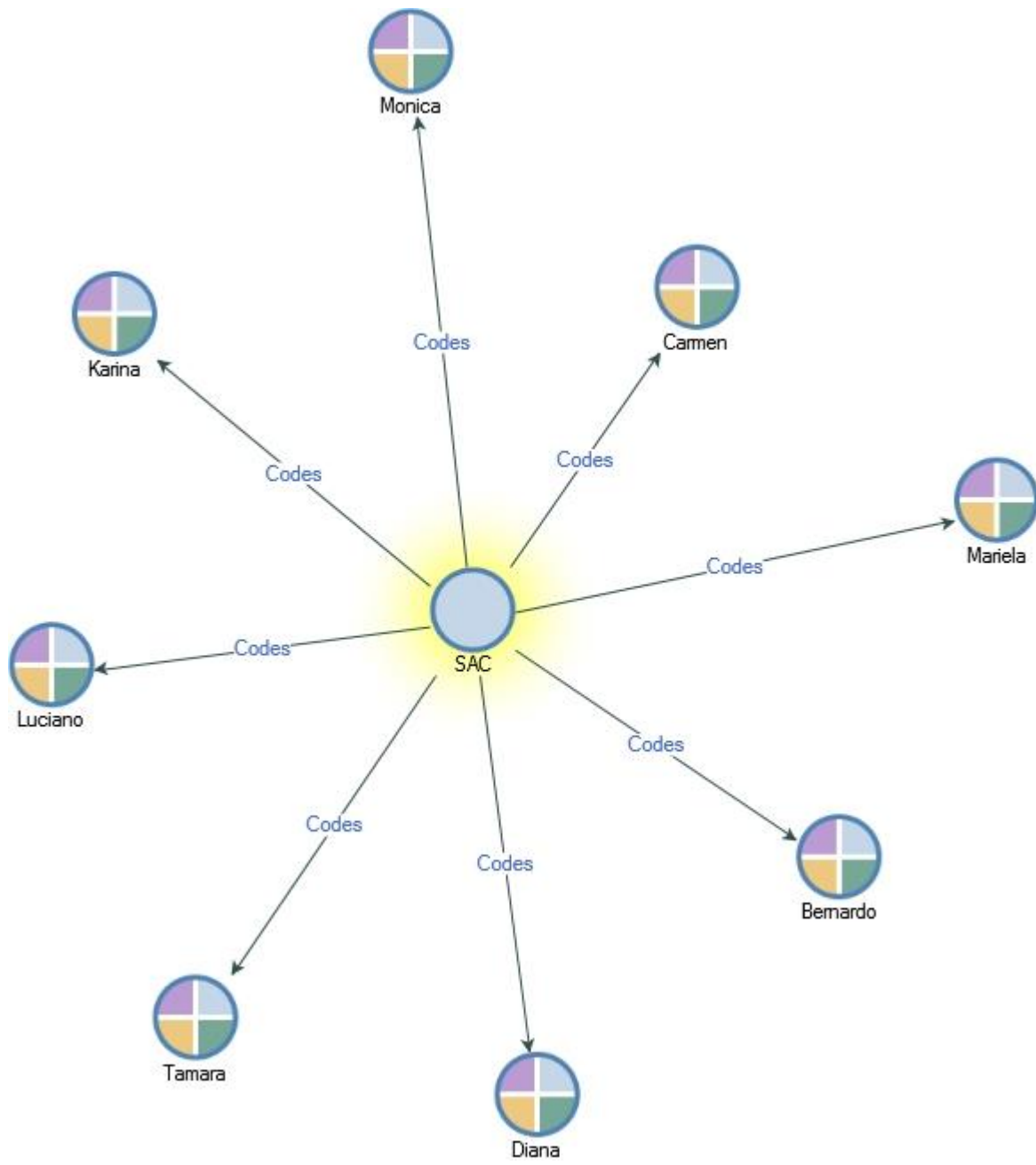
**Projects**



Figure 18: Projects

**SAC**



Figure 19: SAC

# Appendix 14: ERGO- Letter of invitation to participant

**Social Structure and Agency: An Ethnographic Study amongst Second Language Learners using a Self-Access Centre in a Mexican University**

**Researcher**: Magdalena Avila Pardo                    **Ethics number**: 13567

**Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form.**

**What is the research about?**
I will appreciate your help and support for this study that will be conducted as part of the requirements to obtain the PhD in Applied Linguistics: Online at the University of Southampton.

I have been working full-time in the English Department at the Universidad del Caribe for seven years. I am a counsellor in the Self-Access Centre (SAC) and teach the Business Topics course, as well as responsible for some of the students who are doing their social service.

The study aims to explore students' actions that exhibit their initiative in the practice and use of English, by focusing on their learning experiences and contextual conditions that mediate their learning. Given the fact that Cancun is the leading touristic destination in the country, being proficient in English is more imperative for the students' professional development than in other parts of the country.

**Why have I been chosen?**
You have been chosen because you are enrolled in the International Business or Sustainable Tourism degrees, and the last English courses. Being proficient in this foreign language is essential to be professionally successful in Cancun. Hence, I assume you can provide this study with relevant information for its purpose.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**
You are expected to:
  1) Write a language learner biography
  2) Participate in three scheduled interviews (with me).
  3) Allow me, the researcher, to accompany you to your daily activities for a day, that is, at the university, at home, and at work as well as to take some pictures or film what happens in such places, with your parents or boss consent.

**What will happen with the results of this research?**

The researcher will use the information gathered to inform the writing of an academic thesis. This information may also be used in articles prepared for academic and professional journals or presentations. Any references to interviews in reports, the thesis, articles and presentations will have personal, organisational and place names anonymised to ensure confidentiality.

**Will my participation be confidential?**

Participants' confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Procedures for protecting the confidentiality of participants will be followed. I am the only researcher and I will make sure that coding data will be kept with numbers instead of names to protect the identity of the participants as well as when transcribing audio files. Moreover, data with any identifying information will be locked in a file to which I will be the only one to have access to. Pseudonyms for participants will be assigned as well as any others mentioned in interviews or groups, agencies and geographical settings in the publishing of reports, disposing carefully of information that could reveal the identity of participants or places carefully.

**What happens if I change my mind?**
You are free to refuse to participate or withdraw from the research at any time without being affected under any circumstances.

**What happens if something goes wrong?**
In case something goes wrong or you have any complaint to can contact the Chair of the Faculty Ethics Committee Prof Chris Janaway (023 80593424, c.janaway@soton.ac.uk)

Research Governance (02380 595058, mad4@soton.ac.uk) is happy to be the named party.

**Where can I get more information?**
Feel free to contact me for further information or any questions that may arise.

My contact details are:
English Department telephone 881 4438
E-mail: mavila@ucaribe.edu.mx

**The following information was put up on a chart and two walls of the SAC**

A research project is being conducted to explore the languages learning practices in the SAC. The purpose of the research is to provide a better understanding of such practices. Some photographs will be taken, and data collected to inform a doctoral study about what language learners do that exhibit their initiative in the practice and use of English.

# Glossary of Terms

**Affordances**

Affordances are particular properties of the environment that allow, or afford, opportunities for individuals to act and engage with the environment, thus providing opportunities for language learning (Van Lier, 2000).

**Agency**

The term agency, an inherent human feature, as used here, draws upon several authors. Agency is conceived as the will and capacity to act, which arises from knowledge and schemas, and is co-determined by life circumstances, material and symbolical resources, other human subjects, and culturally and historically shaped. (Gao, 2010; Sewell, 1982; Elder-Vass, 2010).

**Causal power**

This is not an abstract notion of social structure or a monolithic concept of society but specific groups of people that have structural power. The social world is composed of many overlapping and intersecting groups, each of which has the causal power to influence human individuals through interactions between he members of the group. Human individuals themselves also possess causal powers- human agency (Elder-Vass 2010:4-5).

**Contextual conditions**

Contextual conditions refer to the circumstances or situation in which individuals live, work or do things. These include the political, social, economic and cultural dimensions that characterise the country and the region of the study, since the context is considered 'fundamental, not ancillary, to learning' (Zuengler and Miller 2006: 37; Block 2003; Gao 2007, 2010, 2013).

**Demi-regularities**

Tendencies that can be seen in rough trends or broken patterns in empirical data (Danermark et al., 2002:70), frequently reproduced behaviours / patterns that get seen in human activity, can emerge in the setting of a realist review as theme-type things and represent the beginning of abduction and retroduction.

**Dispositional formations**

The concept of dispositional formations is used to draw broadly upon both sociological and psychological perspectives. From a sociological perspective, dispositional formations relate to learners' dispositions or tendencies to behave in specific ways, and to their powers in terms of bringing about effects (Harré, 2007:152), that is, habitual patterns of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and acting. From a psychological perspective, it refers to personality traits. The fact is that when there is a comment on our personality, it is undoubtedly about our self, although we do not usually relate our habits to our self (Varela et al. 1993:67). Thus, dispositional formations are habitual latencies that predispose and motivate an individual to have certain types of experiences while at the same time determining to a large extent the manner of his or her response to those experiences.

**Fields**

According to Bourdieu (1993 cited in Naidoo, 2004:458), social formations are structured around a complex ensemble of social fields in which various forms of power circulate. The relative autonomy of fields varies from one period to another, from one field to another and from one national tradition to another. Within a field, there are ever evolving and emergent ways of thinking and acting, which participants adopt as they struggle for positions of power, thus bestowing distinction and legitimacy onto themselves (Block, 2012:192).

**Habitus**

Habitus describes the system of durable and transposable dispositions through which individuals perceive, judge, behave and think about the world (Bourdieu 1990 cited in Watson et al. 2009:670). It is structured by the social forces and conditions of the field that produce it while simultaneously structuring individuals' behaviours, perceptions and expectations (Wacquant 1998).

**Identity**

Identity is conveying to one another what kind of people we are; which geographical, ethnic, social communities we belong to; where we stand in relation to ethical and moral questions; or where our loyalties are in political terms (De Fina 2006: 263 cited in Zotzmann and O'Regan, 2016:139)

**Language learner identity**

Language learner identity refers to the individual who studies a target language for diverse reasons, either set by himself/herself or by the educational system. Sometimes he/she learns the language as part of the school subjects and has no intention of becoming an L2 user. Vivian Cook (2002:4) highlights that for an 'L2 learner, the task of acquisition is never finished'.

**Language user identity**

The language user identity relates to 'a person who knows and uses a second language at any level' and uses L2 for his/her own purposes, such as writing an e-mail, playing video games, or participating in social media (Vivian Cook 2002:1-4). An L2 user can be almost anyone, anywhere using a second language in a mundane activity.

**Mechanisms**

Mechanisms are conceived as how things act, such as the structures, powers, and liabilities shaping an entity predisposition while they operate and interact, and may be applied without being noticeable (Bhaskar, 1975:14)

**Personal identity**

Personal identity is the concept an individual develops about himself/herself that evolves throughout his/her life. It may include aspects of his/her life that he/she has no control over, such as the place of birth, socioeconomic status, choices made in life, as well as beliefs and how time is spent.

**Sociocultural configurations**

Sociocultural configurations entail social and cultural aspects. The social aspect involves the way individuals belong to a group or groups, whereas the cultural element is concerned with the habits and customs of the people in such groups. The term includes how learners' choices are influenced by the affordances and constraints within the social practices of their communities.

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