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IRANIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN CANADA

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IRANIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN CANADA

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Abstract

This study investigated the dynamics of adult Iranians' social interactions in Canada. The purpose was to identify social and cultural factors that improve or block speaking opportunities for adult Iranian immigrants. Eight Iranians, five men and three women, who had spent their adulthood in Iran, accepted invitations to participate in this study. They were interviewed for their processes of English language learning and their social interactions in Canada. The interviews were conceptualized for themes using the principles of grounded theory methodology. The analysis demonstrated that adult Iranians faced various challenges in their social interactions in Canada. Over-monitoring of grammar and pronunciation impediments turned out to be their main linguistic challenges. Opportunities for speaking with Canadians and cultural factors such as gender issues, religious background and personal background were the other factors emerging out of data analysis as influencing their social interactions.

Key words: Adult Iranians; English language acquisition; social identity; social interactions; linguistic and cultural challenges

DEDICATION

To My Mother and Father
&
Fatemeh and Matin

Acknowledgement

First of all, I thank God who was there for me all the time and who made the hearts of other people tender toward me.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Paradoxical as it may seem, Second Language Acquisition researchers seem to have neglected the fact that the goal of SLA is bilingualism.

Sridhar and Sridhar

I have never known what is Arabic or English, or which one was really mine beyond any doubt. What I do know, however, is that the two have always been together in my life, one resonating in the other, sometimes ironically, sometimes nostalgically, most often each correcting, and commenting on, the other. Each *can* seem like my absolutely first language, but neither is.

Edward Said

The Problem

Ting-Toomey (1999) defines culture as "a complex frame of reference that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meaning that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community" (p.10). This frame of reference makes it possible for speakers of a language to have effective communication by giving them a shared perspective as to how to see the world, describe it, and predict it (Haslett, 1989). It will further determine how members of a community make a request or proposal, take a stand, or adopt a certain social role in a social interaction. The inseparableness of culture--this frame of reference--and language has also been demonstrated by many scholars. Vygotsky (1978), for example, argues that language is, in fact, mediated through learners' active participation in social activities.

The inseparableness of language and culture has made it specially challenging for second language learners to interact socially with speakers of the target language (Scollon and Scollon, 2001), and the important question that begs an answer is how learners' frame of reference in their native language affects their social interactions in the target

language. Does bilingualism require biculturalism as well, and to what extent? Given that language is the vehicle for these norms, values, and beliefs, and functions as a symbol of identity (Gumperz, 1982a), does learning a second language necessitate being a person with two value systems?

These questions are just a few that describe the challenges that I went through in my social interactions with Canadians since my arrival 6 years ago. Being in Iran up to the age of 30 had given me a socio-cultural orientation in my social interactions that was very different from that of Canadians. Although I had studied the English language for quite a long time, and in fact taught it for a few years before coming to Canada, there were many incidents where my orientation led to confusion or misunderstanding in communications with Canadians.

These challenges in my communications with Canadians provoked me to investigate the factors that influence Iranian immigrants' social interactions with Canadians. In this study, therefore, I intend to explore the dynamics of adult Iranians'[1] social interactions with Canadians. I will focus on Iranians who have spent their life up to adulthood in Iran because they are the ones who have established a relatively fixed "Iranian" identity, which will enable me to examine the effect of Iranian culture on their social interactions as well. The research questions that I will specifically be investigating are as follows:

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[1] I use the term adult Iranian to refer to anyone who was born and spent his/her life to adulthood in Iran. My intention has been to make sure that they have already established a distinct identity for themselves before coming to Canada. This definition, however, does not mean that I have essentialized my participants into a unified category. I am aware that my Iranian participants certainly have different ideas and dispositions. My intention is simply to investigate their challenges in their social interactions in Canada.

What challenges do adult Iranians face in their social interactions with Canadians?

How does "culture" affect adult Iranians' social interactions in Canada?

Context of the Study

Participants of this study are first generation Iranian immigrants. Iranians do not have a long history of immigration to Canada. There have been two major trends of Iranian immigration into the West and Canada. The first one was in the 1970s. It was immediately before and after the revolution of 1979. The transformation that took place after the revolution in the cultural domain, family planning, and women's freedom was one of the major reasons for most of the modern, middle class, and Western-educated Iranians to emigrate (Safdar, 1998). Apart from this political reason, the Iraq-Iran war which broke out shortly after the revolution and lasted for almost 8 years accelerated their immigration. These immigrants were mostly well-off families, factory owners, professionals, and engineers.

The second trend of immigration has been going on for almost a decade now. They are mainly young people and students with a high level of education who are seeking better educational and economic opportunities outside of Iran. There are still some people who decide to emigrate because of their dissatisfaction with the theocratic system of the country, but this second wave of immigration has mainly been due to the economic hardships of a country that is coming out of the ashes of 8 years of war, political and economic mismanagement as well as three decades of Western economic embargo (Pajouhandeh, 2004).

Iranian immigrants in Canada, just like all other newcomers to a foreign country, have faced language problems, identity crises, stress, and culture shock because of "changes in values and behavior, and the need to adapt to new social relationships" (Safdar 1998, p.2). The current socio-cultural approaches to SLA research also reflect this concern for learners' stress and emotional status. Studies of the social interactions of Portuguese, Chinese, etc. in Canada bear witness to this concern (Hall, 1995; Norton, 2000). These studies conclude that learning a language is not just cognitive, but a process that involves the interaction between learners' personal, emotional, and experiential backgrounds with socio-cultural factors of a speaking context.

For successful language teaching and learning, therefore, we need as much information as we can get about how socio-cultural factors affect a learner's social interactions. Given the cultural mosaic that characterizes Canadian society and its different minorities, this task seems daunting, and yet important. My study addresses a perceived gap that exists with regards to the Iranian community. Indeed, there have been very few studies on the challenges they face in their English language performance (Majdzade, 2002; Riazi, 1995; Safdar, 1998). Even less common is the exploration of the socio-cultural factors that affect their social interactions.

Background

The field of second language learning/acquisition[2] is a very young discipline. Research into this field can be traced to the 1970s and 1980s when researchers first became interested in investigating the linguistic system, and then the cognitive process of learning a language (Brown, 2000). Research in the field of SLA has used theories, research methods, and findings from different disciplines, and as a result, a number of SLA theories have emerged, each one emphasizing a certain aspect of second language learning. These theories have made important contributions to this field (Ellis, 1994). One trend of SLA research which is particularly relevant to my study is the role that learners play in their language learning.

The role of the learner in learning a second language was not of much priority to structural linguistics. As the first scientific approach to linguistic studies, structuralism was primarily concerned with the form of the language. Language was conceived as a systematic structure that served to link thought and sound (Brown, 2000). The study of language was conducted with an ideal student in mind who was learning the language from an ideal native speaker (Norton, 2000). To structural linguists, therefore, it was considered peripheral or too abstract to examine the actual role of the learner in real

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[2]The literature has used different terminology to describe the process of language learning depending on whether learners learn the language in an environment where the target language is spoken (Second Language Learning), or in their native country (Foreign Language Learning). Depending on whether learners simply pick up the language by interaction with native speakers, or attend formal language classes to learn it, a distinction has also been made between Second Language Acquisition and Second/Foreign Language Learning. In this study, I do not intend to make any of these technical distinctions by using one term over the others. In fact, I will be using second language learning and second language acquisition interchangeably. My participants have had some formal instruction on the linguistic system of the English language in their native country, but their language development, to their own admission, was far from complete. Even for those who had spent years learning English in Iran, the social aspect of the English language was still in its infancy when they immigrated to Canada, and even in this case, I consider their instruction in Iran as a first step in English language learning which has continued in Canada.

linguistic interactions. In modern history, Chomsky has been the only vocal proponent of this pure linguistics, claiming that learners' identities are not central to the study of language (Norton, 2000).

Apart from structuralists, the learner has long been recognized as playing an essential role in second language learning. Norton (1997) argues that since "speech, speakers and social relationships are inseparable" (p. 410), the relationship between language learning and the role of the learner should be of primary importance. Sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic studies of language have taken up different positions as to the role of learners in their language learning. Psychology of language, for example, has focused on *individual differences*, holding the learner responsible for learning a second language. To psycholinguists, a good language learner is one "who seeks out opportunities to learn the language, is highly motivated, has good attention to details, can tolerate ambiguities and has low levels of anxiety" (Brown, 2000, p. 32). Sociological studies of language, on the other hand, have focused on *group differences*. To sociolinguists, social distance between the two languages and degrees of acculturation would determine the success of language learning (Brown, 2000).

Both of these approaches have, however, been criticized as two extremes of a continuum (Hanson & Liu, 1997). Psycholinguists, on the one hand, used to conceive of the learner as an individual who is independent of his/her relationship to the social world. Sociologists, on the other, gave no agency to the learner and actually failed to examine the role learners could play in their second language learning. These studies have also been attacked for their over-emphasis on experimental designs and artificial contexts (McNamara, 1997). Social studies of language learning were also criticized for not being

social enough, conducted in the comfort of the researchers' offices rather than in the actual social context where learning takes place (Norton, 2000).

In an attempt to bridge the gap between one trend of research holding the learner the only responsible party to the learning process, and the other trend of research ignoring human agency altogether, the current sociological studies in SLA have adopted a new focus, that of social identity (Hanson & Liu 1997). According to most of these studies, a person's social identity is their perception of who they are in relation to others; that is, how they perceive the people they talk to, and how they are perceived by them. This social identity, Norton (2000) argues, is not determined *just* by individual differences, but is *also* "socially constructed" and "varies depending on context" (p. 419). Defined as such, social identity would be the domain where there would be a constant dialectic relationship between an individual's agency and socio-cultural factors of the community in which he/she lives.

Influenced by Vygotsky's theory on human development, a number of other researchers have also investigated the effect of these socio-cultural factors on learners' social identity and their second language learning (Hall, 1997; Lantolf and Appel, 1994; Norton, 2000). They have concluded that SLA is, in fact, mediated by social identity. To them, social identity is the scene where learners' personal as well as contextual socio-cultural factors influence one another to give the learner a context-based disposition that would block or improve their making use of a speaking opportunity, and consequently, their second language learning.

Norton (2000) demonstrates that these dispositions and perceptions lead to learners investing differently in their second language acquisition, and concludes that

learners' perceptions may facilitate or hinder their opportunities to speak, and consequently, their oral proficiency. Therefore, Norton argues, learning a second language is better accounted for using the term "investment" rather than "motivation".

With the impact of social identity on SLA widely documented (Hall, 1995; Gumperz, 1982b; Ochs, 1993), it has become necessary for all policy makers, curriculum developers and teachers to have a comprehensive understanding of the social identity of the community they intend to teach. Regarding the Iranian community in Canada, however, there have been few studies on their English language learning, and there has never been a study on their social identities and its impact on oral proficiency.

In his study of 4 Iranian graduate students, Riazi (1995) for example, focused on how his subjects achieved their major-specific literacy in the English language. He concluded that literacy development in their specific majors was fundamentally an interactive social-cognitive process. The acculturation process of Iranians in Canada has also been the subject of investigation in a few studies. Saba (1998) tested a new model of acculturation on 166 Iranian immigrants in Toronto. Her focus was more on the distress, cultural adjustments, and the well-being of her subjects while in Canada. Pajouhandeh (2004), too, examined the cultural adjustments that 8 young Iranian women in their 20s had made to the Canadian society. She examined their acculturation experiences, and explored the complex and unique attempts of negotiating an identity in the Canadian context.

In a more recent study, Sadeghi (2008) has investigated the literacy and lifelong learning of Iranian immigrant women. She drew upon her participants' narratives to demonstrate that her participants' success in lifelong learning was heavily influenced by

their socialization experiences in their early years in Iran. She also illustrated that these immigrant women faced various challenges in their lifelong learning such as cultural differences and gender differences.

Significance of the Study

This study of adult Iranians' social interactions with Canadians will serve two purposes. First, it is expected to contribute to the general picture of the impact of social identity on social interactions and language learning. It provides even more data to support the need for the incorporation of a comprehensive social theory into the theory of SLA. Second, given the fact that no such study has ever been conducted, it is also expected to provide specific examples of how the social identity of adult Iranians would impact their social performance and oral proficiency.

This study is also important in that it is the first one that taps into Iranian learners' social identities and its impact on their social interactions in Canada. With an ever increasing Iranian immigrant population in Canada, it would be wise for policy makers, curriculum designers, and teachers to examine the challenges these newcomers have faced in their socialization and to reflect on their success or failure to develop English oral proficiency.

This study has personal implications for me as well. I believe that learning a second language requires learning to have a second self. Since language and culture are so intertwined, I have always been wondering how a single person can have two selves, two cultural identities, religious identities, value systems. One thing I am sure of is that

this study has been very insightful in helping me recognize who I am and who I want to be.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. I provided necessary background information and set the stage for my study in the first chapter.

The second chapter presents a review of the pertinent literature and the theoretical framework in which I have grounded my research. I specifically review Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Swain's Output hypothesis, Acculturation Model and Norton's concept of investment. Later in this chapter, I discuss the principles of Vygotskian approaches to second language learning as the theoretical framework of my study.

Grounded theory as the methodological framework of my study is described in the third chapter. I have also discussed "interviews" as the main research method for data collection and analysis. In that chapter, my participants are also introduced and their similarities and differences are discussed.

Chapter 4 begins with an in-depth description of each participant's lived experiences of social interactions with Canadians. This description includes their backgrounds, their process of English language learning in Iran, if any, and in Canada, their social life in Canada, and their challenges and difficulties in their social interactions with Canadians. Then, it presents the findings of this study in the form of the themes that have emerged out of the conceptualization of the data.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings in light of the theoretical framework and the related literature review. I demonstrate how "cultural differences"

between Canadians and my participants challenged their social interactions. I further argue that all subcategories of culture—religion, gender, and social obligations—affected their social interactions as well. My participants' different linguistic and social habits, which have been established through time, were demonstrated to lead to confusions and misunderstandings in their social interactions with Canadians. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings, implications of the study, as well as suggestions for further research.

I now turn to my second chapter where my theoretical framework and the related review of literature are presented.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The main purpose of my study is to examine the dynamics of social interactions of adult Iranians and Canadians. In this chapter, I review the insights that I have gained for this research from different theories of second language acquisition. The Grammar Translation Method as the prevalent method of teaching English in Iran will be presented first. I, then, review Krashen's Input and Swain's Output Models, the Acculturation Model, and Natural Language Learning theory. Krashen's and Swain's models put emphasis on the role of interactions in second language acquisition. The Acculturation Model emphasizes the importance of culture in learning a language, and assumes that acculturation to the target language is the ultimate purpose of social interaction. Natural Language Learning theory, on the other hand, makes a distinction between formal and informal environments of language learning. In this chapter, I will also illustrate how my study is grounded in recent socio-cultural approaches to second language learning, and examine how Norton's concept of social identity can best capture the totality of the socio-cultural factors that the socio-cultural theoretical framework deems as affecting learners' social interactions with native speakers. Since culture is an important aspect of my research and a vital component of most of the above theories, I have also elaborated on the definition of culture and its relationship with language.

Theories of Second Language Acquisition/Learning

In its rather short history of six decades, second language learning has seen the rise and fall of many theories, each one emphasizing a certain aspect of the process of language learning. Below is a review of some of the SLA theories which have provided me with insights in the examination of my participants' social interaction with Canadians.

Grammar Translation Method

Grammar Translation (GT) was in fact a method of teaching Latin and Greek that was extended to teaching modern languages as well. In the GT method, language is taught with a focus on grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary, repetition of different conjugations, translation of texts, and written exercise. Languages are not taught for oral communication, but for scholarly purposes or attaining a reading proficiency (Brown, 2000).

GT has been practiced in classes all over the world for centuries with little variation. It does not improve learners' communication skills, and is remembered by many learners with distaste because language learning for them simply "meant a tedious experience of memorizing endless lists of useless unusable grammar rules and vocabulary, and attempting to produce perfect translations of stilted or literary prose" (Brown 2000, p.17).

This method also reflects the lack of theoretical research on second language acquisition as well as the lack of any research-based method of teaching prior to the 20th century. Brown (2000) states:

> Grammar Translation Method has no advocates. It is a method for which there is no theory. There is no literature that offers a rationale or a justification for it or that attempts to relate it to issues in linguistics, psychology, or educational theory (p. 17).

Despite all this distaste, and the "theorylessness" of Grammar Translation, it has been very popular for centuries, and has "withstood attempts at the turn of the twentieth century to reform language teaching methodology" (Brown 2000, p.16). Some of the reasons for this resilience are because teachers do not need to have any specific skills, tests of grammar and translation are easy to construct, and easy to score objectively. The fact that many of the standardized tests of today still do not measure communication skills has also discouraged learners from going beyond grammar rules, translation, and rote exercise.

After this short discussion on Grammar Translation method which is still prevalent in many public schools in Iran, I now turn to review the interactionist theories of SLA which consider "social interaction" as vital in learning a second language.

Krashen's Theory of SLA

Although not considered an interactionist approach to SLA, I start my literature review with Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis because it is, first of all, half of an interaction, and second, many interactionist researchers have built their theories upon Krashen's (1985) theory. His SLA theory consists in fact of a few hypotheses: the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Affective Filter Hypothesis and the Input Hypothesis. Because his Input and

Monitoring Hypotheses are specially related to my investigation of social interactions, a discussion of these two will follow.

Input Hypothesis

Krashen (1981, 1985) states that language acquisition takes place when the learner is exposed to enough comprehensible input. To define comprehensibile input, he states that a learner understands a structure that is a little beyond his/her current level of competence (p. 100). In other words, learners should be exposed to an input that is neither too difficult nor too easy for them. He emphasizes that speaking emerges only when enough comprehensible input has been provided.

Krashen's input hypothesis inspired Long (1983) whose research was aimed at defining in more detail what "input" is. Long argues that deeper attention needs to be paid to the interactions that learners are engaged in if the nature and usefulness of input to SLA is to be better understood. In his investigation of how input could be made comprehensible to language learners, Long (1983) compared conversation between native speakers of English and conversation between native speakers and non-native speakers of English. He found that input could be made comprehensible through the modifications of interactional structure and negotiation of meaning. Long concluded that collaborative efforts during interaction between more and less capable speakers could maximize comprehensibility.

Krashen's input hypothesis is helpful in my investigation of Iranians' social interactions with Canadians. It draws attention to the basic tenet of language learning: input. It shows the importance of exposure for immigrants to learn the English language.

Because, based on my teaching experience, Iranian English language learners have very little natural exposure to the English language, I assume that the Canadian context would give them ample opportunity in this regard. Input hypothesis also demonstrates that not all kinds of input is going to help them improve their proficiency, but only the exposure that is just a little beyond what they already know.

The Monitor Hypothesis

Krashen defines monitoring as the concern for correctness in speaking in public. Although Krashen believes that a little amount of this monitoring can be helpful in learning a second language, he argues that second language learners are mostly over-monitors or under-monitors. The learners who are anxious to have error-free speech are over-monitors to their own disadvantage. Over-monitors are so concerned about their speech accuracy that they tend to avoid the demands of communication. This anxiety itself can increase their affective filter which would affect their performance even more. Under-monitors, on the other hand, are the learners who are ready to take more risks in public. They have a lower affective filter which would make it less stressful for them to speak in public. While under-monitoring may help in the beginning stages to have effective interactions with native speakers, in the long run it has been proved to lead to fossilization of inaccurate structures and lexicons. Krashen (1985) believes that optimal monitoring only occurs after a certain level of comprehensible fluency is achieved. This monitoring would help increase learners' accuracy without affecting their social interactions.

Given the fact that in Iran public schools and private language teaching institutes place their emphasis on grammar, and that there is a strong tendency toward deductive teaching (Riazi, 1995), I expect most of my participants to be over-monitors in their communications, especially because there is very little chance of real interactions for them to overcome this problem over time. Being too concerned for correctness has, from time to time, been my own problem in social interactions in Canada.

The Affective Hypothesis

As briefly mentioned above, Krashen believes that learners will learn a second language more easily if their anxiety level is low. Low anxiety, he argues, would mean a low affective filter which in turn would make more comprehensible input possible. Anxiety, though, is not the only affective factor Krashen talks about. He believes that effective learning takes place when learners' emotional status is optimal; that is to say, learners are highly motivated, have self-confidence and experience low anxiety. High anxiety, on the other hand, would mean a high affective filter which in turn would result in less comprehensible input being accessible to learners.

Acknowledging the role of anxiety in learning a second language, Spolsky (1989), too, argues that "there is a specific kind of anxiety that in the case of many learners interferes with SL learning" (p. 115). This variable, he says, most often affects listening and speaking skills. Bailey (1983) makes a distinction between facilitating and debilitating anxiety, which, contrary to Krashen's argument, means that anxiety is not inherently individual, but is context-based.

Krashen's concept of motivation, however, has not been without controversy. While Krashen believes that motivation is an independent psychological trait, Gardner (2005) rejects that motivation is exclusively individual, and argues that motivation is a subcategory of self-confidence. He further argues that self-confidence and its subsets arise from positive experiences that a learner gets from learning a second language in social context. Gardner (2005) has also made a distinction between instrumental and integrative motivation. The first one refers to learners' motivation in learning a second language as an instrument to other purposes while the second one refers to learners' desire to become a member of the target community.

A more recent model of motivation has made a distinction between people who are intrinsically or/and extrinsically motivated. Brown (2000) defines these two kinds of motivation as:

> Intrinsically motivated activities are ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. People seem to engage in the activities for their own sake and not because they lead to an extrinsic reward. Intrinsically motivated behaviors are aimed at bringing about certain internally rewarding consequences, namely, feelings of competence and self determination. Extrinsically motivated behaviors, on the other hand, are carried out in anticipation of a reward from outside and beyond the self. Typical extrinsic rewards are money, prizes, grades, and even certain types of positive feedback. Behaviors initiated solely to avoid punishment are also extrinsically motivated, even though, numerous intrinsic benefits can ultimately accrue to those who, instead, view punishment avoidance as a challenge that can build their sense of competence and self determination. (p. 156)

Motivation has also been looked at from a different perspective. Dornyei (2001) has proposed a new model of motivation which, in a sense, is a shift away from emphasizing macro-contextual factors. Dornyei's model is an attempt to analyze the relationship between motivation and the specific tasks developed in the L2 classroom.

Dornyei (2001) argues that a change in the task that students are engaged with would result in a different motivation.

To my study of adult Iranian immigrants, Krashen's concept of input offers three lines of insights. Two of them have already been discussed above: the recognition of input to adult Iranians as one of the principles of success in language learning as well as the appropriate difficulty level of input. The third characteristic of input, according to Krashen, is that it should be provided in a stress-free environment. This trait of input is especially meaningful for adult learners who have developed an ego and a respected social identity in their Persian language.

The second interactionist theory of second language learning that I will review in this chapter is Swain's (2000) comprehensible output hypothesis. Swain basically argues that language output—speaking--is just as important as input—listening-- in learning a second language.

Swain's Comprehensible Output Hypothesis

One of the major criticisms leveled at Krashen is that he attributes success in SLA only to input (Chaudron, 1985; Swain, 2002). In her output hypothesis, Swain (2000, 2002) argues that in addition to comprehensible input, learners' production is also necessary for successful second language learning. She believes that the role of the learners' production is minimized in Krashen's theory. Swain lists three functions for learners' output. It helps them focus their attention, test hypotheses, and provide feedback as to their level of progress in language learning.

The importance of comprehensible input and output has also been emphasized in Pica's (1993) work on "negotiation of meaning". Her research provided data demonstrating that negotiation of meaning occurred when learners while conversing with native speakers experienced communication breakdowns. Through negotiation of meaning, learners and native speakers cooperated in order to resolve communication failures. Specifically, Pica demonstrates that they engaged in a social process that required them to modify their speech linguistically to resolve communication breakdowns and achieve mutual understating. Negotiation of meaning, to Pica, is a social process that integrates social, linguistic, and cognitive processes in learning a second language.

Based on this hypothesis, my participants' language production--output--is as important in their English language development as is the exposure to it. My participants' language production helps them to put to the test what they have already learned, and evaluate themselves. This process, called hypothesis-testing, would give them the confidence that their internalized concepts about the English language and the Canadian culture are correct and effective.

Acculturation Model

Another theory that has been particularity insightful to my understanding of the process of SLA is the Acculturation Model (Schumann, 1978). This model is particularly relevant to my study as it tries to explain the language learning of adult immigrants. In a step away from the interactionist approaches, however, this model argues for "acculturation" as the ultimate purpose of interaction. To Schumann (1978), second language acquisition is simply an aspect of acculturation. Therefore, success in second

language is measured depending on the level of acculturation: to the extent that learners are prepared to acculturate to the target language, to the same extent they can learn the second language. Schumann explains that there are two distinct groups of factors involved in acculturation:

> I would like to argue that two groups of variables—social factors and affective factors—cluster into a single variable which is the major causal variable in SLA. I propose that we call this variable acculturation. By acculturation I mean the social and psychological integration of the individual with the target language group. I also propose that any learner can be placed on a continuum that ranges from social and psychological distance to social and psychological proximity with speakers of the target language, and that the learner will acquire the language only to the extent that he acculturates. (p. 29)

As it is clear from his statement above, the acculturation model emphasizes three concepts: the socio-cultural context of language learning, the role of the learners in SL learning, and the regular contact between learners and native language speakers.

Schumann's (1986) concept of acculturation is of particular relevance to my study. While children naturally tend to acquire culture from their communities, culture acquisition is particularly difficult and presents unique challenges for my adult participants. My adult participants have already acquired a certain way of looking at the world and they possess a certain system of values that they are comfortable with. Learning a second culture, however, means to depart from this system to that of an unknown world. It could also, at worst, lead to a clash between the two value systems, culture shock and identity crisis. Adult Iranians' success in learning English, as Schumann (1978) has also indicated in his quotation above, depends as much on acculturation as it does on formal linguistic instruction.

Schumann argues that if acculturation to the target language does not happen, instruction is of limited benefit. This concept could be very revealing in my investigation of Iranian immigrants' social interactions in Canada because I expect them to have undergone extensive formal instruction with very little opportunity to have actually used it with native speakers of English.

Schumann (1986) has identified two groups of factors that would affect acculturation: social factors and psychological factors. Social factors include: power relations between the L1 and L2 group, the two groups' desire for L2 learners to assimilate or not to, size and cohesiveness of the L2 group, attitudes of the two groups towards each other, and the length of time the L2 group intends to stay in the L1 environment. Psychological factors include: language shock, culture shock, motivation and ego.

Ting-Toomey (1999), too, argues that there are a lot of factors affecting the process of acculturation. "Push-factors," she states, are the difficulties that people faced in their own communities and countries like particular political and economic situations, which forced them to emigrate. "Pull factors," on the other hand, are the chances of achieving better jobs, educational opportunities, or quality of life that has led to their emigration. Ting-Toomey further argues that "If expectations are realistic and positive, they can facilitate the acculturation process because they can influence a newcomer's mindset, attitudes and behavior" (p.235). Also affecting the acculturation process, Ting-Toomey states, are knowledge of norms, verbal and non-verbal styles of communication, personality attributes, high tolerance for ambiguity, age, and educational level.

Comparing socialization of children into their first language with acculturation of adult immigrant language learners, Sarangi and Roberts (2002) point out that the environment for adult immigrant learners is less supportive. They remark:

> The gradual process of taking on new roles and identities, of managing activities and of presenting oneself in terms of knowledge and attitudes has to be accomplished without the active attention, tolerance, and long stretches of informal and relaxed interaction which typifies child language socialization. (p.199)

Another theory of second language learning that I have drawn upon in my exploration of learners' social interactions with native speakers is Natural Language Learning Theory. This theory makes an important distinction between formal (classroom) and informal (natural) settings of language learning.

Natural Language Learning

Spolsky (1989) believes that the more learners are exposed to a language, and the more they practice it, the more proficient they would become in that language. Spolsky argues extensive exposure to the target language, in appropriate difficulty, would help learners discriminate between the sounds of a language, give them the opportunity to analyze the language into its components, learn how these constituents would combine again grammatically into larger units, and finally help them to develop control over the grammatical and pragmatic structure of the language. Spolsky (1989) makes an important distinction between the informal (natural) environment of the target language community and the formal environment of the classroom.

> In natural second language learning, the language is being used for communication, but in the formal situation, it is used only to teach. In natural language learning, the learner is surrounded by fluent speakers of

> the target language, but in the formal classroom, only the teacher (if anyone) is fluent. In natural learning, the context is the outside world, open and stimulating; in formal learning, it is the closed four walls of the classroom. In natural language learning, the language used is free and normal; in the formal classroom it is carefully controlled and simplified. Finally, in a natural learning situation, attention is on the meaning of the communication; in the formal situation, it is on the meaningless drills. (p. 171)

The SLA theories that I have reviewed so far shed light on the role of "social interaction" in learning a second language which is the cornerstone of my exploration of Iranians' communications with Canadians. However, when it comes to the detailed description of all the socio-cultural factors that affect a social interaction and how these factors influence one another, socio-cultural theories of SLA provide the most adequate theoretical framework. Below is a review of the principles of these approaches and how they relate to my study.

Socio-Cultural Approaches to SLA

Socio-cultural approaches to SLA have their origins in the theoretical insights of Vygotsky. I will, therefore, present a brief account of Vygotsky's theoretical stance on human learning and development. I will, then, focus on how his insights have influenced SLA research.

Vygotsky (1978) perceives learners as active participants in the process of development. To Vygotsky, learning takes place within an interactive context where participants engage in social activities to (re)construct knowledge. To (re)construct knowledge, he believes, both individual and social factors are interdependently involved. Seen in this way, knowledge is the result of new members' interactions with older members of a community, activity, and context. This is in contrast to previous views on

knowledge that it can simply be transferred from one individual to the other. In order to understand this holistic approach to the acquisition of knowledge, Vygotsky believes, it is important to understand the higher forms of mental processes (conceptual thought, voluntary attention, logical memory, rational thought, etc). Vygotsky states:

> Any function in the child's cultural development appears on two planes. First, it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an inter-psychological category, and then within the child as an intra-psychological category. (p. 163)

This holistic perspective on learning means that a learner acquires knowledge only in a social setting, and only then he/she will eventually be using that knowledge independently. In other words, to Vygotsky, human development is not just the growth of inborn faculties, but a transformation of these innate faculties as they interact with socio-culturally constructed activities. Watson-Gegeo (2004) concurs and regards cognitive development as a social interaction shaped by culture, and socio-political processes.

Vygotsky (1978) has not attempted to use his insights to explain the process of language acquisition, but language is a very important part of his theory. It is the central mechanism for human learning and development. Language is the main medium in receiving "all knowledge of the world" (p. 91). Based on his human development theory, language is the tool of thought which carries the cultural inheritance of the communities" (ethnic, gender, class, etc.). Language is instrumental in the interactions between the individual and the community, between the learners' innate faculties and the socio-cultural activities of the community (the first step in learning). Language is also instrumental in the interactions between learners and their own cognition as in inner speech (the second step of learning).

Recently, SLA research has turned to Vygotsky for insights. This turn to socio-cultural theory is a response to prominent psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic theories of SLA which have over-emphasized either individual characteristics to the exclusion of social factors or the social factors to the exclusion of the learners' agency in their language learning. Psychology of language, for example, has focused on *individual differences*, holding the learner responsible for learning a second language. To psycholinguists, a good language learner is one "who seeks out opportunities to learn the language, is highly motivated, has good attention to details, can tolerate ambiguities and has low levels of anxiety" (Brown, 2000, p. 32). Sociological studies of language, on the other hand, have focused on *group differences*. To sociolinguists, social distance between the two languages and degrees of acculturation would determine the success of language learning (Brown, 2000).

As indicated above, both of these approaches have been criticized as two extremes of a continuum (Hanson & Liu, 1997). Psycholinguists, on the one hand, used to conceive of learners as individuals who are independent of any relationship to the social world. Sociologists, on the other, gave no agency to the learner and actually failed to examine the role learners could play in their second language learning. These studies have also been attacked for their over-emphasis on experimental designs and artificial contexts (McNamara, 1997). The social studies of language learning were also criticized for not being social enough because they were conducted in the comfort of the researchers' offices rather than in the actual social context where learning takes place.

Socio-cultural theories of SLA have tried to address these shortcomings by putting the learner at the center of the socio-historical context of learning, and in so

doing, they have had better explanatory adequacy. They describe the process of language learning as how learners would position themselves in a learning context depending on their learning opportunities and the level of their participation with other members of the community (Hall, 1997).

Sharing the same Vygotskian foundation, Doehler (2002) and Hall (1993), too, argue that language learning originates in a social setting. Learners participate and interact with more skilled peers in the class or in the society, and attain socio-cultural values and competence. To Doehler and Hall, the acquisition of a language means learning to participate in socio-culturally valued activities. To construct knowledge in general, or to learn a language in particular, a learner should be able to appropriate these socially constructed conventions and values. In other words, in order to learn a language, a learner must have an understanding of the rules, regularities, and values of a given social situation (Hall, 1993; Doehler, 2002).

Another important principle of Vyotsky's theory of human development which has been very helpful in how research has conceptualized the process of SLA is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD is defined as an interactive plane where learning takes place. According to Vygotsky (1978), ZPD is:

> The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through solving problems under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (p. 89)

Vygotsky (1978) further explains that ZPD " defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state" (p. 86). Lantolf and Appel (1994) concur with this definition and argue that the task that is carried out during interpersonal interaction is

more important than its outcome. Doehler (2002), Donato (1994) and Hall (1993) have also drawn heavily from the ZPD notion in their research.

Based on the concept of ZPD in socio-cultural theory, the teacher's role is that of a mediator. Lantolf (2000), for example, views the role of the teacher as a reflective problem solver and mediator. The teacher establishes the students' current knowledge and then guides them towards accomplishing the task under discussion. The teacher is instrumental in designing appropriate learning techniques which are adjusted to learners' current level of knowledge. This support mechanism for language learning has also been the interest of some other SLA theories in the literature. As an example, scaffolding has been defined as teachers' efforts to facilitate the negotiation of meaning and cognitive development. Donato (1994) defines scaffolding as the intentional intervention by the teacher to facilitate development along a learner's ZPD.

In my investigation of Iranians immigrants in Canada, I will be using many of the insights that socio-cultural approaches to second language learning have provided. These approaches, in particular, emphasize the environment of language learning, and better explain the relationship between learners and their environment of learning. According to socio-cultural theories, my participants' success in English language learning depends on their active interactions with the more experienced members of the Canadian community. This active participation in the Canadian community would create the "Zone of Proximal Development," a plane where my participants would be able to learn certain aspects of the English language that would be possible only when it comes into contact with the environment and the activity (Johnson 2004, p.110).

Influenced by socio-cultural approaches to second language acquisition, some researchers have introduced the concept of "social identity" in order to account for all the socio-cultural factors as well as the important role of learners in learning a second language (Hall, 1997; Lantolf and Appel, 1994). They define a learner's social identity as the perception that they conceive of themselves in relation to others and the context of speaking. Defined as such, learners' perceptions affect their participation in a social interaction and consequently their language learning (Norton, 2000). An important aspect of my study, therefore, is to investigate the relationship between identity, language and community. In the remainder of this chapter, I will review the literature on identity, social identity, and their relationships with language.

Language and Identity

Identity has been defined as the common thread that binds a certain group of people together. To share the same identity means that people belong to the same organization, group or category even if they have different personalities and dispositions. Identity is not just what a person wants to project; it is also how a person is acknowledged by other people (McNamara, 1997; Norton, 1995). Even though a person might have unique qualities, identity would still be largely dependent on how people would identify a person.

Two trends of research have investigated the relationship between language and identity: first, research that has made a connection between identity and the type of language people use; Second, research that has actually demonstrated that language learning is mediated by social identity.

One of the scholars who examined the relationship between identity and language is Ochs (1993). She argues that people generally establish their social identities through "verbal performance of social acts", like making a request, and "social stances" (p. 288) like displaying a socially recognized point of view. Ochs (1993) gives the example of a professor who tries to construct his/her professional identity by executing professional acts such as hypothesizing and claiming, as well as displaying social stances, such as objectivity and intellectuality. According to Ochs, identities and ways of talking are interrelated because when people speak they position themselves in a way to be recognized as a socially distinct person. Day (2002) and Gumperz (1982b), too, demonstrate that ways of talking and social identities are dynamically interrelated and each act of speaking or silence indicates an "act of identity."

With almost the same sociological orientation, Gumperz (1982a) demonstrated that "social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language" (p. 7). He conducted research on specific speech events to examine the relationship between speakers' choices of linguistic categories such as phonology, morphology, syntax and the social situation. In his study of code-switching, Gumperz, (1982a) showed that code-switching may indicate various group memberships and identities because the language of the majority group is often considered as the in-group, "we-code", while the minority group's language is considered as the out-group, "they-code". As a result, Gumperz (1982a) argues, language may become a symbol of group identity, especially when there is contact between two different groups.

Giles and Johnson (1981) are also interested in the exploration of the relationship between identity and language. In developing their theory of ethno-linguistic identity,

Giles and Johnson (1981) focused on language as a salient marker of group membership and social identity. They hypothesize that people compare their own social group to other groups in order to make their own favorably distinct. This positive distinctiveness, they argue, helps them to achieve a positive social identity. If the comparison is negative, however, the authors maintain that an individual may adopt several strategies to obtain a more positive social identity such as assimilating into a group that he/she thinks is more favorable. In this sense, language and identity are also inseparable because it becomes not only a medium of communication but also "an emblem of groupness".

The studies reviewed so far have been limited in the sense that they mostly try to make a connection between the type of language a person speaks and his/her identity; that is, how people would change their language types (register) as they assume a different identity based on a new position. I agree with Norton (2000) that, for adult immigrant language learners, it is much more important to investigate not the kind of the language they use, but under what conditions they speak, and under what conditions they create opportunities for themselves to speak. This trend of research has been the orientation of current sociological studies of SLA.

SLA Research and Social Identity

Current sociological studies in second language acquisition have placed learners' social identity at the center of investigation. They try to account for the very process of SLA through the role of social identity. They argue that social interaction is to a large extent mediated by social identity—learners' perceptions and evaluations of how they relate to the social world. In other words, it is the learners' perceptions of themselves, of

those they converse with, and of the context of speaking that largely determine learners' success in SLA (Goldstein, 1995; Hall, 1993, 1995, 1997; Hanson & Liu 1997; Norton, 2000).

According to most of these studies, a person's social identity is their perception of who they are in relation to others. It is determined not just by individual differences, but it is also "socially constructed" and "varies depending on context" (Norton, 2000, p. 419). To these SLA researchers, social identity is a plane where a learner's personal, cultural, ethnic, and gender identity comes into contact with the socio-cultural factors of the learning environment such as power relations, social issues, as well as the social identities of the people they speak to. Influenced by all these factors, a person's social identity is therefore unique and specific to *one* certain speaking opportunity. It is, therefore, obvious that this momentary social identity—learner's perception of him/herself in relation to all the above socio-cultural factors--would dictate the learner's participation or the quality of his/her participation in a speaking opportunity (Hanson & Liu 1997; Norton, 2000). In this study, therefore, I have taken the position that Norton's (2000) concept of language mediation through social identity would best explain the dynamics of my Iranian participants' social interactions in the Canadian community.

Norton (2000) as well as Hanson and Liu (1997) have demonstrated that learners' perceptions in social interactions lead to their investing differently in their second language acquisition, and concluded that learners' perceptions may facilitate or hinder their opportunities of speaking and their oral proficiency. I quote Norton (2000) to illustrate the concept of learners' investment in learning a language.

> The notion of investment conceives of the learner as having a complex social history and multiple desires. The notion presupposes that when

> language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with the target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space.

From the beginning of this chapter, I have reviewed many of the factors involved in social identity formation such as social factors, personal identity, etc. What follows is an exploration of some of the other socio-cultural issues researchers have demonstrated as affecting social identity.

Goldstein (1995) has shown that learners' ethnic background is implicated in their social identity, and therefore, it may limit their ability to participate in some social settings. She states that ethnic background may become "an emblem of that identity." Therefore, SL learners of certain ethnic backgrounds may resist any speaking opportunity that seems to look negatively at their ethnicity.

Power relations have also been demonstrated to be very influential in learners' social identity formation. Norton (1995) has studied this relationship between social identity and power relations, and argues that SLA theorists have not adequately explored how "inevitable relations of power limit the opportunities second language learners have to practice the target language" (p. 12). She draws from her study of the language learning experiences of immigrant women in Canada, and demonstrates how their socially and historically constructed identities in their second language learning environments have had a strong bearing on their language learning process. She shows how the investments of all of her five participants in their language learning have interacted with their changing and multiple social identities, which in turn have been constantly influenced by the social relations of power, gender, and class. To further

emphasize the role of power relations in learners' interactions with their English speakers, she demonstrates that "it is through language that learners gain or are denied access to social networks wherein opportunities for speaking are created" (p. 3).

Goldstein (1995) also found that power structures are influential in women's acquisition and use of English. In a study of language choice among female Portuguese immigrant workers in a Canadian factory, Goldstein was surprised to find that Portuguese, rather than English, was associated with social and economic benefits, and later concluded that it was because many of the Portuguese women who worked in the factory had few opportunities to learn English and relied on Portuguese networks to find jobs.

Research has also shown the role of interlocutors in learners' social identity formation. Day (2002) demonstrates how a language learner's relations with peers and a teacher mediate possibilities of language learning. In his study, Hari, a male Punjabi-speaking English student in a kindergarten, had fewer chances to speak when he participated in classroom activities with more skillful male peers. He, however, actively participated in other classroom activities with a newcomer or with a teacher who cared for him. This study is insightful in that it shows opportunities of learning are not only influenced by power relations but also by subconscious emotional affective factors such as a "climate of respect, care, and trust for one another" which, Day suggests, we might need to incorporate into the current framework of identity and SLA (p. 116).

The important relationship between learners and those they converse with and its effect on language learning can best be explained by Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of "legitimate peripheral participation." To Lave and Wenger, learning is engagement or

participation in a community in which different participants have different degrees of familiarity with the social practices of the community. They state:

> Learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers [to move] towards full participation in the socio-cultural practice of a community. Legitimate peripheral participation provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become a part of the community of practice. (p.29)

Gender has also been demonstrated to be socially constructed and implicated in the SLA. There have been two distinct trends of research on gender and language use. On the one hand, Lakoff (1975) and Tannen (1990) focus on how men and women use language differently in social interactions. For example, they both have demonstrated that women are more tentative and use more tag questions and hedges than men. While Lakoff attributes this phenomenon to different power relations between men and women, Tannen puts more emphasis on the differences between the two. The second research orientation regarding gender is marked by the work of Ochs (1993). She tries to demonstrate how gender is constituted through acts, stances, and activities associated with culturally preferred gender roles which have context-specific linguistic realizations.

To Ehrlich (2001), gender is also a part of social identity. She believes that individuals construct themselves as women and men by engaging in socially and culturally accepted notions of masculinity and femininity within their native community. Thus, it is just as important to raise the question of gender identity in second language acquisition as it is with social identity and power relations. Studies conducted by Cumming and Gill (1992), Ehrlich (2001), and Goldstein (1995) all document data that demonstrate different ways in which gender is constructed across communities and

cultures, and how this socially constructed gender identity has resulted in gender-differentiated language access, language use, and language learning outcomes.

Identity, language and community are interrelated. Stuart Hall looks at identity as a "process of identification" which itself is an indication that identity is not fixed and stable, but formed by interaction, through language, within a specific community. A person's identity, therefore, is specific to the culture and language of that community. Learning another language, understandably, necessitates learning a second identity. Given the huge emphasis that Vygotsky (1978) and socio-cultural theorists have put on the interrelationship of thought and language, learning a language is indeed changing thoughts and identity.

So far, I have reviewed major SLA theories that shed light on the social interactions of Iranian immigrants with Canadian English speakers. Since "culture" is the cornerstone of some of these models, I will present my definition of culture, discuss the relationship between culture and language, argue how cultural difference between two communities can result in confusions and misunderstanding, and lastly, because of the relationship between culture learning and language proficiency, I will touch upon acculturation as the need to at least know and appreciate target culture values, norms, etc.

Culture

It has been acknowledged for a long time that language is more than a set of words and rules. Kohls (1994) believes that without culture, the language is incomplete. An integral part of language is the feelings and thoughts of the people who speak that language. Culture captures this totality of words, rules, thoughts and feelings. Haviland

(1993) defines cultures as the total way of life of a certain group of people, the way they speak, think, do things, make things, feel, their customs, and shared attitudes. Holliday et al. (2004), too, provide a more detailed definition of culture:

> A culture is a complex set of shared beliefs, values, and concepts which enables a group to make sense of its life and which provides it with directions for how to live. This set might be called a basic belief system (note that such a belief system can include items which are fully explicit and others which are not, and can include matters of feeling and deportment as well as discursive claims about the world). In perhaps the most influential variant of this standard view, culture is pictured as a text the vocabulary and grammar of which its members learn. Indeed, in this view, becoming a member of a particular culture is a process of enculturation conceived as learning to read the culture's basic text and making it one's own.

This temporal nature of culture is perhaps best captured in Homi Bhabha's (1994) writings. He argues that cultures are complex phenomena which result from "intersections of multiple places, historical temporalities, and subject positions." He further illustrates modern racism, and explains how different ethnicities are commodified even today for consumption purposes. In this study, however, I have used the definition of culture that Ting-Toomey (1999) has offered: culture is a complex frame of reference that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meaning that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community (p.10). This definition is particularly useful because it also acknowledges the individuals within that group may not share this perspective equally.

Language and culture are closely interwoven. Hymes (1974), for example, emphasized that the significance of language is in its social context. Gumperz (1982b), too, confirms the close relationship between language and culture, and argues that to communicate effectively, speakers and listeners must agree on the meaning of the words.

It is this close relationship between language and culture that makes language performance for adult ESL learners specially challenging. Scollon & Scollon (2001), for example, argue that one of the reasons why intercultural misunderstandings between native English speakers and ESL learners can occur is the transfer of values and beliefs from native language to an acquired language.

SLA research has also demonstrated the effect of cultural differences on second language learning. In a study on the Chinese community in Canada, Hong (2001) demonstrated that cultural differences between Chinese learners and Canadians affected their oral language proficiency. Rublik (2006) also conducted her dissertation on the development of oral proficiency in Canada by Chinese speakers, and concluded that the Chinese cultural features of "maintaining harmony," "saving face," and "listening centeredness" had indeed affected their social interactions in Canada, which in turn influenced their oral language development.

For effective communication, therefore, second language learners, in addition to learning the linguistic system of the language, are also required to make cultural adjustments. Scollon & Scollon (2001) argue that effective communication between people belonging to different cultural backgrounds depends on not just knowledge of the language system but also on an appreciation of cultural differences as well. The need for English language learners to make cultural adjustments to the target language has also been of importance to Chomsky who states "ESL students also need to know *how* to speak the English language *in a natural way"* [italics, my emphasis]. This implies that apart from the language itself, an understanding of the second language culture is needed to perform well in social interactions.

Most ESL educators have followed suit, emphasizing the importance of teaching culture while teaching the language (Haslett, 1989). Haslett believes that culture provides the background knowledge that enables its members to interpret, understand and communicate, and therefore should be taught at the same time that language is being taught.

Given the importance of cultural adjustment in language performance, it is understandable why many of the studies of the past have demonstrated a strong relationship between cultural adjustment and academic achievement (Au & Jordan, 1981). Ogbu and Simons (1998) have also written extensively on the relationship between cultural adjustment and academic performance, predicting that the minority would face more difficulties acquiring a language if their culture is very different from that of the majority. They also argue the relation between minority culture and the dominant culture of the society would determine, to a large extent, their academic success.

Cummins (2001), too, believes that there is an important link between language ability and academic achievement. He makes a useful distinction between two aspects of language proficiency: basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP). BICS refers to level of proficiency necessary to understand and speak a second language while CALP refers to the ability to analyze, synthesize and evaluate in a second language. Cummins admits that this dichotomy can over-simplify reality, but he argues that it can help educators to make a better evaluation of learners' overall proficiency. Since children's basic interpersonal communicative skills develop more quickly than their cognitive-academic language proficiency, some

educators have mistakenly attributed second language learners' academic weakness to their poor cognition or academic aptitude rather than to the stage of second language learning in which children are.

Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed some of the theories of second language acquisition that provided insights into my investigation of the dynamics of adult Iranians' social interactions in Canada. In particular, I reviewed Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Swain's Output Model, Acculturation Model, and Norton's Social Identity Formation. In this chapter, I also illustrated how my study is best grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of human development. Influenced by his vision of language learning, I have taken the position that language learning is a social practice, where language learners interact with social and cultural activities of a certain community. Given the importance of culture in current theories of SLA, I also dedicated a section to this concept illustrating its close relationship to language. In the next chapter, I describe the methodology that enabled me, within this theoretical framework, to investigate my research questions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this study, I explore the dynamics of adult Iranians' social interactions in Canada. The specific questions that I investigate are:

1. What challenges do adult Iranians face in their social interactions with Canadians?

2. How does "culture" affect adult Iranians' social interactions in Canada?

In this chapter, I elaborate on the principles of phenomenology, grounded theory as the method of analysis, and open-ended interview as the method of data collection. This chapter will also explain the rationale for choosing these methods. I also describe how my study was actually conducted by presenting the procedures for selecting participants, and data analysis. Lastly, issues of validity, reliability and ethical concerns will be raised and addressed in this section.

As I explain in more detail later in this chapter, I am both a researcher and a participant in this study. In order to investigate the dynamics of adult Iranians' social interactions in Canada, I have used my participants' lived experiences as well as those of mine. My own participation in this research, however, raises the risk of adopting premature categories and/or drawing premature conclusions (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998). To avoid these pitfalls, I have drawn upon the principles of phenomenology as explained below.

Phenomenology

Creswell (1998) defines a phenomenological study as one that "describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (p. 51). The purpose of a phenomenological study is to describe a human experience as lived by the people who went though that experience. A phenomenological researcher tries to enter participants' world of concepts, and investigate how people construct meaning based on their experiences (Charmaz, 2005).

In my study, the lived experience that I am interested in investigating is adult Iranians' social interactions with Canadians. According to the principles of phenomenological studies, I will be trying to articulate my participants' meaning construction around the phenomenon of "social interactions with Canadians." There are certain pitfalls, however, that a phenomenological researcher, should avoid.

Phenomenological studies require that the researcher ask "what a phenomenon is" not "what causes it" (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998, p. 99). In this sense, the researcher becomes the articulator of his/her participants' experiences, and therefore, is required to establish an empathetic relationship with them. The other requirement of phenomenological studies is that the researcher should conduct a self-evaluation in the initial stages of the study in order to identify his/her biases. Once these biases are identified, the challenge, then, is for the researcher to avoid imposing his/her own ideas and beliefs onto the research. As Bentz and Shapiro (1998) have succinctly stated, "the researcher must act to prevent the data from being prematurely structured into existing categories of thinking" (p.99).

Ideal as it is for my study, a phenomenological study, just like any other methodology, has its weaknesses. One of the criticisms leveled at phenomenology is that by using "language" as the instrument for tapping into the essence of a lived experience, the "true essence" of the experience is lost (Creswell, 1998); that is to say, an experience mediated through language is not the true experience anymore. The second weakness of phenomenology is that participants might not be able to describe in detail the true essences of a lived experience. I should mention here that the purpose of this study has been to investigate adult Iranians' *perceptions* of their challenges in their social interactions in Canada. Therefore, although real-time social interactions in Canada are very important to investigate and might be illuminating in ways that this research cannot be, it was not the purpose of my study.

Grounded Theory

Background

Grounded theory was "at the front of the qualitative revolution" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 509). By the 1960s, some researchers had even started using qualitative designs that most quantitative researchers looked down upon as illegitimate and inappropriate. It was in 1969, however, when Glaser and Strauss (1970) presented grounded theory as a rigorous and coherent argument for the legitimacy of qualitative research. They were the first ones who formally and convincingly argued against the common misconception that "qualitative research is just a preliminary, explanatory effort to quantitative research since only quantitative research yields rigorously verified findings and hypotheses" (p. 288).

Principles of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is an analytic procedure for data analysis rather than a method for data collection. It is "a set of flexible guidelines that enable researchers to focus their data collection and to build inductive middle-range theories through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development" (Charmaz, 2005, p. 507). It is an inductive approach, moving from the specific to the more general, an approach in which the theory is developed from the data, rather than the other way around, in a process called the conceptualization of data.

Glaser and Strauss (1970) believe that one of the distinguishing traits of grounded theory is that it is emergent. Grounded theory does not test a hypothesis, but it tries to find a theory that would account for a certain situation as it is. The aim of a grounded theory is to understand a phenomenon and then discover the theory that is inherent in it.

One of the other important characteristics of grounded theory is its orientation. It revolves around cases rather than variables. In a single case, variables are regarded as a unit that produces certain outcomes. This means that grounded theory assumes that variables interact in complex ways, and not in a simple additive model. This orientation to analysis is totally different from quantitative methods of analysis like ANOVA where variables are simply considered to be additive and where the main effect becomes the focus of the study (Windle, 2006). The researcher in grounded theory compares and contrasts cases that have many similar variables, but have produced different outcomes in an attempt to see where the important causal differences are. In the same way, the researcher examines cases with the same outcome to discover the common conditions which would, in turn, reveal the probable causes.

A few other tenets of grounded theory have been specifically designed in order to maintain the "groundedness" of the method. Among them are simultaneous data collection and data analysis, theoretical sampling, and memoing. These unique characteristics of grounded theory refine even further the theories that the researcher will end up developing and increasing the validity of the research. The following is a separate treatment of each one of these characteristics.

Simultaneous Data Collection/Analysis

Data collection and data analysis are purposefully combined. Initial data analysis is supposed to shape continuing data collection, and this increases the "density" and "saturation" of recurring themes. In order not to "fall into a premature commitment to a set of categories" (Charmaz, 2005, p. 510), the researcher constantly compares and reflects on data already collected and analyzed. With the vision developed out of initial data analysis, the researcher is better prepared to collect more focused data, which, in turn, would improve data analysis. This process goes on to the stage of saturation when there is almost no data that does not conform to the theory (Creswell, 2005). This simultaneous comparison of data collection and analysis provides the researcher with "respites from active fieldwork to avoid collecting huge mass of data without adequate systematic reflection on the research directions and purposes" (Glaser & Strauss, 1970, p. 290).

Theoretical Sampling

In grounded theory research, getting a random sample is not the goal. Rather, a selective sample is adopted based on the participants' experiencing the same phenomenon under investigation, and based on what the sample can contribute to the emerging theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In a more purposeful sampling, grounded theorists recommend "theoretical sampling" where previous data collection and analysis direct how data should be collected later to shed more light on the emerging theory. In other words, the initial theories that researchers develop to account for a phenomenon would help them look for specific participants, or sections of data to further refine the developing theories (Charmaz, 2000).

Memoing

The third defining trait of grounded theory is memoing. In simple words, grounded theory holds that the researcher would not be like a machine that would collect all the data at one shot mindlessly, do the analysis with no more reference to the data, and finally develop theories. Memoing is based on the simple fact that the human mind does not work that way. It is obvious that while the researchers are collecting data, a part of their mind is also doing some preliminary analysis, analysis that would help them be better prepared for the later data collection which, in turn, would lead to better analysis and better theories. Memoing acknowledges that the researcher would be in constant dialogue with him/herself throughout the process (Charmaz & Mitchel, 2001), and therefore, requires that they write these dialogues as these thoughts might be lost during the long process of the study.

Grounded Theory and Epistemological Battle

Although the procedure to conduct grounded theory research has remained the same, its epistemological basis has shifted a lot. Charmaz (2000) reports that grounded theory was first "widely acclaimed for legitimizing and codifying an already implicit process in research, but criticisms soon began to follow with the waning of objectivism as well as the advent of post structuralism and post modernism." (p. 510) Current grounded theorists, however, have emphasized the traditional principles of grounded theory in the initial stages of a research, but argued for more emphasis on constructivist and interpretive approaches when it comes to analysis and theory development (Charmaz 2005).

My Study and the Constructivist Models of Grounded Theory

Charmaz (2000) proposed a model of grounded theory that she positioned as between the traditional positivist models and the models advocated by post-modern researchers where the importance of methods is challenged. In constructivist models of grounded theory, the focus is on the meanings ascribed by participants, and as such, researchers are more interested in investigating the views, values, beliefs, feeling, assumptions, and ideologies of participants, and much less on gathering facts and acts. Creswell (2005) stated that constructivist models of grounded theory put more emphasis on active codes rather than technical terminologies. He suggests that "any aspects that obscure experiences, such as complex terms or jargon, diagrams, or conceptual maps, detract from grounded theory and represent an attempt to gain power in their use" (402). In constructivist models of grounded theory, moreover, the role of the researcher is not

minimized. The researcher makes decisions about data segmentation, categorization, and coding. He/she brings certain questions to the study. The researcher also brings his/her own values, experiences, and priorities. As a result, the conclusions that the researcher makes throughout the study are "suggestive, incomplete, and inconclusive" (Creswell 2005, p.402). The researcher is not going to be trapped by the predetermined relationships like the ones in axial coding. Instead, he/she tries to explain participants' values, beliefs, and customs as experienced in their life stories.

In my study of the impact of social identity on adult Iranians' social interactions in Canada, I will draw upon both traditional and constructivist models of grounded theory. I will be using the traditional guidelines of data collection, data codification, constant comparison of data collection and data analysis, theoretical sampling and memoing. These guidelines would give me the initial direction I need in my research. The constructivist models of grounded theory, however, make me more aware of my participants' views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions and ideologies. These models, moreover, acknowledge that I am a non-neutral researcher. They acknowledge that I have already experienced learning a second language, that I share the same cultural heritage and native language with my participants, and that I have had access to professional readings on SLA and Social Identity. Constructivist models, because of their belief that knowledge is a "human construct generated discursively within social contexts," would even welcome my background as long as I avoid forcing my theory onto the data (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001; Lather, 1991; and Piantanida et al., 2004). By the same token, I would not claim that my proposed study will produce final answers to the impact of social identity on adult Iranians' social interactions; rather, my results would be the

knowledge constructed through the mediation between me and my participants waiting to be confirmed by further research.

Connecting Theory and Methodology

When the tenets of the theoretical framework of the socio-cultural theory that I outlined in the second chapter are compared them with the tenets of constructivist grounded theory, a clear conformity stands out, and it can be seen why grounded theory is best suited to develop a tentative theory that would answer the question(s) of this study.

On the theoretical side, as Lather (1991) defines, socio-cultural theory is based on "the premise that psychological phenomena are humanly constructed as individuals participate in social interactions" (p.2). On the methodological side, constructivist grounded theorists, too, seem to be "concerned with emic understandings of the world: they use categories drawn from participants themselves and tend to focus on making implicit belief systems explicit" (p. 2). Grounded theory lets participants speak for themselves and then tries to capture the essence of their complex social interactions by detecting meaningful themes in their speech. In other words, constructivist grounded theory tries to see the world as constructed by participants, and tries to see the world through the participants' eyes.

Why Grounded Theory?

There are many reasons why grounded theory is the most suitable and useful methodology for my study. First, it helps me generate theories about a process, especially

a process I know very little about (Creswell, 2005). The impact of adult Iranians' social identities on their social interactions is also a complex process that cannot be broken into a few independent variables to be examined separately. Grounded theory would equip me with the tools to explore this complex process, and generate theories about the ways the learners' perceptions of themselves and others affect this process.

Secondly, since social identity is all about participants' perceptions, I will need grounded theory to enable me to focus on peoples' perception, views, values not just on facts and laws (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006). Obviously, it would be much better if I could conduct an ethnography of these participants in their gradual journey of language acquisition, but given the huge time and commitment it takes as well as the constraints of a PhD research study, this approach is practically impossible. Therefore, the second best thing would be to try and recreate as best as possible the social experience of adult Iranians in their own words.

The third reason why grounded theory is the most useful methodology for my study is that it does not deny my own life experience. In the re-creation of lived experiences of adult Iranians, I will be helped with my own experience of learning English as a second language, my social interactions in Canada, and my professional readings on SLA and social identity (Charmaz, 2000). This background does not mean that I am going into my research with a predefined theory to force onto the data. On the contrary, this experience coupled with the fact that I share with my participants the same cultural heritage and native language would give me the initial orientation that grounded theory requires from the researcher to collect data. In the end, however, it would be my

participants' experiences which would increasingly refine my orientation to collect better data and recreate the story of adult Iranians' social interactions in Canada.

Data Collection

While grounded theory is a qualitative method, data can be either qualitative or quantitative or even both. Creswell (2005) recommends that no data should be excluded as long as it contributes to the emerging theory. For my study, however, I decided to focus on open-ended interviews and class observation as the methods of data collection. The second part of this chapter discusses what an interview entails as my main method of data collection.

What Is an Interview?

An interview is a "conversation with a purpose" (Charmaz, 2005, p. 676), and is "based on the assumption that it is possible to investigate elements of the social by asking people to talk, and to construct knowledge by listening to and interpreting what they say" (May, 2002, p. 225). Charmaz (2002) states that the purpose of a qualitative interview is to "make cultural inferences, thick descriptions of a given social world" (p. 225). Warren (2002) holds that, in qualitative interviews, participants are regarded as "meaning makers" (p. 83) not passive information providers. That is why an interview in grounded theory is not considered a "neutral tool of data collection but active interaction between two (or more) people leading to negotiated and contextually based results" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 646).

The Importance of Interviews

Interviews as a tool for data collection is so popular among grounded theorists that May (2002) labels it as "the gold standard of qualitative research" (p. 225). Piantanida, Tananis and Grubs (2004), too, regard interview as one of the most commonly used methods of data collection, especially when the main purpose of the researcher is to generate theories.

There are a lot of reasons why most qualitative research studies are based on interview. Interviews can help researchers "reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people's subjective experience and attitudes" (Perakyla, 2005, p. 869). An interview is also a "very convenient way of overcoming distance both in space and time" (p. 255). Moreover, as Hutchinson (1988) states, interviews help researchers "verify, clarify, or alter what they observed and thought happened to achieve a full understanding" since "observation alone begs misinterpretation" (p. 125).

In-depth Interviews

In an in-depth interview, the researcher starts with the same questions, but will most likely end up with different follow-up questions depending on the responses. In my interviews of adult Iranians, I followed Warren's (2002) advice of open-ended questions, which "would be more attuned with participants rather than setting a fixed route to follow for all interviewees" (p. 86). Johnson (2002) regards a good in-depth interviewer as someone who can establish an intimate relationship with the interviewee in order to get "deep information" (p. 104). Charmaz (2002) considers the in-depth interview as one that

"explores" and not "interrogates" (p.676). As for in-depth interviews in grounded theory, I could not come up with better words than those of Charmaz's (2002):

> A grounded theory interview can be viewed as an unfolding story. It is emergent although studied and shaped. It is open-ended but framed and focused. It is intense in content, yet informal in execution—conversational in style but not casual in meaning. This unfolding story arises as interviewer and the participant together explore the topic and put a human face upon it. Grounded theory interviews are used to tell a collective story, not an individual story told in a single interview. The power of grounded theory methods lies in the researcher's piecing together a theoretical narrative that has explanatory and predictive power. (p. 690)

Procedure

In this section, I will describe how I selected my participants, collected data, and analyzed them.

Participants

I recruited my participants mainly through networking. After getting approval from the Research and Ethics Board, I made contacts with a lot of Iranians to see if they would be willing to, or if they knew of anyone who would be willing to, participate in my study. Because of my own status as a student and the fact that most of the people that I contacted to help me find participants were also students, I ended up having only student participants. Therefore, although I had initially started to investigate the challenges that all adult Iranians from all walks of life face in their social interactions, I ended up investigating only one section of the Iranian immigrant population here; that is, students. This issue is brought up again as one of the limitations of this study in Chapter 5. (A table

consisting of my participants' demographic information will be provided later in this chapter although their detailed profiles will have to wait until chapter 4.)

For my study, I interviewed both male and female Iranian immigrants aged 17 and above who had left Iran when they were adults. Living in Iran up to the age of adulthood gave them the appropriate opportunity to develop an identifiable social identity. In my interviews, I was interested in their overall process of English language acquisition as well as their social interactions in Canada. But it turned out that, at the time of the interview, most of them were students who had come to Canada to do their Masters or PhDs, and had received their formal English language instruction in Iran. But as you will see in their narratives, that formal instruction had helped very little their interactions with Canadians. Only one of them had come to Canada when he was a high school student. An in-depth description of each participant will be provided at the beginning of the fourth chapter where the results are presented. In this section, though, I have summarized my participants' demographic information in Table 3.1. The demographic information includes their names, age, gender, marital status, number of children, length of stay in Canada, immigration status, major, and English language instruction.

Table 3.1 Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Age	Gender	Marital status	No. of children	Length of stay in Canada	Immigration status	Major	English Language Instruction
Pary	27	Female	Single	----------	5 years	Permanent Immigrant	Comp. Sci. (MSc)	Both public and private schools (Iran)
Hoda	39	Female	Married	2	11 years	Citizen	Chemistry (MSc)	Both public and private schools (Iran & Kuwait)
Kobra	42	Female	Married	1	9 years	Citizen	Chemistry (MSc)	Both public and private schools (Iran)
Adel	31	Male	Single	----------	3 years	Permanent Immigrant	Educational Studies (PhD)	Both public and private schools (Iran)
Javad	21	Male	Single	----------	4 years	Citizen	Medical Science (BSc)	Both public and private schools (Iran)
Valid	28	Male	Single	----------	4 years	Citizen	Medical Sci. (MSc)	Both public and private schools (Iran)
Ahmed	27	Male	Single	----------	6 months	Visa Student	Engineering (PhD)	Both public and private schools (Iran)
Mohsen	36	Male	Single	----------	4 years	Permanent Resident	Educational Studies (PhD)	Both public and private schools (Iran)

I have also included my own demographic information in Table 3.1 as I am one of the participants of this study. I am both the researcher and a participant in this study, and there are many reasons why my voice should also be heard. As an Iranian immigrant to Canada, I share the same cultural heritage, the same native language, and many of the same experiences with my participants. Like my participants, I have experienced learning English as a second language, spent most of my adulthood in Iran, and have been under the influence of Canadian culture. In fact, my own experience of learning a second language and facing the challenge of using it in the Canadian context were the main reasons why I became interested in this research in the first place.

I have also been in constant contact with the challenges of Iranian English language learners because of my university education in *Teaching English as a Second Language* as well as teaching English for 6 years. I am an insider in the system, someone who is well positioned to listen to immigrants' concerns. Therefore, I have included my information in the table as in the case of other participants, and a more detailed account of my experience was also provided in the first chapter.

In this section, I should also include a note on why I ended up having fewer female participants than male. First of all, it is a statistical fact that there are by far fewer female Iranian immigrants in Canada than male. This imbalance is understandable because men enjoy more freedom, and culturally it is more acceptable for them to leave home and lead a separate life away from their families. Second, gender construction in Iran stipulates that there should be less contact between men and women, and that females should not talk about their personal lives or even share their ordinary experiences with men. I am sure I would have been able to find more female students if I were a

woman researcher. There were several cases of female students that I contacted through friends, but they somehow declined my request.

It was for the same reservations that I decided to take a few steps to overcome the anxiety of some of my female students who did participate in my study. I requested that they read my Letter of Information in detail before responding. If possible, I tried to explain in person or on the phone the innocuous nature of my research. I also sent them through email a copy of the five major themes that I wanted to investigate to assure them that my questions would be specifically about the process of their language learning in Iran, if any, and in Canada, as well their social interactions in Canada.

Procedure for Data collection

Interviews

As I noted earlier, I used interviews as the primary method of data collection supported by participant observation. In the interview, I asked adult Iranians living in Canada to describe their experience of social interactions. The general theme of my interview of open-ended questions was their perceptions of their social interactions with English speakers. Some of the guiding questions dealt with the difficulties they faced in this process; the interactional contexts in which they felt most uncomfortable or most comfortable; social contexts in which they thought they performed best; and social settings in which they had very little to share. Through these questions, I was trying to explore how their social identities-their perception of themselves as well as their English interlocutors-affected their social interactions and oral proficiency.

I conducted the interviews in the language my participants felt more comfortable as I did not want them to look for words while they were describing the nuances of social interactions they had encountered. I did not want the language to be a barrier in our conversation as I tried to get the maximum information from them.

In developing research questions, there were two important concepts that I was concerned about: social interaction and perception. In order to explore my participants' social interaction, I conducted the interviews with one overarching question in mind: what are the issues my participants deal with in their social interactions with Canadians? All the other questions that I later developed simply tried to help participants remember and talk more about this important concept. They were hints and clues. The interviews started with informal conversation about life in Canada, and dealt with their English language learning in Iran if they had any. The second part was about their interactions with English speakers in Canada. These are the five main themes that I was following in my interviews:

1. Their process of English language learning both in Iran and in Canada if any

2. Their own perceptions of their proficiency

3. Their comfort in communicating in English, interacting with native speakers, and participating in social events

4. Contexts and people they were more comfortable with and more skilled to engage in or contexts and people they were less comfortable with and less skilled to engage in

5. The reason they decided to learn English, and if they had achieved their purpose, or if that aim has changed along the way

To make sure that these questions really asked for the information I needed in exploring the effect of socio-cultural factors on social interactions, I had a friend

interview me first. I then analyzed my own interview to check for any possible gap in the information I needed for analysis. The insights from my own interview were then used to refine the interview questions even further. The final list of the questions is attached to the end of this thesis in Appendix II.

Since these general themes of inquiry required detailed description about the past experiences of my participants, and I was concerned that they might not be able to immediately remember the details of their experiences, I decided to give them these general themes of my interest at the time I was also getting them to sign the letter of information and the consent form.

When scheduling interviews, I allowed my participants to choose the location: at a coffee shop on campus, in their own offices, in my own office, or in one of the classes on main campus. All interviews were conducted face to face from June to October 2007. In 5 cases, I had to schedule a second meeting for further clarification or information as my middle-range theories were developing. The interviews were to be conducted in either English or Persian depending on the preference of the participants. In practice, however, they all preferred to have the interview in Persian.

Immediately after each interview, following Creswell's (2000) recommendations, I wrote memos in my research logbook. In these memos, I included important notes, interview content that crossed my mind at the time, my general impression about the interview, important interruptions, body language, etc. Most of my interviews lasted for about an hour. In my constant data collection and data analysis, if there were ever the need to refer to the participants once again for more specific information or clarification, I contacted them and requested that they agree to a second interview.

Observation

Some of my interviewees who were students were also asked for further consent to be observed in their classes while they were in real time interaction with their teachers and peers. During observation, I intended to make notes about their oral performance in English; their difficulties in interaction; the interactional contexts in which they felt most uncomfortable with, or most comfortable with. In my observation, I was only focusing on my interviewees; their teachers or peers were not research subjects. The observation lasted a few sessions and it was not audio or video taped.

I observed one participant in a class for two sessions, and the second one for three sessions. All the classes were too technical. There was almost no interaction. There were formal presentations and lectures. Very soon, I came to the realization that this kind of observation would not shed any insight into my study question, and I decided to abandon the observation component of my study.

Analysis

Miles (1984) suggests that the problem with qualitative data is that guidelines on data analysis are scarce and disputed. Hopkins, Bollington and Hewett (1989), however, provide some broad guidelines that were helpful for data analysis. They include: anticipate the study; immerse yourself in the data to discover modifications or refinements that can be made to the theoretical framework on the basis of data culled, coded and reduced; validate identified themes; interpret the data; and finally write a final report.

Following the above guidelines, I interviewed 2 adult Iranians in Canada. These interviews delved into their processes of English language learning and how their social identities--their perceptions of themselves as well as others--had affected their social interactions.

Then I transcribed the interviews, and started analyzing the data. Following grounded theory procedures (Creswell, 2005), I chose a meaningful chunk as my unit of coding. Sometimes, it was a word, a phrase, a sentence. I codified my data, changed my open codes into higher-level categories, tried to make a meaningful interrelationship among the categories. This process involved conceptualizing the data. Concepts were intended to be abstract representations of events, thoughts, actions and interactions that I identified as significant. To turn my initial propositions and themes into valid theories, I drew upon three important tenets of grounded theory: simultaneous data collection and data analysis, theoretical sampling, and memoing.

Interviews, as I said before, were all in Persian; therefore, for the purpose of this study and the final report, I translated the themes and the important quotations that were typical representations of them. After the first two interviews, I had a better understanding of how to conduct the interview itself. Moreover, these two interviews helped me ask better questions in later interviews. With that understanding, I started doing the next six interviews.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability have long been recognized as essential indices to ascertain the quality of a research. Reliability is defined as the consistency of the measuring

instrument. It is the extent to which a measuring instrument can reproduce the same results on repeated measurements. Validity, on the other hand, is the extent to which a measuring instrument actually measures what it sets out to measure.

The true meaning of validity and reliability, however, is debatable as, among other things, there is not a consensus among scholars on whether there is a single truth out in the world or there are multiple truths. For quantitative researchers, for example, who have a positivist perspective and look at it the world as consisting of observable facts, "truth" does exist, and therefore, validity and reliability are defined based on objectively observed and measured variables. Qualitative studies, however, which attempt to explain social and behavioral issues do not share this understanding of validity and reliability. Qualitative studies have grown out of the conviction that there is not a single, observable "truth" out in the world. These studies are marked by their post-positivist approach to social issues, and by their interest in personal experiences, group behavior, and sub-culture ethnicities. They generate theories by conceptualizing empirical data, rather than testing theories (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Given the difference between quantitative and qualitative interpretations of validity and reliability, educational scholars have adopted two styles: some have replaced them with the terms "rigor," "trustworthiness" or "credibility." Some others have used the same concepts but have defined them differently, especially those in the United Kingdom and Europe (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

The definition that I have adopted in this study, is the one theorized by Beck (1993) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). Beck (1993) defines credibility as the extent to which a description is vivid and faithful to the experience lived by an individual. Lincoln

and Guba (1985) define it as the extent to which a phenomenon is accurately identified and described. They further argue that this vivid description "will bear insights that are self-validating," and that people "will view that description as a statement of the experience itself" (p. 104).

Validity

Data collection

I tried to have a multi-faceted approach to data collection. This is in recognition that learners, educators, and researchers may view success differently, and it once again raises the issue of how validity and reliability are interpreted (Woods, 1996). I am hoping that collecting data from different sources would shed light on how these different elements in my research view SLA, proficiency, and interaction. This is particularly important because this study is mainly concerned with participants' perceptions, views and beliefs.

Saturation

To ensure the credibility of my research, I have also made sure that no more interviews and investigation would provide new results. Having interviewed 8 students, I used Strauss and Corbin's (1998) three benchmarks to check if I had reached the level of saturation: No new relevant data were emerging; properties and dimensions were well developed, and thirdly relationships among categories were well established.

Member checking

The third step I took to ensure the credibility of my findings was to do member checking. As I had informed my participants in my letter of information, I returned to them when the interview transcripts and analyses were ready. This process of referring to participants for comment when transcripts and analyses are ready is called member checking. My purpose was to ascertain that my findings reflected the participants' views and experiences.

Generalizability of Results

The main limitation of my study is that its focus is limited. It focuses on 8 Iranian students doing graduate studies at a Canadian university. This limitation, however, does not make my study invalid since a qualitative study is evaluated in terms of its transferability, comparability, making connections, and its potential to contribute to theory building (Cummins, 2000; Donmoyer, 1990; Woods, 1996). My study, too, is going to be judged in terms of its contribution to the theory of SLA, as well as the transferability of its findings to the Iranian community in Canada.

Yin (2003) views relating research findings from one unique setting to another and ultimately to a theory as a qualitative form of replication which establishes external validity. He refers to this process as "theoretical replication logic":

> The external validity problem has been a major barrier in doing case studies. Critics typically state that single cases offer a poor basis for generalizing. However such critics are implicitly contrasting the situation for survey research, where a 'sample' (if selected correctly) readily generalizes to a larger universe. This analogy to samples and universes is incorrect when dealing with case studies. This is because survey research

> relies on statistical generalization, whereas case studies (as with experiments) rely on analytical generalizations. (p. 43)

Cummins (2000) has almost the same argument. He explains why many of the research-based arguments made by opponents and supporters of bilingual education have been methodologically flawed. He believes that they have missed the role of theory in their arguments.

> In complex educational and other human organizational contexts, data or facts become relevant for policy purposes only in the context of a coherent theory. It is the theory rather than the individual research findings that permits the generation of predictions about program outcomes under different contexts. Research findings themselves can not be directly applied across contexts. When certain patterns are replicated across a wide range of situations, the accumulation of consistent findings suggests that some stable underlying principle is at work. This principle can then be stated as a theoretical proposition or hypothesis from which predictions can be derived and tested. This means that studies in isolation (unique, unpredictable situations) can be related to a broader set of findings in contexts where a variety of other unique conditions may be present. (Cummins 2000, p. 204-205)

Ethical Considerations

In some research studies if the anonymity of the participants is not protected there is a chance of physical or psychological damage due to their involvement in the research (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p.372). Researchers are, therefore, required to do their best to protect the participants' anonymity. Confidentiality becomes even more important in qualitative research where detailed description might reveal participants' identity to the readers of the research. I took the following steps to make sure that my participants' interests were protected.

A detailed explanation of this study was submitted to the Ethics Board. I did my best to address the concerns of this Board and to adopt their guidelines all through the

sections of the study. Following the Board's protocol, a description of the nature of this study was included in a Letter of Information and provided to the participants. They were requested to read the Letter of Information and sign a consent form to demonstrate their acceptance to participate in the study. A copy of the Letter of Information as well as the consent from is provided in Appendix I.

In line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations, I have also taken further precautions of using pseudonyms to protect my participants from being identified by those close to my study or the readers of the study. Immediately after transcribing the interviews and preparing the report, I also made them available to my participants so that they could comment, make changes, or even withdraw their further participation if they were not satisfied with the progress of the study.

I also created a file for each participant. That file contained all the personal information, how they were contacted, the audio tape of the interview, the interview transcripts, my interview notes during and immediately after the interview, and print-outs of any email correspondence. I transcribed the interviews myself and included that with the rest of the personal information. These files were locked in my office all through the research, and they will be destroyed two years after the study as required by the Ethics Board.

In this chapter, I illustrated how the guidelines of phenomenology can help me recognize my biases and avoid imposing premature categories upon data. Grounded theory as the method of data analysis and interview as the method of data collection were also described. In the final section of this chapter, I also touched upon the issues of

validly, reliability, and ethical concerns relevant to my study. In Chapter 4, I present my findings about the dynamics of my participants' social interactions with Canadians.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I will first describe my participants' profiles, including myself. For each participant, I will describe their English language learning background, their lifestyles in Canada, and their perceptions of their English language proficiency. Then, I will make a comparison of their experiences, and present a general picture of their commonalities and differences. Lastly, the major themes that emerged out of data analysis will be presented. Specifically, I will present motivation, opportunity to speak, grammar and pronunciation, English language learning certificates, cultural differences, religious background, gender, age, Canadians' reactions, and social obligations as factors affecting their social interactions in Canada.

Participants' Profiles

The participants of this study included 5 men and 3 women. They were all attending university at the time of the interview. Except for Javad, they were all in graduate programs. They had some formal English language instruction in public schools in Iran. Except for Hoda, they also attended an English Language Teaching Institute sometime before coming to Canada. The participants' demographic information were presented in Table 3.1 in Chapter three. More descriptive information about each participant will now follow.

Mohsen

I am also one of the participants of this study. I arrived in Canada in 2003 as an international student, and became a Canadian resident 2 years ago. I was born in a working class family, and spent my adulthood in Esfahan, the third largest city in Iran, which is considered much more traditional and religious than the capital Tehran. I was raised a very reserved and shy person. The following is my experience of English language learning as well as my social interactions in Canada.

English Language Learning

Like almost all other Iranian students, my English language instruction started in middle school with two-hour classes per week. I was taught with the same method of English language instruction in middle school and high school as that of my informants: two hours of English language instruction per week, with a focus on grammar and reading. I was really interested in English even then, and I was the best in my class, but I must note that "best" here means doing well on written grammar and vocabulary tests.

When I was in high school, a family friend introduced me to a private English language teaching institute. I remember the method there was audio-lingual with a lot of repetition and structural drills. In this institute, the emphasis was still on vocabulary and grammar, but it was a lot better than public schools. They taught us better pronunciation and better grammatical structures. They were a lot more successful than public schools for some obvious reasons: they were not mandatory and only people who were interested registered for these classes. They offered more regular classes especially during the summer with at least two hours of instruction every day. They had better books and

equipment. I was not, however, privileged to finish all the levels of the institute because of financial restraints, so I quit after a few terms, each lasting for a couple of months. But, the good point for me was that I became familiar with books and tapes in English that were not available in public schools. So, I started buying these books myself and studying them on my own.

The institute's method of teaching, however, had been instilled in me. I remember I had these books with me all the time, memorizing new words, repeating new structures, and listening to the native speakers on the tape. I did not believe in any other method of learning English, and I did not have anybody to open my eyes to better methods. That method was the best I knew at the time. I used to think English language proficiency was in the books and tapes so much so that I was not even willing to talk to my friends in English for a long time in the beginning. I was so insistent on this way of learning that I remember once, when I was talking in English to a friend of mine at the university, he told me, "Mohsen, when you talk, I think someone is reading out loud from a book."

Then came my university studies of English. For my BA, I studied Persian-English translation. The teaching method of the university was not fundamentally different from that of the institute. They just used different books and tapes. I then started my MA in *Teaching English as a Second Language* at Tarbiat Modares University. The last two years of my BA and my two years of MA dealt with technical topics in English like translation of documentaries, media and legal texts; linguistics; psychology; etc. In fact, they had very little to do with general English language proficiency. It is interesting to note that in all 6 years of my English language learning at the university, and the few terms at the institute, I never had a native English-speaking teacher. Our teachers, at best,

were Iranians who had been in an English-speaking country for a few years. In most cases, however, our teachers were people who had been taught English exactly the same way that we were being taught.

My life, however, took a sharp turn when I married my girlfriend while I was doing my MA. We both started applying to different universities in Canada. About two years later in 2003, I was offered an admission to a Canadian university. Two months after my arrival, she, too, came to Canada as my dependent. Our marriage however, ended in divorce a year and a half later due to different expectations of Canada and of ourselves. But most important of all, it was our different adaptability to the Canadian culture that made our personal differences even greater.

Lifestyle in Canada

Culture shock, divorce, and financial restraints made my first year in Canada almost unbearable, and left me no desire to socialize not even with the Iranian community. I do not remember I ever had a conversation with anyone other than my classmates or academic staff in the first year. I spent most of my time in my office behind my computer even if I could not concentrate. I felt my English language fluency was getting worse. Over the years, things gradually began to improve just a little, but not enough to make it possible for me to freely take part in social events. Five years on, I feel I am still avoiding many of the opportunities to get involved and be an active participant in the Canadian society.

Pary

Pary is a single female student of 27. She is from a very highly educated family. Her father is a heart specialist, and her mother has a PhD in nutritional studies. Her parents were of great influence and encouragement to her. Pary came to Canada on a student visa in 2003, and has been here for 5 years now. She decided to apply for her residency in 2004, and is now a Canadian resident.

Pary did her high school diploma in Iran, but decided to quit her B.Sc. studies in Natural Resources when she was half way through her program because, she "did not like it." She enrolled in this program because she was not offered an admission to her preferred program, Computer Science. She explains that Iran is a very young country with almost half the population below 30; and therefore, the number of students is staggering, resulting in a high competition for university admissions in most majors. A part of the reason she decided to come to Canada was the chance to get the education she longed for in Computer Science. Right now she is a Master's student in the same area working on her thesis.

English Language Learning

As noted above, Pary comes from a highly educated family. Her parents encouraged her from a very young age to attend private institutes and evening classes in order to learn English. Therefore, apart from the usual English language instruction that she had in public schools, she also completed all the levels of a famous English language teaching institute. Pary was very happy with her English all along before coming to Canada.

Lifestyle in Canada

Pary likes Canada, and she has many reasons for that. She says that she is a very sociable person who enjoys interacting with people and attending social events, even if these events are mixed. Pary explains that her family background is more academic and liberal than religious. She insists that she was not the kind of girl who wanted Iranian society to allow her to do whatever she wanted, but at the same time she hated to be checked on all the time in society or at the university for her hijab. In Canada, she says she is free to choose the kind of life she wants. She freely interacts with whomever she wants, and wears any kind of clothing she wishes.

Because of her sociable personality, Pary says she has a lot of opportunities to speak English with native speakers, and she tries to make use to them, but she says speaking opportunities in Canada have not been as ideal as she used to think. Pary explains that she has not been able to use many of these opportunities and struggles to make friends because she seems very serious and formal to Canadians. Her family and her culture have taught her to respect certain boundaries and conduct herself "properly" in speaking with people especially with men.

Perception of English Language Proficiency

Before coming to Canada, Pary used to think her English proficiency was perfect, but she was very surprised when, during the first couple of months in Canada, she realized that her English language proficiency was not enough for her social interactions with Canadians. Five years on, she thinks her English proficiency has improved, but not to the extent she had hoped for.

Hoda

Hoda is a 39 year old female Master's student of Chemistry. She has been in Canada for 11 years, and is now a Canadian citizen. Although she comes from a very religious family, she does not have strong religious convictions. In fact, religion is, to a large extent, the reason she decided to immigrate to Canada. She talks about the extreme patriarchic attitude of her very small community, and complains that she had almost no will of her own to choose her lifestyle in that community in Iran. She finished her high school diploma, and then, by the help of a brother she had in Kuwait, she managed to get out of the country. She started learning English, and making friends with a lot of Iranians in Kuwait. She explains that it was some of her friends in Kuwait who gave her the idea to immigrate to Canada. One year after her arrival in Kuwait, she married an Iranian man, and two years later, they both immigrated to Canada. In Canada, she spent about a year looking for a job, and finally was employed as a bank teller. She worked there for a couple of years before she started her B.Sc. in Chemistry. She explained that her husband's religious and patriarchic attitude made the continuation of her marriage impossible, and her marriage ended in divorce a few years after their arrival in Canada. She now lives with her two sons.

English Language Learning

Hoda started learning English in middle and high school in Iran. But, her real English language learning started in Kuwait where she decided to learn the English language in order to get a good job, communicate with people, and "enjoy more freedom." She had two-hour English language classes every evening for almost two

years. In these classes, she used to sit next to a friend all the time, and they used to enjoy talking to each other in English. Quite a few of her teachers in that institute were native speakers from Canada or the United States.

Lifestyle in Canada

Hoda is very sociable. She knows a large number of Iranians because of her personality and her previous position at the bank. She had a lot of clients while she was a bank teller, and she did not have much difficulty communicating with them. She talks about times when her male clients used to show interest in her because she was kind and patient with clients although she thinks her gender also played a role. Hoda has a lot of friends, both Iranians and Canadians. Because she has been divorced for some time now, she spends her free time with friends. She takes part in Iranian and some Canadian social events. She talked at length about the journeys that she has had with her friends, and the social events, especially Iranian parties, in which she has participated with them.

Hoda explains that her Iranian cultural and traditional background, from time to time, gets in her way of socializing. Although she has some male friends too, she never goes out with them because she is too concerned about what her Iranian friends might think. She describes many incidents where she declined a request for a date since it is not socially acceptable in her culture to date a man especially if she is divorced with children. This feeling is so deeply rooted that the couple of times that she did accept their invitations, and went out for a coffee or something, she never called the man who had given her his number.

Perception of English Language Proficiency

Hoda has a very good command of the English language. She is now very comfortable communicating with Canadians. In fact, her success at work is all because of her communication skills in the English language. She thinks that her sociable personality, her job, the length of stay in Canada, and her demanding life as a mother who had to raise two children in Canada, have been very helpful in giving her the proficiency she has right now.

Kobra

Kobra is 42, and she has been in Canada for 9 years now. She came to Canada as an immigrant, and is now a Canadian citizen. She has been very interested in the English language since childhood when she used to see her father having guests from other countries. She was very curious about these guests and always wanted to learn English, especially when she saw her father's struggle in communicating with them. Kobra finished her high school diploma and her B.Sc. in Chemistry in Iran, and then decided to come to Canada for graduate studies. Her university did not accept her B.Sc. and she ended up having to do another B.Sc. She is now a second-year Master's student of Chemistry.

Kobra has been married to a Polish Canadian for 8 years now, and has a 6 year old son. Her husband does not know Persian, and she does not know Polish. They communicate in English. Interestingly enough, they address their son in their own languages, so their son can now understand Polish and Persian very well. Of course, he knows English best.

English Language Learning

She started learning English at a very young age, but in a very informal fashion. She remembers her mother teaching her just a few words of English every now and then. Like almost all other Iranian students, her formal English language instruction started in middle school. Sometime, half way through high school, she decided to attend evening classes at a private English language teaching institute. She recalls that her two years at the institute was also more grammar and reading exercise. After she finished all the levels of this institute, she took two conversation classes at another place. The English language instruction did not change much at the university where she used to have only a couple of hours of English instruction in a week. She never had any interactions in English with native speakers of English in Iran. Her exposure with the English language was just occasional conversations with her father or short greetings with her father's guests.

Lifestyle in Canada

Kobra is also from a very religious family. She had her hijab when she came to Canada, and did not shake hands with people upon meeting and greeting. This was very difficult for Canadians to absorb and very unsettling for her. She used to be very uncomfortable with dogs around, too, as they are considered impure in her religion. Upon her arrival, she stayed with a relative in Vancouver. Kobra remembers how difficult it was for her to find a job after her arrival in Canada because of her hijab. She kept on wearing it, however, for quite a long time before she finally decided to remove it. She is now comfortable in her interactions at the university, in her son's school or when shopping. She is leading her life successfully, but still, she is not happy with her English.

Compared to Iran, there are a lot of opportunities to speak English in Canada for Kobra, but it has not been easy to use these opportunities. She used to think that Canadians, as with her father's guests, would understand why she is wearing a hair covering, and would never ask a question about it, but it has been one of the most important problems in her social interactions in the first few years. She thinks Canadians are very impatient and uncooperative in their interactions.

Things have changed gradually since she arrived. Right now, despite her religious background, she is rather comfortable interacting with men, attending parties, etc., a fact that she is sure would be different if her husband were an Iranian.

Kobra does not often listen to radio or watch TV in Canada. She says she is not a reader either. Her daily use of English is limited to her small conversations with her classmates and instructors, her son's teachers, and shopping. She thinks one of the reasons she does not go out with her classmates or talk with them about things other than academic stuff is that she is older than they are, and she does not have a lot in common with them. Although she sometimes forces herself to communicate and share a joke with her friends or classmates, this generally leads to confusion and misunderstanding. She says she is very sociable and active, but she has become very impatient lately.

Perception of English Language Proficiency

Kobra says she is not happy with her English at all, and she has not improved her English as she had desired. She feels that even if she is in Canada for "50 years," still she will not be as comfortable in English as she is in Persian. In particular, she talks about her son coming come from school every day and using a certain word or phrase that she does

not know. She is worried that in a few years' time she won't be able to understand her son.

Adel

Adel is a 31 year-old international student, and has been in Canada for three years now. He completed his BA and MA in Iran. He has been a top student all through his academic life and has passed the Ezame Kharej exam. This is a highly prestigious test that the government administers every year, and those who pass it automatically get a scholarship from the government to go to universities of their choice in other countries to continue their education. Adel decided to come to Canada for his PhD studies. He is now in his third year of a doctoral program in Humanities.

English Language Learning

Adel did not have a particular interest in the English language in the beginning. He first decided to take English seriously when he failed his English course at the university despite the fact that he was a top student all through his academic life. He decided to attend evening classes at an English language institute in his hometown. He started learning English more "out of spite of his failure at the English course at the university." At the institute, though, he began to do very well, and he became very interested in the English language. He began to enjoy learning English, and that the more he learned, the more interested he became. He never had any problem with English courses at the university after that. He has also translated two books from English to Persian. By the time he came to Canada, he had finished all the levels of the institute. He thinks that the institute's method of teaching English language was good, but he

complains that it was not social enough. He never had a conversation with a native speaker before coming to Canada, except for greetings in rare conferences. He values this social skill especially now that he is in Canada.

Lifestyle in Canada

Adel is also a Muslim, with strong religious and nationalistic ties to his country. He cautions me that both the nationalism and religiosity he has in mind are a bit different from those understood in Canada. The strong religious and national ties however, have never been an issue for him when he wanted to participate in Canadian social events. He has tried to take part in as many social events as possible both Iranian and Canadian, and yet, because of his busy academic schedule, he could not take advantage of many of these opportunities. His use of English is limited mostly to his academic conversations with his instructors, supervisor, and his classmates. He reads the university newspapers, and tries to keep up with the events at the university. Adel thinks to be in Canada is very important in mastering the English language as it provides him with the best opportunity to practice his speaking skill, but he thinks he should have more opportunities to speak if he is to improve.

Adel remembers his first few months in Canada were very difficult because he could not understand what people or his classmates were saying. He had to ask them to repeat themselves and that made him very uncomfortable. He has improved a lot since then, and is now very happy with his English. He says that English has never been a barrier to his social or academic life, even though he believes his English is still a long way from perfect.

As I was talking to him, I realized that English was not his second language. It turned out that he belonged to the Turkish ethnicity in Iran. His mother tongue, the language he is more comfortable with and the one spoken at home is Turkish. He says that in the beginning he used to translate what he had heard in English to Persian, and then to Turkish because the language of instruction in schools was Persian and he had learned English through the medium of Persian.

Perception of English Language Proficiency

Adel is now very happy with his English proficiency, and says that English has never been a barrier to his functionality. He has no major problem speaking to his classmates, supervisor and university staff. He thinks Canada has given him the chance to practice speaking English and learning about Canadian culture. He knows there is a lot he does not know about the English language, but, compared to his English proficiency at the time of arrival, he is sure he has improved a lot. He hopes he can keep on this trend of progress.

Javad

Javad is a 21 year old Iranian Canadian. He has been in Canada since he was 16 when all his family members immigrated to Canada. At that time, he was half way through his high school. He finished his high school degree in a Catholic school in Toronto. Right now he is a B.Sc. student of Medical Science, and is preparing himself for the MCAT exam.

English Language Learning

Javad, too, had to take the same two-hour English classes in middle school and high school. Sometime at the end of his middle school, he decided to attend a private English language institute. For two years, he attended intensive four-hour classes on Fridays. He remembers the institute was really good for grammar and vocabulary, but he wishes they could have also prepared him culturally for this country. Given the limited facilities of language instruction in Iran, however, he thinks they "do a good job" in these private institutes.

Lifestyle in Canada

Javad remembers that in the beginning he had a "tough time" speaking and studying in English, but things got gradually better. He specifically recalls how welcoming and accommodating his high school classmates were.

He says he uses English mostly for his academic work: reading textbooks, listening to class lectures, etc., but he is also equally comfortable now using English for his social life. He is a very sociable person--in his own words, a "party guy"--and has a lot of friends. He stops frequently to chat with a lot of them as he walks across the campus. He has about six close Canadian friends, and a girlfriend who is "deep Canadian." When I asked him if his ethnic or religious background affected his social life at all, he said that nothing gave him trouble except his occasional misunderstandings with his girlfriend.

As I said before, he came to Canada as an immigrant, and is now determined to stay in Canada. He is very comfortable in Canada, and calls it home, his own country. He

enjoys the fact that he can compete with his classmates in all aspects of life: social, academic, etc., and considers himself "just one of them". He is studying very hard, and wants to become a professional.

Perception of English Language Proficiency

After four years in Canada, he says the English language is not on his mind anymore when he speaks to people. He may make a mistake every now and then, but he says he is OK with that. It does not bother him anymore. There is no first or second language when he thinks of Persian and English. He feels equally competent in both.

Valid

Valid is 28 years old, and he has also been in Canada for four yours. He is Javad's brother, the previous participant of this study, and they both immigrated to Canada with all their family members. He did not have any interest in the English language in the beginning; he simply took English classes at a private institute because his parents wanted him to. Valid has a B.Sc. in Chemistry from Iran. Like Kobra, the university did not accept his degree, and he ended up having to do another B.Sc. He is now a B.Sc. student of a double major: Physiology and Biology. He is studying very hard because he is preparing himself for the MCAT exam. Because of his insufficient English proficiency, he says, he is worried more about the interview section of the exam than the written one.

English Language Learning

He started learning English at the age of nine at a private English language teaching institute, and continued until the first year of high school when he had to quit because of the demanding school work. This is in addition to the two-hour English language classes in a week in middle school and high school that he and all other participants of this study share. Valid indicates that he never had a native English speaker as a teacher, and complains that English teaching, both in the institute and in public schools, emphasized grammar and reading more than any other skill. Language teaching in Iran, he says, has not been social enough, and has not prepared him for life here in Canada.

Lifestyle in Canada

Valid is an immigrant, and determined to stay in Canada after graduation. He wants and tries to fit in, but finds it very difficult. He thinks his insufficient proficiency in English, and his ethnic culture and identity are making it difficult to fit into the Canadian society. He says he uses English mostly for his academic work: reading textbooks, listening to class lectures, etc. He remembers he was very grammar conscious in the beginning, worried all the time if what he had just said was right or wrong. He does not speak to Canadians very often, and tries not to get into long and detailed discussions with them as he knows he would not be able to keep up with the flow of conversation. If he is ever unsure about an issue in the class, he always refers to other Iranians in the class. He complains that he has an isolated lifestyle here, limiting his social life mostly to Iranians.

Perception of English Language Proficiency

Valid is not happy with his English because he cannot "speak his heart." He says he feels behind. He feels he is not Canadian although the society insists he is because of his immigration status. He feels he has improved since his arrival in Canada, but, given the length of the time he has been in Canada, he thinks this improvement has been very little. He talks about the many opportunities he has to interact with his classmates, but, because of age differences, he can not use them.

Ahmed

Ahmed is a 27 year-old international student. He decided to come to Canada for his PhD studies in Engineering. When I asked him if Iranian universities did not offer the same program, he responded that they did, but that he also wanted to experience a different "world." He is a newcomer who has been in Canada for 6 months. He had no particular interest in the English language when he was very young, but started going to evening classes because of his father's insistence.

English Language Learning

Ahmed attended special elementary, middle, and high schools. These schools in the capital Tehran are very rare. Unlike all other public schools, they offer two hours of English language instruction during the week at the elementary level, and six hours of English language instruction in middle school and high school. But, when I commented that he should therefore have a good proficiency in English, he responded that the pace of teaching was very slow. He recalls that they were still dealing with alphabets by the end

of the first two years in elementary school. While he was in high school, though, he decided to go to a private language teaching institute because of his parents' insistence. He finished all the levels of an institute. He never had native English-speaking teachers, and the only times he had ever spoken English were his small chats with foreigners, not necessarily native English-speakers, at occasional conferences.

Lifestyle in Canada

Ahmed uses English in Canada mostly for academic purposes, and occasionally social life: "shopping." He does not have any problem reading and listening to academic stuff, but when it comes to social interaction, his concern for grammar interferes with his socialization. He complains that he had to ask people to repeat themselves.

Ahmed likes to learn about Canadian culture, to get to know their world vision, but not to become a member of the Canadian community. He has not applied for residency here and he is determined to return to Iran when his education is over. He cites religious identity as one of the reasons why he is determined to return to Iran; other reasons being cultural and family ties back home. He is also a Muslim whose religious identity is very important for him. He emphasizes that he has a different understanding of religion from Canadians, and that he cannot practice his religion here the way he likes. In Canada, he does not attend mixed Iranian parties, but tries to attend religious ceremonies that are held regularly in the suburbs of the city.

He does not have any close Canadian friends. His social life is mostly limited to the Iranian community and Iranian religious events. Because of his religious obligations and the segregation policy of his native country, Ahmed is more comfortable talking to

girls in Canada than in Iran, but he is still most comfortable talking to men than women. He explains that he never had an opportunity to speak English with native speakers in Iran, and thinks that Canada has helped him improve his English proficiency, but he wishes he had more opportunities to practice speaking English. Because of his busy academic life, and his religious personality, he has not been able to or willing to make use of all these opportunities.

As a PhD student of engineering, Ahmed is leading a very busy academic life in Canada. He is doing very well academically. Although he has been in Canada for less than a year, he has written several papers and attended many conferences. He also attended a conference in the U.S. although he explains he had to "go through hell" to get the visa because they were very "picky" with [or because they picked on] Iranians. He explains that he spends almost all his time in his office every day from 8 am to 8 or 9 pm, and even most Sundays, too.

Perception of English Language Proficiency

Although Ahmed has been in Canada only for 6 months and admits he is grammar conscious, he says his English proficiency is not "a big issue for him," and he functions very well in the Canadian society. He, however, believes that he would feel he has failed if, in five years' time for example, his English language proficiency does not improve dramatically.

So far, I have given detailed treatment of each of my participants' profiles. In order to make the findings of this study easier to present, however, I will now compare

and contrast these profiles, and offer a general picture of their commonalities and differences.

Comparing Participants' Profiles

All my participants are in their late 20s or early 30s. They were already adults when they left Iran to come to Canada for their Masters or PhDs. At 21 years of age and his B.Sc nearing completion, Javad is also not far off. This common age has exposed them to almost the same social, cultural, and economic changes and experiences. My participants have experienced the Iranian revolution, the eight-year war with Iraq, Iran's population explosion of the 1980s, the biting economic sanctions, and the terrible economic recession. It is apparent that this shared experience has given them some similar desires, too. The very act of immigration, for example, is one of the common desires of the current generation. They mostly immigrated to escape economic hardships, political inflexibility, and high competition among the population boom of the 1980s for university positions, jobs, etc.

They all had some formal English language instruction in public schools as well as private language teaching institutes prior to their arrival in Canada. Their English language instruction features extensive training in grammar and vocabulary with the social and cultural aspects of the language largely missing. Their English language instruction is a strange example of teaching the language system out of its context.

Here in Canada, my participants are academically very busy. Their education responsibility is huge. Most of them report spending long hours every day in their offices at their computers working, writing papers, preparing term projects, preparing themselves

for conferences, and filling out applications for jobs, residency in Canada, etc. With their academic life consuming almost all of their time, there is little time left for social life.

My participants are independent, high academic achievers. They have developed a professional identity. They know what they want in life, and they have decided to put their education ahead of everything else. They are, in fact, representatives of the very educated section of the Iranian society. They have shown their dedication to their education, to learning English language, and to overcoming the difficulties of immigrant life.

Except for Kobra and Hoda, they are all single, and social life does not exert the same pressure on them as it does on Kobra and Hoda. They do not have to worry about money, or their children's education and upbringing. Since they are mostly first generation immgrants, they do not have any relatives in Canada, and do not have the same social obligations as Kobra and Hoda. All my participants, except for Javad, have a grant or scholarship, and their university funding is enough for them. Except for Pary who comes from a very rich family and is used to spending extravagantly, most of my participants do not spend much.

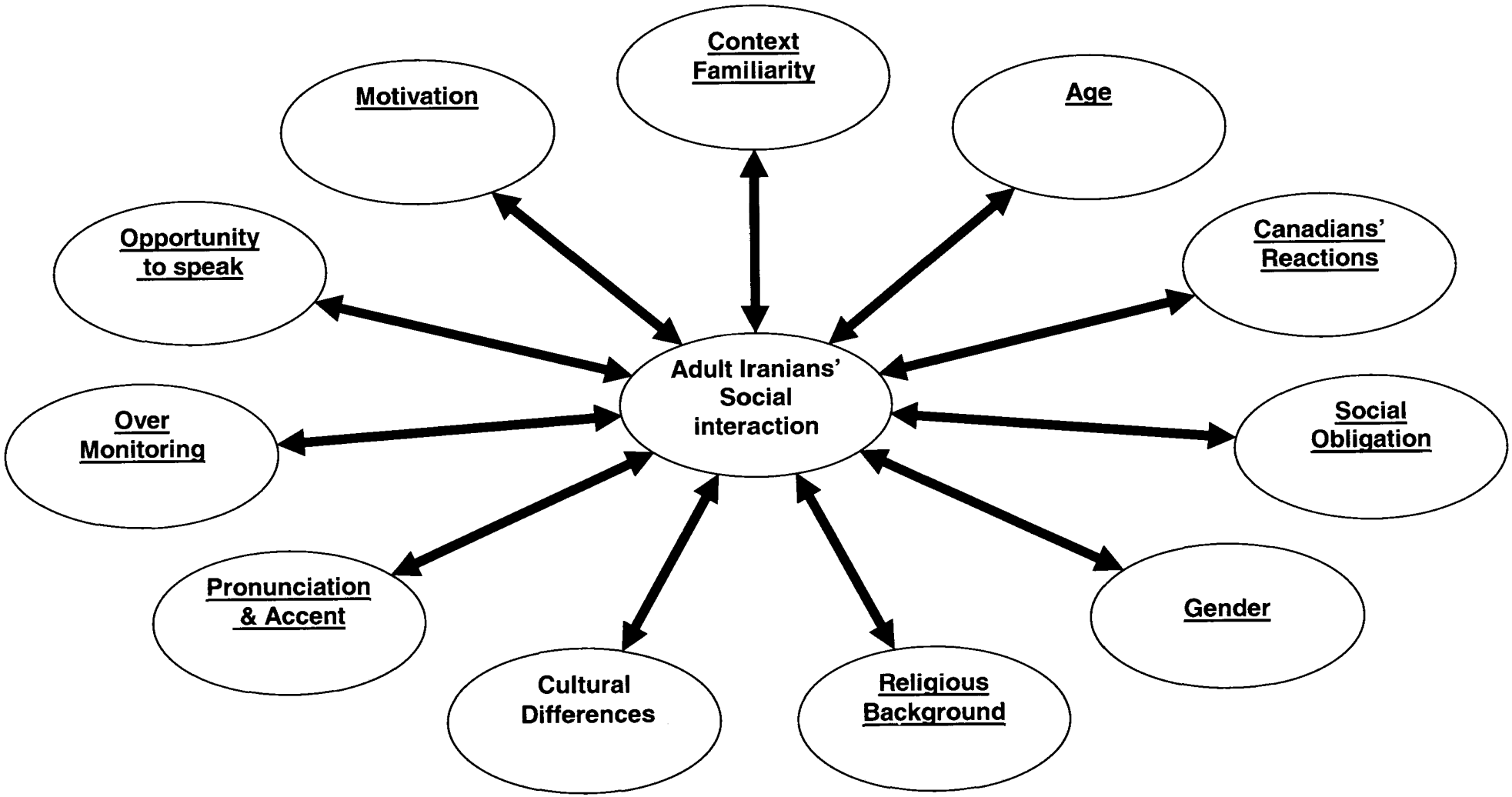
Now that I have introduced my participant and illustrated a general picture of my sample population in Canada, I will start a presentation of the major themes that emerged out of data analysis.

Factors Affecting Social Interactions

As detailed in Chapter 3, I transcribed and segmented my participants' interviews into meaningful chunks. Then, I categorized these chunks of data, and tried to make

meaningful relationships between these categories. Diagram 4.1 on the next page presents an illustration of all the themes that emerged out of data analysis. In the following section, I will introduce these factors one by one, and support them through my participants' voices. It should, however, be noted here that there is no particular hierarchy in the presentation of the themes. I have simply identified categories and extracted themes out of my data in the order of the questions that I have asked. For example, the first question that I put to all my participants was about the reason they decided to learn English. That is why motivation, which is a related theme, turned up first and is presented first.

Diagram 4.1:
Factors Affecting Adult Iranian's Social Interaction in Canada



Motivation

In the literature on second language acquisition research, motivation has been defined as learners' attitudes and orientations towards target language and the people speaking that language (Gardner, 1985). Data analysis shows that motivation was one of the factors that affected my participants' social interactions in Canada.

Kobra talked about one particular incident that was very motivating in her decision to learn the English language:

> I made a trip with my family to a European country. I realized how important this language learning was; that is, the few simple things that I knew, no one knew. The same broken English that I had learned at the institute was very helpful. None knew any English, and I had turned into an interpreter for everyone. How much is this? What is that? How do we do this? I was feeling proud. They were rich, but they could not even ask the price of things, change a product, or even ask for a product of a different color. Still, I have the same motivation driving me forward in my conversations with Canadians although sometimes, I feel frustrated.

My own experience of learning English is also an example of the role of motivation in social interaction. As explained in my life story, I was very interested in the English language from the beginning. I wanted to learn about different cultures and peoples. Adel, on the other hand, became interested in the English language later in life while he was a university student. He became interested when, for the first time, English was taught to him in a better way, and he began to see that he was actually learning English.

Ahmed and Pary were interested in the English language because they needed it for their academic progress. Ahmed, in particular, talked about his parents' insistence that he should learn the English language for future education. Pary's educated family was also her source of motivation. They insisted on her learning English from an early age

because they wanted to make sure that she would have a better chance of university admission.

Opportunity to Speak

As I described in Chapter two, English language instruction in Iran provided my participants with very little opportunity to speak English in real contexts, and therefore, one of the themes that emerged out of my analysis was their description of their opportunity to speak in both Iran and Canada. Pary contrasted her English language learning in Iran with that in Canada, and said:

> During my English language learning in Iran, I did not have much chance to talk to other people in English and practice speaking. Canada has been wonderful in this respect, especially for me with a sociable character. Before coming to Canada, though, I thought I would be able to talk to a lot of people and master the speaking ability, but it was not as easy as I thought. A lot of times there was an opportunity to speak but I have not been able to use it because I did not know much about the topic, or they were talking about things that I was not comfortable with.

Adel, the PhD student in Humanities, said it took him a long time to be accepted into the community of the study area dedicated to graduate students. Although he complains about the time it took to get comfortable with and accepted in this community, he thought it was worth it. He was happy because this community had been very supportive and helpful. They had taught him a lot about social life in Canada. He just wished he had more opportunities of this kind.

Comparing his opportunity to speak English in Iran with that in Canada, Ahmed said that he never had an opportunity to speak English with native speakers in Iran, and that Canada had helped him a lot to improve his English proficiency. Ahmed could have

more chances of practicing speaking English, but because of his busy academic life, and his religious personality, he had not been able or willing to make use of all these opportunities. The other issue that had affected his participation in social interactions was that all of his colleagues were immigrants who were not any better in English than he was.

My own experience of social interaction is also relevant here. Compared with Iran, I have had many more opportunities to speak English with native speakers. In fact, as I explained before, I never had the chance to speak English with native speakers before coming to Canada. I have, however, not been able to use these opportunities, either. My disappointment in my first marriage had made me even more reserved. I noticed that I avoided people, especially when conversation got into social or cultural issues. I felt I had isolated myself from the social aspect of the English language.

Grammar and Pronunciation

The second finding of this study is that the problem with grammar and pronunciation also affected my participants' social interactions with Canadians. Comparing his English language learning in public schools and private institutes, Adel, for example, said:

> A large part of my time at the institute in the beginning was spent on correcting the wrong pronunciation of the words I had learned in public schools. English teachers were not qualified for teaching English. Many of them were not even English teachers. There were required to teach English as there were not enough English teachers at the time. There were times when a math teacher or a science teacher came to our class to teach English. Many of those words still linger in my pronunciation and affect my speaking and listening.

Another problem which is closely related to pronunciation and accent is the many contracted forms used in informal English. My participants reported that they were only taught the articulated versions of these phrases. Kobra, for example, reported:

> You know, my conversations in English while I was working in Iran did not help me improve my proficiency in English, because the way we talked there was a lot different from the one needed here. I never used or heard phrases like 'I wanna do that', 'you know' etc.... The thing is I never listened to radio or anything, or there was never a method to teach us these things....

Ahmed talked about the same issue:

> The English we have learned is a cliché English not the English of life here. It was very bookish. There are many phrases that are used here like 'you know,' 'would you,' 'need you,' etc., that are pronounced differently from their written form. We were not familiar with these pronunciations when we come to Canada. I remember I had to ask people to repeat themselves as it was difficult for me to understand these phrases the first time I used to hear them.

The idiomatic meaning of many phrases was also a problem for my participants in their social interactions in Canada. Valid complained that he sometimes understood the meaning of all the words of a sentence, and yet he could not figure out what the sentence meant as a whole. Kobra was also concerned about her son's use of idioms. In fact, she was worried that she might not able to understand him in a few years' time.

Data analysis showed that grammar was the other linguistic factor affecting my participants' social interactions in Canada. Valid, for example, said: "In the beginning I was very worried about grammar, thinking all the time if what I had just said was correct or not." He also shared with me an experience he had on the bus where a friend asked him a question, but it took him a long time to figure out how best to answer that question. By the time he decided what the best structure was, his friend said, "forget it. It is not important after all."

Adel, too, had a poignant experience to share:

> Most of the times during the class discussion, I struggle to understand the professors or other students' detailed arguments because they speak so fast, and when I do understand I won't comment even if there are a lot of interesting ideas that I would like to put forward in response simply because I am very slow in finding the best structure to express my idea, and it is out of the patience of the class. Sometimes, I feel my classmates take me lightly as if I have no good idea.

English Language Learning Certificates

A huge portion of the young Iranian population attend different sorts of English classes in the hope of being able to get an English language certificate. Such a certificate is desperately needed for those who are eager to emigrate out of the country or those who wish to get higher education in good universities. Of all the internationally accepted English language tests, IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is the only one administered in Iran. The organization in charge of administering this test, however, cannot deal with the huge number of applicants every month. The other option is to take the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foregn Language) in one of the close-by Gulf States.

This study is not an investigation of the formal definitions of language proficiency. Nor is it interested in exploring if IELTS of TOEFL are good measurements for it. It is, however, very relevant for this study to investigate what my participants think of these two tests. It is also very important to explore if my participants think their preparation for these tests helped them to learn the English they needed here in Canada.

Valid took the TOFEL in 2003 as one of the basic requirements to apply to the university. There was no speaking section at the time. He said that the training he had for

the test had very little to do with the English language used in social interactions, and did not prepare him for life in Canada. He said, "It was not a good measurement for speaking, but it did help me increase my vocabulary, and it was helpful to some extent."

Javad, too, took the TOFEL. He took it a year after he arrived in Canada. He believes "there is not a strong impact of TOFEL on my proficiency. It just taught me writing a little bit." Ahmed, however, had to take the test while he was in Iran as it was one of the basic requirements for admission to the university. He had the same complaint when he talked about this test: "The test was good for vocabulary and structure, but not social life and conversation here." Adel, however, was the only participant who took the IELTS. He took the test before coming to Canada. He believed there was a lot about social life and social interaction that were not taught in the IELTS preparation classes, and that the test he took did not measure the social aspect of the language.

Culture

It has been acknowledged for a long time that language is more than a set of words and rules (Kohls, 1994). To Kohls, language is incomplete without culture. An integral part of language is the feelings and thoughts of the people who speak that language. Culture captures the totality of words, rules, thoughts and feelings. It is, therefore, obvious that the differences between two languages are not just the difference between two linguistic systems, but also a difference between how customs, beliefs, religion, etc. have shaped different worldviews in these two languages. My participants had also talked about many incidents where the differences between Iranian and Canadian culture had affected their performance in social interactions. Because culture as

described above is very general, I decided to use the different categories of cultural difference, religious background, gender, and social roles to make the presentation of my findings easier.

Cultural Difference

Kobra complained that the things she was more interested in talking about were sometimes not interesting to Canadians. She used to spend a lot of time talking to her Iranian friends about the clothes or the shoes of other people, their hairstyles, or even the perfume they used. But apparently, these topics of discussions were not interesting to Canadians. She continued:

> I am most comfortable talking to Iranians (laughing), and most of the times, my conversations with them are long, but not with Canadians. I think most of the things I talk about in Persian with my Iranian friends are not important to Canadians.

Regarding the things that she thought were more interesting to Canadians, she said:

> You know as I told you I do not read a lot, or watch TV, and I can not talk about the things that are interesting to them. For example, who is the best actress, what was the show last night, who won the ice hockey game? These things are simply not important to me. I do not concern myself with them.

Kobra also shared a few of her social interactions where she told a joke to her Canadian classmates, officemates, or friends, and they did not react the way she expected. She said:

> You know, what seems interesting to us is not interesting to them. The jokes that I share with my friends and we all laugh are not interesting to Canadians at all. It has happened a few times that when I share a joke with them, they seem confused, and I have to explain what I meant. By the time I make myself clear, the joke is not going to be interesting anymore. Unfortunately, they have sometimes misunderstood me.

In my own experience of social interactions, telling jokes or understanding Canadian jokes has been a very difficult aspect of the English language, and from time to time, it has prevented successful communication. I remember Diane's (pseudonym) mother bought me a hat, and I intended to be funny with her. I said to her that "putting a hat on a person's head" in our culture means "cheating him/her," but she took my joke literally and was apologizing that it was not her intention.

Ahmed had an example of how he missed the opportunity to interact with one of his officemates because in his culture it was not acceptable to comment on a girl's appearance:

> There was a girl in our office that I used to greet and have a small chat whenever I saw her. Once she had changed her hairstyle, and other people in the office started commenting on it as soon as she arrived. I was just watching and listening. After this incident, I noticed that she was not as willing as before to have a conversations with me. She was very short in her answers and tried to finish it fast. You know, when you do not do what is common and acceptable here, you become a stranger, someone who does not belong here, and people will start treating you that way.

Ahmed told me that in his culture certain things were more important and superior to that of Canadians. He gave me examples of his reluctance to speak in situations where the way people dressed made it uneasy for him to interact with Canadians.

> People in Canada are used to wearing clothes differently than what I am used to, especially women. They have very light clothing in summer or when they are in the office. Culturally, they are used to it, and it is acceptable for them. But, it has made my conversations with them difficult as I become uneasy when we are face to face. If she is my supervisor or a prof, I try to look somewhere else when we speak, and that has been very unusual for them. If they are my classmates or officemates, I make my conversation short.

Finally, Ahmed said, "I am not interested in this culture, I just want to learn some technical knowledge and take it back home."

One of the Iranian cultural features that had affected my participants' social interactions was "interference." As for interference Hoda had this to say:

> Most of my neighbors are Iranians, and Iranians interfere in each other's affairs, of course in a different way from what Canadians might think. Iranians pay close attention to what other people do, and have a constant concern for what others might think of them. I still can not unshackle myself from the idea of what my friends would think of me or what they would say to themselves if I do this or that. If I think something is not socially acceptable in their eyes, it is extremely difficult for me to do it. This has become my psyche, so, when I speak to Canadians, I am also worried what they might think of me.

Affecting the social interaction of some of my participants was also the Iranian cultural feature of indirectly approaching topics that they deem indelicate. Adel shared this story with me:

> Once when I was going to buy my groceries, my Canadian roommate, asked me to buy her a pack of cigarette paper, too. A few days later, she came to me and reached out her hand to pay for the pack. As soon as I saw the money, I said, 'It is not valuable.' She said, 'what do you mean it is not valuable? It is one dollar.' As you know, I just wanted to be polite in matters of money and price.

Taarof, the cultural feature that Adel is referring to, is a characteristic of Iranian social interaction. It is "a hollow system of flattery and false modesty to make others feel good", a system where "people express nice sentiments that they do not truly mean or feel" (Tajbakhsh, 2008). For example, if someone offers you something, you are expected, out of politeness, to refuse it even though you may want it because the one offering it is also probably doing it simply to be polite. This offering and refusing may take place several times before it is finally determined if the offer or refusal is real or simply out of politeness. The same principle governs most of the Iranian social

interactions. If you ask the price of something that you have just purchased from a shopkeeper, you are certain to be told "ghabele shoma ra nadare" meaning "it is worth nothing." It is just a polite way of approaching the indelicate matter of quoting a price. You are expected to insist, and then the shopkeeper will name a price. Westerners are used to "short declarative sentences", and they might consider this cultural attribute as lying. This feature, however, demonstrates the vague and symbolic nature of the Persian language. People are kept guessing if the statements is genuine or not, and they are never sure (Tajbakhsh, 2008).

Another feature of Iranian culture which is closely related to the concept of Taarof, is "Rodarbayesti" (prevarication in accepting or refusing an offer). While Westerners are mostly direct and frank in saying no to what they do not like, Iranians, out of politeness and considerateness towards those they are speaking to, have a very elaborate way of refusing or saying "no." Pary talked about a few incidents in Canada where this indirect approach in accepting or rejecting an offer has led to confusion or misunderstanding. In one particular example, she said:

> Last year, I went to a conference in Toronto with a few Canadian classmates. We had to share the ride and the hotel because our instructor was expected to pay for the expenses. For dinner, they asked me to eat out, and they really wanted me to go because they wanted to bill the instructor and they wanted to show that the group as a whole did the same thing. I really did not want to go because I was really tired after attending different presentations during the day. But I could not say that. I did not want to be the wet blanket in the group. We went to a restaurant, and they ordered seafood. I could not even touch that food, and they started asking me question why I did not eat, and they became very uncomfortable. I was feeling the same. This incident overshadowed our stay in Toronto. They were not comfortable with me all the few days that we were there. Interestingly, they all agreed to come home a day earlier. I was exhausted, and I think they were too.

Regarding his interactions with Canadians, Javad, the youngest and the most proficient participant who came to Canada when he was a high school student, had this to say:

> With people who are generation after generation Canadian, and very well read, I am not comfortable talking. You know they start talking about stuff that I do not have a clue. Most of the times, I do not have a clue what they are talking about, and I just say, "Yeah, yeah", and then, "hey I gotta get going".

Javad also shared examples of how his social interactions had sometimes led to confusion and misunderstanding:

> I have a girl friend, we date, go out together, and she is Canadian. But we have arguments, too. When I argue with her, what I am trying to get out of that argument is not what she thinks I am trying to get out. For example, she lied to me once, and I am trying to tell her, ok, you lied to me, please do not do that again, and she gets the idea that I am calling her a liar. As another example, if I argue about something that I am absolutely certain that I am right, and she knows that I am right too, but in the end, she is not gonna say, OK, I am sorry you are right. She would say, 'you are bringing me down.' I say, 'I am not bringing you down; I am just talking about this because I do not want this to happen again.'

Valid gave two examples to show how profoundly cultural differences affected language performance even in the simplest situations:

> ..., and they [classmates] come to me, and say, for example, 'nice job', etc., the problem for me is what to say in response, what is appropriate in their culture, what would they say themselves in these circumstances.... Once I got a birthday card for a friend of mine. I gave it to him, and he was in the class. He was very excited, stood up and started thanking me. The class was very crowded, too. I was speechless. I did not know what to say in response. In Persian, I know what to say. There are a lot of things I can say. I say, 'God willing you live long, you live for 100 years, etc, but I did not know what to tell him in that situation. I was silent. The only thing I managed to say was 'no problem', but I had the feeling that it was not appropriate there. The students next to me were laughing. I regretted my decision. I said to myself, I will never buy a card for anyone, and if I did I will just leave it on their desks.

Religious Background

Religion is an integral part of the culture of a community. It binds people into a unified social group. Religion and culture are so interwoven that it is unimaginable to have a society in which religion has not played a role (Bowker, 2002). In fact, as I said earlier, it is sometimes impossible to designate a clear border between religion and culture. Religion has also a strong impact on other cultural institutions like family, law, marriage, politics and education (Bowker, 2002). Given this profound impact of religion on almost all social institutions, it is no surprise that it turned out as one of the main issues affecting my participants' social interactions with Canadians. Below are a few examples my participants shared with me. I should note here that all my participants were of Iranian origin, and, like most in the Middle East, practiced Islam[3] as their religion.

Kobra, for example, who had been in Canada for nine years reported:

> When I arrived in Canada, I was wearing hijab, and it was very difficult to find a job because of that. I did not shake hands with people either. Well, at the beginning of job interviews, they are used to standing up and shaking hands, and since I did not shake hands, it was a turn off right in the beginning. Especially in Vancouver, there were at that time very few people with hijab. That is why it was very strange to them. They used to think I was ill, or had a disease in the head because of my head-covering. In short, the reactions were not good at all. The Iranian family I was staying with used to baby sit, and I began to realize that people were less willing to bring their kids when I was there. I felt I was hurting their livelihood. After four months, I decided to move out. I began to feel that my stay in their home was not good for them.

Pary, however, thought about her hijab for a long time before coming to Canada, and finally decided to remove it as soon as she arrived. Pary is from a very educated

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[3]Adherents of Islam are obligated to pray five times a day; fast the month of Ramadan every year; eat Halal meat; make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime; avoid any physical contact with the opposite gender; avoid any alcoholic drinks. Women are obligated to cover their hair, and avoid showing their bodies except for their hands, faces, and feet.

family with less religious background. She thinks that hijab should not be mandatory in Iran, and therefore, she was not very happy with the idea of a compulsory hijab to begin with, but when her visa was issued and she was sure she could come to Canada, she had a decision to make. She told me that she knew if she wanted to keep her hijab it would have been a constant reminder of her background in all social interactions. It would have meant that she did not belong here.

Ahmed's lifestyle in Canada was also an example of the effect of religious background on social interaction. He did not socialize much, and he had limited his life in Canada to his academic career because he felt he was obligated by his religion. He also limited his social interactions with the opposite sex because he did not what to hurt their feelings by not shaking hands with them, and he did not want to risk his religious identity either.

Like other male participants, the effect of religion does not surface in the beginning in Ahmed's interview, but when asked, religion is a deciding factor. He said:

> I do not intend to stay here because of my religion. The Quran circles that we had in Iran, the religious festival, ceremonies, and gatherings that we had, I miss them all. I have come here at the age where it is very difficult for someone like me with strong convictions in religion, culture, and national identity, to be able to adapt to this place. I just intend to learn something and take it back to my own people.

Javad who enjoys the most comfort in the English language, however, reported that religious background was not a concern to him at all. He had never hesitated in his communications with other people because of his religion. As I understood from his interview, he had never been concerned to be in the company of someone with a dog, or

shake hands with girls, eat meat, etc. When I asked him if he could comment on his religious beliefs, he remarked:

> I do not care if it is Mohammad or Jesus, the son of God or God saying something. I believe in common sense. If something makes sense, I obey that. I am not Persian, or Canadian, or European. I am myself, a mixture of all.

Gender

Gender is another factor which emerged in my study as affecting my participants' social interactions with Canadians. Pary, one of the female participants, remembered her first few months in Canada, and talked about the discomfort she used to experience in talking to people. She said she seemed very formal to Canadians. There were many things that her culture and her family had instilled in her about how a girl should behave in public that hindered normal social interactions in Canada. Pary said:

> Our femininity is not just our hijab. We have been raised differently from men. Our parents teach us to conduct ourselves properly in the presence of men. There are certain boundaries that we should not cross. Our contacts with men are limited even if they are our co-workers, teachers, etc. We try to avoid looking into their eyes when speaking to them. It is clear that when you have been raised like this all through your life, you are not going to be comfortable interacting with men in Canada. It takes sometime before you can figure out what you think is proper and what is not.

Hoda also gave an example of how gender influenced her opportunities of speaking English in Canada. She described how her clients used to show more interest in her when she worked at a bank because of her gender. She also talked about the occasions where she had been asked for a date. These incidents were certain to create opportunities to practice speaking.

Kobra, too, talked about her freedom to interact with Canadians now that she was married to a Polish-Canadian compared to if she had been married to a Muslim from her own country. She said that she was well aware of the differences between the two cultures, and described how she would have to show regard for her husband's opinions regarding her choice of clothes to wear or the place to go if she had a husband from her own country. It was not just the clothes and the parties that she felt more freedom because of her marriage to a Pole. She also talked about a lot of other small incidents in social interactions that she was sure she would have to be very observant of her behavior if she had a husband from Iran rather than her Polish-Canadian spouse. This freedom allowed her to attend most of the social events, and gave her the chance to practice her English in a lot of situations.

It is not just the female participants who report discomfort at social interactions in Canada because of their gender. Ahmed recalled his social interactions with females in Iran, and says:

> There are some restrictions for social interactions between a man and a woman in Iran imposed by both religion and the culture of the country. Because there are no such restrictions in Canada, I am more comfortable talking to girls in Canada than I was in Iran. But I have noticed that even in Canada, I am more comfortable talking to men than women.

Age

As I explained in Chapter 3, some of my participants had already finished their undergraduate or graduate degrees in Iran, but because their degrees were not accepted by their university, they had to do the same degree here in Canada. As a result, three of my participants turned out to be a few years older than their classmates. This age difference

has also emerged in their descriptions as affecting their social interactions with Canadians. Kobra reported:

> The other thing is that I am the oldest in the class. I mean they are young, go to clubs, etc. I am not that kind of person. I am married with a child, these things do not appeal to me anymore, not that my religion is in the way, but I do not have time for that.

Valid also had the same concern about his opportunities of social interaction in Canada. He thought that he had to have "a close friend to be comfortable with, to talk to, have confidence in," so that they could correct him and give him feedback. He did not have that friend because of his age. His classmates were mostly around 20, but he was 28. As he explained in his life story, this age difference was because his university did not accept his B.Sc. from Iran and he had to start his university studies all over again.

Canadians' Reaction

One of the other factors which most of my participants described as influencing their social interactions was the way they are treated by Canadians. Ahmed, for instance, reported of higher efficiency in English performance when his supervisor helped him with words when he was struggling to express himself. Adel, too, shared his experience of social interactions with graduate students in his department:

> In our department, all graduate students share a study area. This has provided me with the chance to interact with a lot of students, get to know their interests, and even their personal lives. A lot of these students are Canadians or international students who speak the language very well. Although I had to win my membership into this academic group, they have been very kind and supporting since then. This has given me a unique opportunity to practice speaking English language in real context.

I have also drawn much support in my social interactions in Canada from my classmate, Diane (pseudonym). Through time, we developed a very close friendship. In fact, she has been treating me like an older sister. Diane has also invited me to her friend's wedding, Christmas party, and family reunions. Interestingly, despite my reserved personality, I have always felt comfortable going. I seem to have a different social identity with regard to Diane from any other person in Canada, a social identity that has provided me with a lot of opportunities to get involved in social interactions in Canada.

Not all my participants had positive experiences with Canadians' reactions when they interacted with them. Recalling a few incidents where she had mispronounced a word or put the stress on the wrong syllable of a word, Kobra drew my attention to the fact that Canadians' treatment was sometimes very unfriendly. She said:

> You know, I knew I was not perfect in the pronunciation or stress, but I thought that was still meaningful. I simply could not believe that they had not understood. I would like to ask a native speaker if they really do not understand a word if the stress is misplaced because I sometimes get the idea that they do understand, but they just pretend they have not understood. It has happened a lot. Most of the times I think it is the latter; that is, they do understand, but they want to make fun of our speech. I get the feeling that some people here are racist. When they realize some people do not speak well, they want to make fun of them.

Kobra, however, reported being more confident talking to people she knew. She was also more confident speaking with immigrants because "they do not know much English either, and they are more tolerant of my mistakes." Moreover, since immigrants come from different parts of the world, "my religion will not be problem in my social interactions with them." Valid, on the other hand, said that he was more confident talking to international students. Just like himself, international students spoke more slowly, and

they were more accommodating. Moreover, Valid believed international students were more lenient on his mistakes because they were not perfect in speaking English either, and they knew what a big challenge it was to speak a second language. Kobra, too, had a negative impression of some of the questions people asked her:

> You know they immediately ask where I am from. Well, it is obvious I am not Canadian, so I do not think it is a nice question. They ask, "are you Spanish, Philippines, etc.?" it is not related to our conversation at all. You know when we are talking about something else, and they immediately ask me this question which is not related to our discussion, it means I made a mistake, pronounced something incorrectly, or ....

Javad reported of a difference in his performance because of his peers' support. He said:

> It was my first year in Canada, and I was in my third year of high school in a Catholic school. Everything seemed so different. I did not know much English, but my classmates were very supportive and helpful. Little by little, I began to talk and enjoy talking.

Social Obligations

My participants have different social roles and obligations in Canada. The examples below show how these different obligations have affected their social interactions with Canadians. Kobra who is married with a son shared this example:

> I am not particularly interested in parties, but, you know, sometimes you have to go. I remember my supervisor threw a party once. I think it was for the graduation of one of her students. I really did not want to go, but I did not want her to get upset with me either because all the other students she was supervising were supposed to go to. So, I went.

Hoda's social obligation as mother has also played a role in her social interactions with Canadians. She said:

> During the summer, my son went to a martial arts class. I think it was almost the end of the class. Every day he came home and said his teacher had tested some students and had changed their belt color. Gradually I realized, his teacher had tested everybody except for my son. So I asked my son to talk to his teacher, but it did not work out. You know, as a mother, you sometimes need to intervene, to talk to different people to see what is going on with your son. So I went to his teacher and had an argument with him. It worked and he tested my son the next week.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced my participants, described their personalities, their English language learning process, and their social interaction with Canadians. After this detailed description of my participants' profiles, I made a comparison among them in order to make it easier to see their commonalities and differences. Then, I presented the themes that emerged out of data analysis demonstrating factors that affected adult Iranians social interactions in Canada.

The findings of the study revealed that adult Iranians are faced with numerous challenges in their social life in Canada, all of which in turn affect their language development. Opportunity to practice speaking English was the first factor influencing their social interactions in Canada. Poor pronunciation and over-monitoring their utterances was the linguistic challenge they were facing. Data analysis also demonstrated that culture, religious background, gender, age, Canadians' treatment of participants, and context familiarity were the other issues influencing their interactions with Canadians.

In the next chapter, I will present a discussion of these factors, highlight the answers they can offer to my research questions, and evaluate my findings in light of my theoretical framework and literature review.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter, I presented my participants' profiles in detail, and listed the factors that they described as affecting their social interactions with Canadians. It was demonstrated that motivation, opportunity to speak, grammar and pronunciation, culture, religious background, gender, Canadians' reaction, social obligation, and age affected their social interactions in Canada.

In this chapter, I will cross-examine these major themes in light of the literature review as well as the theoretical framework that I illustrated in the second chapter. In this section, I will also be using this discussion to answer the questions of this study. The questions that I intended to address are:

> What challenges do adult Iranians face in their social interactions with Canadians?
> How does "culture" affect adult Iranians' social interactions in Canada?

In the final section of this chapter, I will also discuss the limitations, recommendations and implications of my research.

Motivation

Data analysis revealed that my participants had different motivations to learn English. While Kobra and I were interested in the English language for the sake of the language itself, the other participants seem to have decided to learn English to be able to do better in their own majors, but not necessarily in English. Not only had this motivation been a driving force in the first stages of their language learning, but it also played an important role in their current social interactions in Canada.

Motivation in learning a language has been one of the principles of Krashen's (1981) Affective Hypothesis. He argues that success in language learning depends, among other things, on learners' motivation. In this model, motivation along with self-confidence and anxiety constitute the affective filter. Krashen argues that high motivation means a lower affective filter, which, in turn, results in more available comprehensible input. Because this comprehensible input is vital in language learning, one can understand the important status that motivation enjoys in Krashen's model.

My participants' social interactions, however, indicate that motivation was not exclusively psychological, but it also changed depending on the contexts of their social interactions. I have, therefore, found Gardner's concept of motivation more in agreement with my participants' experiences than Krashen's. While Krashen asserts that motivation is "an intrinsic characteristic of the learner," (p. 4) Gardner (1985) argues that motivation is a subcategory of self-confidence which results from positive experiences while a learner is learning a second language in a social context. By attributing it to learners' positive experiences, Gardner in fact draws our attention to the social aspect of motivation.

Gardner's (1985) model of motivation also gives a better platform to discuss the two kinds of motivation that my participants talked about. Some of my participants, including myself, reported the desire to learn English for the sake of the English language itself. Gardner called this kind of motivation "integrative motivation" where learners desire to become a member of the target community. A couple of other participants simply decided to learn English to have a better chance in their technical majors, which concurs with Gardner's instrumental motivation.

The intrinsic/extrinsic model of motivation, however, can better explain the difference between Ahmed and Pry, on the one hand, and the other participants on the other. Ahmed was extrinsically motivated. He started learning English in the beginning neither for the sake of the English language itself, nor as an instrument to enhance his academic career. He simply did what his parents wanted him to do. Other participants, however, were intrinsically motivated. They had a self-oriented goal in learning the English language. They either wanted to learn English for the sake of the language itself or to enhance their academic career.

Motivation vs. Investment

Although motivation was reported by my participants as affecting their social interactions and their proficiency in the English language, a closer look at their life stories reveals that motivation alone does not guarantee their success in mastering the English language. Ahmed, Pary, and Adel, for example, have all proved their high academic achievements in their own majors, have shown their dedication to their academic goals, and yet when it comes to learning English, although they are eager to learn and immersed in the English speaking community, their efforts have been frustrated by a lot of factors.

Therefore, there seem to be, as Norton (1995) argues, many more factors that influence learners' active engagement in social interactions other than motivation. To capture this totality and have the explanatory adequacy to account for these issues, I will be using the term Norton (1995) has introduced--investment. As defined in Chapter 2, investment is learners' degree of active participation in a specific social interaction

depending on their perceptions of themselves, of the context of speaking and of the people they talk to.

Opportunity to Speak English

Data analysis revealed that, in order to develop language proficiency, it was very important for my participants to have the opportunity to speak with Canadians. All my participants, even Hoda who had some opportunity to speak with English-speaking teachers in Kuwait, reported that Canada had provided them with much better opportunities to practice English than their native country.

My social interactions in Canada, too, have been of major impact on my language development. Even though I did not take advantage of many of these opportunities, the ones that I did use have significantly improved my English language oral proficiency. I remember there were times in the beginning of my arrival in Canada when I thought my English proficiency was deteriorating. Five years on, however, I am confident that it has improved significantly. There are many conversational norms and skills that I have learned in the context of my social interactions with native speakers that would have been impossible had I not been in Canada. The more obvious change for me has been my enhanced fluency. Because I had to catch up with the fast speed of normal conversation, it is now taking me much less time to look for words and express myself, and as a result, I am enjoying better fluency.

In her study of women immigrants in Canada, Norton's (1995) has also made a direct link between her participants' speaking opportunities and their investments in their development of English language. Goldstein (1995), too, found that power structures

within the factory where her Portuguese participants worked had limited their opportunities of social interactions and, as a result, their language development. This finding of the effect of speaking opportunities on second language learning also concurs with Schumann's (1986) Acculturation Model where regular contact with native language speakers is assumed to be an integral part of developing a second language.

The importance of speaking opportunities are also reflected through the theory of Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky defines learning, in general, and language learning, in particular, as *active participation in social interactions.* His principal argument, in fact, is that language is mediated through social interactions. Influenced by Vygotsky's theory, Hall (1993) and Doehler (2002) have also argued that language learning depends on learners' *participation and interaction* with more skilled peers in the class or society. In this section, I used Vygotsky's theory to argue for the importance of speaking opportunities. I should, however, note that this is a very narrow use of his principles. Later in this chapter under Social Identity Formation, I will explain how his theory of human development best captures the totality of all socio-cultural factors involved in my participants' social interactions in Canada.

Vital to language development as speaking opportunities are, my study demonstrated that these opportunities were problematic at best. Despite being in an immersion setting and having more opportunity to practice speaking in Canada, my participants complained that they were not able to make use of many of these opportunities because of certain socio-cultural factors. Norton (1995), too, argues that opportunity to speak is not idealized, but, depending on the power relations that learners face, they invest differently in their social interactions. Some of the factors that limited

my participants' taking advantage of speaking opportunities are the same factors that I will discuss in this chapter as affecting their social interactions in Canada.

Linguistic Aspect of the Language

My analysis of the participants' interviews demonstrated that certain linguistic aspects of the English language are one other factor that influenced their investment in their social interactions with Canadians. Specifically, they described two linguistic problems: over-monitoring the grammatical structure of their utterances and poor pronunciation.

My analysis showed that the deductive method of teaching grammar in educational institutions in Iran and the emphasis that they placed on this skill had made my participants too conscious of it. This constant concern for grammar affected their normal communications in Canada. Emphasizing grammar, however, is not a bad thing in itself, but the problem is that it has become one of the most important concerns for my participants in their conversations. Krashen (1981) describes this problem as over-monitoring. He further states that most language learners over-monitor; that is, they are so anxious about the correctness of their utterances that the normal pace of social interactions is affected.

Because native English-speaking teachers are rare in Iran, my participants also complained about their teachers' poor pronunciation and accents, both of which, they reported, affected their social interactions in Canada. Data analysis further showed that Javad who was the youngest when he came to Canada was the only one who managed to acquire somewhat native-like pronunciation. The other participants had made very little

progress in their pronunciations even after a few years in Canada. My study demonstrated that better pronunciation had improved Javad's chances of social interactions in Canada, but the other participants' poor pronunciation negatively affected their success in their social interactions.

The effect of grammar and pronunciation on my participants' social interaction is in agreement with most SLA theories. From the Grammar-Translation method, with its focus on deductive teaching of grammar and vocabulary (Brown, 2000), to the most recent theories of SLA, learning the linguistic aspects of a language is an important step in developing proficiency. Recent socio-cultural theories of SLA, which attach paramount importance to the role of environment and social interaction, also take it for granted that some kind of formal instruction on the linguistic system of the language has to take place, especially for adult language learners, in order to develop language proficiency (Lantolf and Appel, 1994). The importance of pronunciation and accent in successful communication has also been documented in the works of Brown (2000) and Cook (1991).

Vocabulary building is also a major step in learning the linguistic aspect of a language (Roessingh, 2006), and given the fact that English enjoys a huge vocabulary, I was a bit surprised when few complaints of this nature were reported by my participants. I think there could be three explanations. First, they had very limited social interactions, mostly limited to their academic settings. Obviously, they were much better prepared and trained to interact in their academic environments than in the society at large. Second, they were all high academic achievers who were used to learning more through books than through social interactions. In fact, the English that they had learned was also

through books where vocabulary was needed and emphasized more. Third, in their reports they talked about their training and preparation for the TOEFL or IELTS exam, both of which, my analysis showed, had a strong emphasis on words and grammar but not on social interactions.

Culture

In Chapter one, culture was defined as "a complex frame of reference that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meaning that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community (Ting-Toomey 1999, p.10). Given the huge difference between Iranians' and Canadians' shared beliefs, customs, and values, my participants talked about many incidents where these difference affected their social interactions in Canada. Because of the importance of each one of these components, I decided to have different categories for each one. I will start my discussion with cultural difference where I will limit myself to how differences in non-religious beliefs, customs and values affected my participants' social interactions. Later, religious background, gender, and social obligations as the other aspects of cultural differences will be discussed. This section provides the answer to my second research question about the effect of cultural differences on adult Iranians' social interactions in Canada.

Cultural Differences

One of the findings of this study is that Iranian culture has given my participants a certain orientation to talk about things, behave in ways, take stances in social interactions,

and predict things, which, because different from that of Canadians, affected their social interaction in Canada. To borrow Ting-Toomey's (1999) words, my participants' culture has given them a "frame of reference"—certain linguistic and social habits that have been established through time--through which they see the world, describe it, understand it, and predict it. Many examples of the confusions and misunderstandings that my participants reported demonstrate a clash or mismatch between Canadian and Iranian frames of reference. A discussion of a few of these incidents will now follow.

Kobra's expectation, for example, to talk and hear about fashions in clothes, hairstyle, etc. was most likely not going to be met in her social interaction with her Canadian classmates. Nor would she be able to, or willing to, contribute much to a conversation between Canadians about last night's show, a certain actor or actress. As another example, I have interestingly found myself picking up the Canadian habit of starting my conversations by talking about the weather although it rarely appeared in my social interactions in Iran. It is simply because the weather in Iran is mild for the most part of the year while it changes almost a few times during the day in Canada, and it consequently finds its way in their conversations.

Jokes were also reported to be a matter of confusion and misunderstanding in my participants' social interactions in Canada. Kobra, for example, reported that her jokes were not usually appreciated by Canadians as she did not usually appreciate Canadian jokes either. I also had a few incidents where my jokes were taken literally and led to confusion. For a second language learner, humor is one of the most difficult aspects of a language to grasp because it is very closely connected to culture. The culture-bound nature of language is perhaps most obvious in its jokes and humor.

Valid, too, was frustrated as he could not find a phrase that was culturally suitable in his friend's birthday. Adel, too, had difficulty talking about money to his Canadian roommate. He could not find a phrase in English language that would also accommodate his cultural orientation not to talk about money directly.

I also demonstrated that some of the Iranian cultural features were of particular challenge to my participants. The Iranian cultural features of Tarof (talking about indelicate topics indirectly), interference (being curious of what other people do and think) and Rodarbayesti (reluctance to say "no" to someone's request, etc.) were, in particular, illustrated as influencing my participants' social interactions.

Data analysis also demonstrated that the more my participants were attached to their native culture, the more it affected their social interactions. Ahmed who was obviously dependent on his native culture and saw many aspects of it superior to the Canadian culture had, to a large extent, limited his social life to his academic career, and precluded himself from opportunities to practice speaking in Canada. He showed very little interest in experiencing Canadian culture. Ahmed's only purpose was to get some technical education, and take it back to his own country. Javad, on the other hand, came to Canada when he was barely an adult, and his identity was not as fixed in the Iranian culture. He was, therefore, very adaptable to the Canadian culture. This flexibility allowed him to have more relaxed social interactions with Canadians, one that was less affected by his own Iranian culture.

SLA Research has also implicated the effect of cultural differences on learners' social interactions with native speakers. Hong (2001), for example, made a link between Chinese cultural differences with Canadians and their social interaction in Canada.

Rublik (2006), too, demonstrated that Chinese oral proficiency development in Canada was affected by their cultural features of "maintaining harmony," "saving face," and "listening centeredness."

Second language acquisition research has also investigated the effect of learners' socially-accepted norms of speaking and behavior in their native culture on their social interactions in a second language. Scollon and Scollon (2001), for example, argue that the transfer of values and beliefs from native language to an acquired language is one of the reasons why intercultural misunderstandings between native English speakers and ESL learners can occur. Ochs (2002), too, states that confusions occur when an action or stance is not expected by a speaker or a listener, goes too long or too briefly, happens at the wrong time and place, or is not appropriate for a particular social role, status, or relationship.

One trend of SLA research, while illustrating the effect of cultural differences on second language development, has also made a connection between cultural adaptation and academic achievement. My findings, however, seem to be at odds with this connection. Despite their lack of cultural adaptations, some of my participants enjoy a very good academic standing in their fields. This inconsistency with the literature could be explained in different ways: First, my participants are adults. They need much less support to succeed than children. Moreover, they are in their Masters or PhDs, a high level of education where students bear more individual responsibility for their learning. Every one of them is pursuing a very technical and professional career, one that only a few of their professors can comment on anyway. Second, my participants report that most of their social interactions are in their own academic settings. Since they have had a lot of

professional readings in their majors in the English language, and they have acquired enough knowledge of technical English, they can easily handle such social interactions.

In support of my argument to make a distinction between my participants' social life and their academic achievements, Cummins' (2001), too, has made a distinction between "basic interpersonal communicative skills" and "cognitive-academic language proficiency" (BICS vs. CALP). Based on Cummins' argument, one can argue that while my participants have not yet acquired enough interpersonal skills necessary for their social life, they have indeed acquired advanced cognitive skills necessary for their majors in their native language. In other words, unlike children learning their second language naturally in Canada who quickly master BICS but take 5 to 7 years to attain CALP, my participants are comfortable with CALP but less so with BICS.

SLA literature is so solid on the effect of cultural differences on learners' social interactions that it is now a commonly held assumption that teaching a language necessitates teaching the culture of that language as well (Kohls, 1994). The acculturation model, for instance, holds that to the extent that learners are prepared to acculturate to the same extent they master the target language. In support of the need to integrate culture in second language learning and teaching, Schumann (1978) also conducted a longitudinal study on one particular learner, Alberto, and concluded that he had not been able to make any progress in his language development during the ten months of the study as he had not been able to adapt to the US culture.

Similarly, my participants have not been able to adapt, in most cases, to the Canadian culture, and as a result, their language development has also been hampered.

Religious Background

Although religion is indeed a part of a person's culture, and it could have been discussed under the previous title, I decided to have a separate category for it in my study because religion has a pervasive effect on the social and personal aspects of people's lives (Bowker, 2002). It is, then, no surprise that my participants whose identity had been constructed, at least partly, through a different religion all through their adulthood would find many of the social interactions in Canada challenging.

There is very little research demonstrating the effect of these specific Islamic issues on social interactions and language learning. The thing that is certain, however, is that all these religious concerns blocked or interfered with my participants' speaking opportunities. In so doing, religious identity limited the comprehensible input that had to be available to them in order to develop their language proficiency (Krashen 1982). With religion so interwoven with culture, it can also be argued that the implication of the effect of cultural differences on social interaction (Ochs, 2002; Scollon & Scollon, 2001) is also an implication of the effect of religious identity.

Data analysis demonstrated that religious background did not have the same effect on all my participants' social interactions. Because of the religious obligation to cover their hair which made them so obvious at first sight, women turned up to be more affected in their social interactions than men. All the female participants, Kobra, Pary, and Hoda spent a good amount of time describing how their hijab affected their social interactions in Canada. For example, Kobra's job interview was out of control right from the beginning because of her hair covering and her reluctance to shake hands with her

employer. Religious identity, however, did not surface in male participants' interviews. They only started to talk about it when they were asked to.

The effect of religious identity on social interactions was not the same among male participants either. Although they were not obligated to have a hair covering and their religious identity could go unnoticed as long as the conversation was non-religious, those with a stronger religious identity had more issues to deal with in their social interactions than others. Ahmed, for instance, had a stronger religious identity, and was more affected in his social interactions than others. His discomfort in speaking to women who were not "properly" dressed and his unease to shake hands with them were some of the reasons why he limited his social life in Canada. Moreover, when the issue of long-time plans came up, he was determined to leave Canada after graduation. Javad, on the other hand, came to Canada at a much younger age, and did not possess the same religious identity. As a result, he was much more comfortable in his social interactions. He was "just one of them."

Data analysis further demonstrated that religious background affected my participants' social interactions in Canada in two ways: First, social interaction with Canadians did take place but it was negatively affected like Kobra's job interview in the first few months of her arrival in Canada or Adel's discomfort in his social interactions with the opposite sex. Second, a social interaction did not take place or was not used because my participants decidedly avoided situations where they thought their religious identity would be compromised. Adel, for instance chose a lifestyle in Canada that prevented him from taking advantage of many opportunities of social interactions. Some of the other participants were reluctant to attend social gatherings, or to go to a restaurant

with their friends because they did not want to eat non-halal meat or drink alcohol. They reported that they did not want to compromise their religious identity or hurt other people's feeling by being different.

The effect of my own religious identity on my social interactions in Canada, however, has been more positive than negative. Like the other participants of this study, I have also been reluctant to attend certain social events because of my religious identity, but it has also provided me with a lot of opportunities to speak English. I had the chance of long discussions with the university Chaplin. We used to talk at length about the commonalities and differences between Islam and Christianity. In my social interactions with Muslims in London, I also had to use English because they all come from different parts of the world. This community, of course, has provided me with a lot of opportunities of social interaction.

Gender

Another finding of this study was that gender also played a role in my participants' social interactions with Canadians. Since gender expectations in Iran are different from those in the Canadian culture, gender was also a source of confusion and misunderstanding in their social interactions with Canadians. One of the expectations of Iranian-constructed gender is for women to conduct themselves "properly" in front of their male speakers. Pary's example, in chapter four, illustrated in detail how this expectation affected the quality of her social interactions with male speakers.

Data analysis revealed that gender expectations of men from their wives and wives from their husbands also affected my participants' social interactions in Canada.

Kobra's example is the best illustration of how deeply these expectations can influence and limit opportunities to speak. Kobra explained that she would certainly have had a different social life in Canada had she married someone from her own culture. She had much more opportunity for social interactions because her husband, being from the West, was much less "picky" with her. He had been brought up to see as normal a female's social interactions with the opposite sex, being in their company, being more relaxed in choosing the kind of clothes she wished to wear, attending parties, etc.

While the above examples were the effect of the differences between Iranian and Canadian constructions of gender on their social interactions, my analysis also showed that gender in its general sense--the differences between men and women--had also played a role in my participants' social interactions. Hoda, as an example, described incidents where her clients showed more interest in her and tried to chat her up at the bank because of her femininity. She also talked about the times she had been asked out for a date. Depending on whether she accepted or rejected those offers, she had different speaking opportunities with Canadians.

Norton (2000) has also implicated the role of gender in adult immigrants' social interactions in Canada. Norton stated that "the women's investment in English and their opportunities to practice English were influenced by their gendered identities" (p.88). Ehrlich (2001), too, implicates "gender" in social interactions. Ehrlich believes that gender is a part of social identity. To her, individuals construct themselves as women and men by engaging in cultural and social practices of their native community.

Social Obligations

My participants' social needs were also demonstrated to have affected their social interactions with Canadians. For example, Kobra and Hoda had many more responsibilities as wives and mothers that created more speaking opportunities than other participants of the study. Kobra is married with a son. She talked about her frequent discussions with her son's teacher. She described how she had to buy a Christmas tree for him and celebrate Christmas even though Christmas was never celebrated in her native culture. In her study of immigrant women in Canada, Norton (2000) also made a connection between her participants' social roles and their investments in their English language learning. Norton gave examples of their social interactions where their social demands had, at times, limited or created their opportunities of social interactions.

Javad was also leading a comprehensive social life although in a different sense from that of Kobra and Hoda. As noted above, Javad came to Canada at a young age when he was a high school student. He felt there was peer pressure at that time, and that he had to compete with them for academic achievement and university positions. He adopted Canada as his home and was trying to find his place in the Canadian society. These social demands have created for Kobra, Hoda, and Javad many more opportunities to speak English than other participants.

Ahmed and Adel, on the other hand, were single. They were financially secure because they got university funding. Moreover, their only responsibility was their academic duties. They did not seem to need to be involved with the society at large except for the very basic social needs.

Age

This study has also showed that age was a very important factor influencing my participants' social interactions. Javad, for example, was the youngest participant of this study, and more adaptable to Canadian culture than other participants. Javad was also the only one who had acquired native-like pronunciation. As a result, he had many more opportunities to speak with Canadians than other participants, and his social interactions were less hampered. All other participants of this study, however, had come to Canada at the age where they had already established a solid identity for themselves, one that was not easily adaptable to Canadian culture. Kobra and Valid, in particular, were a lot older than their classmates because the degrees that they had received from Iranian universities had not been accepted in Canada, and they ended up having to do the same degree again. This age difference had made their social interactions with their classmates all the more difficult.

This finding concurs with the widely held belief in the SLA literature that younger people generally learn a language better than older ones. Ellis (1994) states, "Learners who commence learning a second language after their puberty are unlikely to acquire native-like accent," and that "children may be more prepared to share external norms because they have not formed stereotypes of their own identities" (p.201). This finding is also supported by the Critical Period Hypothesis which claims that there is a certain age-range where language learning takes place with very little effort. This hypothesis further claims that after this critical period it is not possible to be completely successful in learning a second language (Brown, 2000).

Canadians' Reactions

Data analysis showed that my participants' social interactions were affected differently depending on how they were treated by the people they talked to. They reported more comfort and efficiency speaking English to people who were kind, supportive and understanding. Ahmed, for instance, said he was more efficient speaking to his supervisor because whenever he had difficulty explaining something, his supervisor helped him with words. Adel, as another example, although complaining about the time it took for him to be accepted as a member of the study area for graduate students, talked about the support he later received from them. He described the times he had asked his officemates questions about a cultural issue whenever he was not sure. My own friendship with my classmate, Diane (pseudonym), is also an example of how the reactions of the people we talk to can enhance our opportunities for social interactions in the Canadian society.

The above examples are a limited number of people that my participants were more relaxed and more efficient to talk to. In most cases, however, they complained that Canadians did not have the patience to tolerate their mistakes and hesitations. Kobra, for example, reported of Canadians' impatience, at best, when she mispronounced a word. She wondered if a mispronounced word would really compromise the flow of communication as much as her officemates pretended it did. At worst, Kobra said that her officemates were racist and sarcastic when she made a mistake. Some of them had even tried to tease her by asking her where she had come from.

Schumann (1986) also confirms this finding and rejects the idealized assumption that native speakers are kind and patient with sufficient time to engage in "negotiation of

meaning" in social interactions. Schumann argues that adult immigrant learners are the ones who have to overcome these challenges, make sure they have access to the target language community, and make sure they are understood. Day (2002), on the other hand, demonstrated how a language learner's relations with peers and a teacher mediate possibilities of language learning. Day studied a male Punjabi-speaking English student named Hari, and showed that Hari had much better chance to speak with a newcomer or with a teacher who cared for him than with more skillful male peers.

The importance of Canadians' reaction to my participants' speech and its effect on their social interactions are also confirmed by Krashen's (1981) Input Hypothesis. Based on Krashen's (1981) theory, the quality of the input that participants are exposed to are also very important in lowering their affective filter. Krashen demonstrates that it is not all kinds of input that conduce to English language development, but just as important is the stress-free quality of the input (Krashen, 1982).

Context Familiarity

The last factor that this study revealed as affecting my participants' social interactions with Canadians was the familiarity with social contexts that they had acquired through time. Adel is a prime example in this regard. His description of his experience in the study area revealed that he had acquired a kind of proficiency, knowing the ropes if you will, of how things are done in his study area. He gradually began to know people by name, their research interests, the projects they were working on, and their family background. He further explained how he became used to their voices and styles of speaking. All these factors helped him to be gradually accepted in the

community of the graduate students and positively affected his social interactions with them.

This situational learning can best be explained by Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of "legitimate peripheral participation." This theory explains how Adel's identity and speaking opportunities changed with time. According to Lave and Wenger, Adel, as a new-comer to the community of the study area, socialized with the older members. This interaction, then, increased over time, and he became more and more experienced how to interact with this academic community. Their theory is especially useful as it acknowledges the fact that, in order to increase their language proficiency, language learners should be accepted as social members of the target language community and not as isolated individuals.

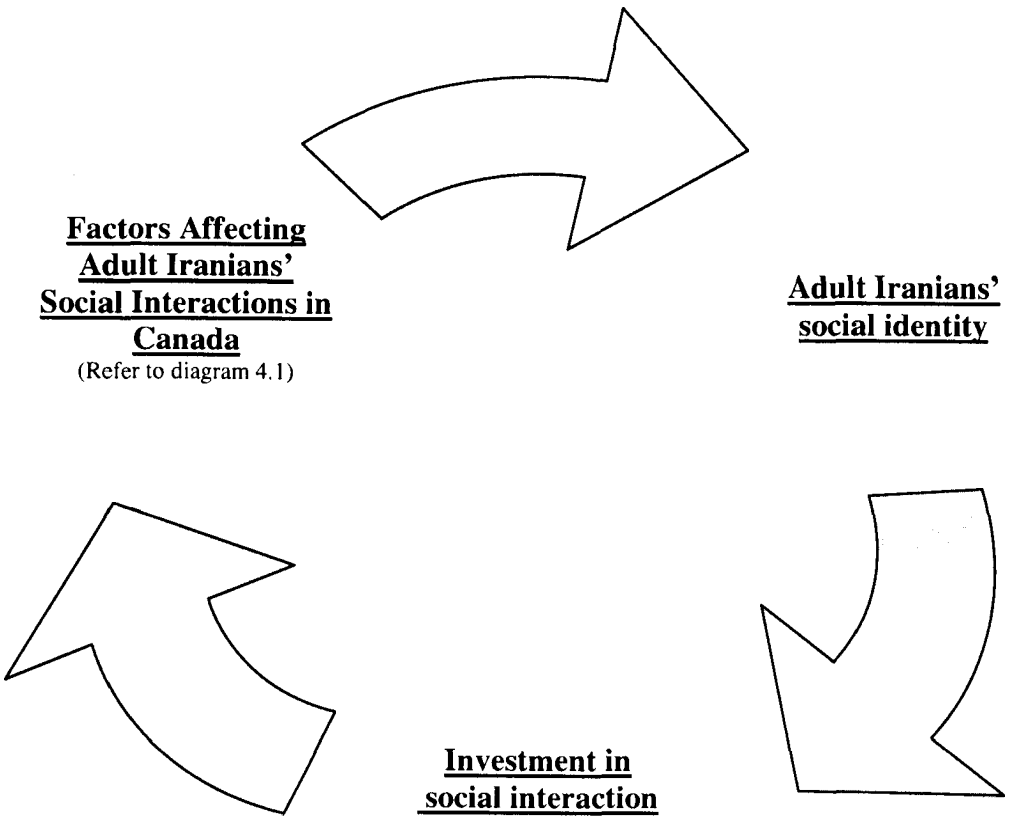
Social Identity Formation

In this chapter, I have so far limited my discussion to the effect of each individual factor on my participants' social interactions with Canadians. My participants' investments in their social interactions, however, were rarely the result of any one of these factors individually. In this section, therefore, I will demonstrate how the aggregate of these socio-cultural factors led to my participants' behaving in a certain way in a specific context.

Diagram 5.1 illustrates how it is the interaction of all socio-cultural factors in a particular context that gives a learner a context-based social identity, and depending on that social identity, the learner may decide to invest differently in his/her social interactions. This diagram also shows that even the interaction of all the socio-cultural

factors for one particular learner is not going to be the same, but depending on the feedback that they get from their social interactions, the next time around, these factors are going to have a different interaction. To clarify this point, I will present a few examples of my participants' social interactions in the following paragraphs.

Diagram 5.1:
Social Identity and Investment in SLA



In the preceding sections, Kobra's social identity, for example, was demonstrated to be under the effect of many factors individually. It was positively affected by her sociable personality, her integrative motivation, her social role as a mother and a wife, her marriage to a Polish-Canadian, etc. Kobra's social interactions were also affected by some negative factors like her age difference with her classmates, her desire to talk about topics that were not common among Canadians, poor pronunciation, Canadians' reactions to her jokes, etc. It is, however, very simple-minded to assume that these factors are always going to have the same effect. Two similar incidents in Kobra's life can show how any one of these factors can be overruled by other important factors in a speaking opportunity.

In one incident, Kobra declined her classmates' invitation to a party, and argued that she was not interested in parties and bars because of her age. In the other incident, she did accept the invitation to attend the party that her supervisor had thrown, and argued that her social obligation required that she attend. In the first incident, Kobra's lack of interest in parties was her only priority which influenced her decision not to take part in the social interaction opportunity with her classmates. In the second incident, however, she had other concerns that were more important. Any potential reluctance to attend her supervisor's party was overruled by her priority not to upset her relationship with her supervisor.

My own experience of social interactions in Canada is another example of how socio-cultural factors interact differently in different contexts. As I explained earlier, I was very hesitant to attend certain social events, and tried to cut short many of my speaking opportunities whenever my religious identity was compromised. Yet, this

compromise did not seem to bother me, or was not my first priority whenever my friend, Diane, invited me to Canadian social events. I was comfortable with her. I could predict how she would behave, and I knew she would take into consideration my sensitivity to certain cultural and religious things. All these factors usually overcame my religious concerns.

Javad and Valid are probably the best illustration of how socio-cultural factors interact with one another and create different social identities that would affect social interactions. Although they are brothers, have the same family background, share the same culture, and have been in Canada for 5 years, their social interactions have not provided them with the same opportunity to improve their language proficiency. Their common features alone were not enough to ensure similar chances of social interactions and language development for them. Some of the factors that made Javad's social identity more amenable to social interactions with Canadians were identified in this study as his much younger age at the time of arrival, his more adaptable personality, more flexible ego, as well as the peer pressure that he had to face in high school in Toronto. For Vahid, however, there were some other factors affecting his social interactions and language development. His age difference with his classmates and his ego were most influential in precluding him from using his opportunities to speak English.

My discussion about the interaction of socio-cultural factors concurs with Norton's (1995) studies of immigrants in Canada. In her study of immigrant women, Norton (1995) demonstrated that her participants' language learning required an investment that depended on not just one or two variables, but the interaction of all socio-cultural factors. She showed how her participants' motivation, attitudes, language

proficiency before coming to Canada, and their social roles gave each of them a certain disposition--a context based social identity—that affected their opportunity to speak English with Canadians. In a study of language choice among female Portuguese immigrant workers in a Canadian factory, Goldstein, (1995) too, demonstrated how ethnicity, gender, social class, and power structures were influential in women's acquisition and use of English.

The most potent argument for the role of all these socio-cultural factors in second language learning is probably made through the theoretical framework that Vygotsky (1978) initiated. The basic argument in Vygotskian (1978) theory is that language learning takes place within an interactive context where participants engage in social activities, and that learning involves both individual and social factors. In the next few paragraphs, I will illustrate some of my findings in light of these principles.

My participants' opportunities for speaking English were demonstrated to be of vital importance in their English language development. Despite some years of formal instruction in Iran, none of my participants could communicate effectively upon their arrival in Canada because they had simply learned English out of context. According to Vygotsky, however, language will only evolve through learners' active social interactions.

My analysis also showed the interference of Persian language and culture into their English oral performance. This interference is also in line with Vygotsky's (1978) argument that second language learning is mediated by the first language because a learner no longer refers to the world of objects when internalizing the concepts of a second language.

My findings are also confirmed by Vygotsky's (1978) argument for the involvement of individual and social factors. Contrary to psychological studies of SLA, my study demonstrated that language learning was not only psychological depending on individual factors, but social as well. My participants' language learning was through the interaction of both their individual factors like motivation and socio-cultural factors like cultural difference, religious identity, gender, etc.

The findings of this study also demonstrate the contribution that Vygotsky's (1978) concept of ZPD can make to instruction as an important aspect of learning a second language. Ahmed's friendly speaking opportunity with his supervisor provided him with the support that Vygotsky (1978) considers as vital in learning a language. Another example of the importance of this special kind of learning is the support that Adel received from graduate students in the study area.

Since Norton (1995) stresses the importance of "power relations," in adult immigrant learners' social interactions in Canada, I was surprised why it did not turn up as one of the major factors affecting my participants' social interactions. Although a couple of them did report unease in their interactions with their supervisors, power relations were not as obvious in my study as it was in Norton's. One reason could be the fact that Norton (1995) investigated a much larger spectrum of immigrants than just university students. It should also be noted that relations of power are generally more obvious in the society at large, where Norton has grounded her research, than in a university, where I recruited my participants.

All in all, except for Javad, none of my participants was able to form a native-like social identity that would be most amenable to social interactions with Canadians. Even

Kobra and Hoda, who acquired some comfort in their social interactions with Canadians, reported more attachment to their Iranian culture and friends. Ahmed, Kobra, and Adel, for example, showed more dedication to attend mosque and the Quran circles than Canadian social events. Hoda and Pary, although not showing the same interest in religious events, attended Iranian traditional and cultural ceremonies such as Nurooz[4]. My participants interacted more with the Iranian community than the Canadian society at large, which is of course in line with the Canadian policy of integration but not assimilation. Goldstein (1995) conducted a study that demonstrated similar results. In her study of Portuguese immigrants in Canada, Goldstein demonstrated that her participants largely lived in the isolation of their own communities. She further demonstrated that Portuguese immigrants relied more on their native community in Canada than on the Canadian society to satisfy their needs.

In my discussion so far, I implicated the individual effect of socio-cultural factors on my participants' social interactions, and then discussed how the interaction of these factors would give a learner a certain social identity that would block or improve their investments in the opportunities to speak English. From time to time, I have also made a brief note of the relationship between their investments and their language proficiency. In the final section of my discussion, therefore, I will compare my participants' overall investments in their speaking opportunities with the proficiency level that they have acquired. I should once again note that since learners' perceptions were the most important variable in my study, I have not used any formal measuring instrument to

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[4] Nurooz: a holiday that marks the beginning of the Iranian new year. All Iranians, regardless of their religious background, celebrate it. This holiday is in honor of Spring and symbolizes rebirth and renewal.

evaluate their proficiency. Instead, I have relied on their word of how comfortable and successful they thought they were in their social interactions with Canadians.

Investments and English Language Proficiency

Data analysis revealed a trajectory of my participants' investments, and as a result a trajectory of English proficiency. On the top-end of the spectrum is Javad who identifies himself as "one of them [Canadians]," "competing for my position in the Canadian society." Javad has made more investment in his speaking opportunities than other participants, and is the most proficient, too. Following Javad are Hoda and Kobra. They have both been in Canada for a long time. Their social interactions have also created for them many more opportunities to speak English. They have, therefore, developed better language proficiency than other participants, but not as good as that of Javad, most probably because they were a lot older when they arrived in Canada than Javad.

On the bottom end of the spectrum, there is Ahmed. Ahmed has the most affinity to his native culture. He considers many aspects of his culture superior to those of Canadians. He wants to "learn some technical knowledge and take it back home." For Ahmed, his social life means his academic career. Ahmed's investment in most of the speaking opportunities that he had was very low. As a result, his proficiency is the lowest of all. On this end of the spectrum and next to Ahmed stand Valid and Adel. Valid is an immigrant and is eager to socialize, but his attempts have largely failed so far due to his relatively fixed Iranian identity and his age difference with his classmates.

I place myself in the upper end of this continuum after Jalil, Hoda, and Kobra. Although I am much better than Hoda and Kobra in grammar and pronunciation, they are more proficient in their social interactions with Canadians simply because I have not been able to invest as much in my language development as they have. They have been in Canada longer, and have had more social responsibilities because of their marriage and their children. These factors were certain to provide them with more opportunities to speak English. I also had the disadvantage of my personal problems, which made my social interactions in Canada even the more difficult.

As noted earlier, Norton (2000), too, made a connection between learners' investment in their opportunities of speaking and their English language proficiency. She argued that depending on the social identities that learners had adopted in different speaking opportunities, they had participated differently in their social interactions. These different opportunities to participate had led to their overall high/low investments in language learning and, as a result, high/low language proficiency.

Conclusion

In this study, grounded theory methodology was used to analyze interview data from eight adult Iranians in Canada. The purpose was to investigate the factors that influenced their social interactions with Canadians, and, as a result, affected their English language development. The themes that emerged out of data analysis were explained against the backdrop of the theoretical framework and literature review that I illustrated in the second chapter. Vygotsky (1978), in particular, was drawn upon to explain the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of language learning. In my discussion, I also

used a lot of the insights that Krashen's (1981) theory, Acculturation Model, and Norton's Social Identity Formation had to offer for the process of second language development.

In this final section, I will revisit and answer my research questions in light of the theoretical framework in which I grounded my research as well as the literature review that informed my analysis. The questions that I raised in the beginning of this research were as follows:

1. What challenges do adult Iranians face in their social interactions with Canadians?
2. How does "culture" affect adult Iranians' social interactions in Canada?

Challenges for Adult Iranians' Social Interaction

My participants faced different challenges in their social interactions with Canadian. Linguistically, they were challenged by their poor pronunciation as well as their constant worry about the grammatical correctness of their utterances. Learning the linguistic aspect of language is also emphasized in recent socio-cultural theories of SLA. Although these theories consider the role of environment and social interactions as vital in learning a language, they acknowledge that some kind of formal instruction on the linguistic system of the language has to take place, especially for adult learners, if they are to attain full proficiency in that language (Lantolf and Appel, 1994). I also used Karshen's (1982) Monitor hypothesis and Affective Filter Hypothesis to argue that my participants' concern for grammatical correctness limited their comprehensible input, and consequently, affected their social interactions in Canada.

The opportunity to speak English also significantly influenced my participants' language learning. It was demonstrated that my participants had more opportunity to

speak English in Canada than in Iran, and that their English language proficiency had, therefore, improved in ways that was not possible in Iran. Norton's (2000) and Goldstein's (1995) studies of women immigrants in Canada, too, demonstrated the importance of speaking opportunities in developing second language proficiency.

This study, however, demonstrated that their opportunities to speak were problematic at best. My participants had an idealized situation in mind where all native speakers would be kind, supportive, and patient to repair a collapse in social interactions. To account for the problematic nature of speaking opportunities, however, Norton's (2000) concept of investment was more useful. Norton argued that her participants, depending on their investments in their speaking opportunities, had developed different language proficiencies.

Motivation was another factor affecting my participants' dedication to learn the language and the extent of proficiency they attained. Generally, the participants who had decided to learn English for the sake of the English language itself had invested more in their language learning, and acquired higher language proficiency than those who had learned English to enhance their chances of progress in their own fields. I argued that Gardner's (1985) model of motivation could better explain these two kinds of motivation that my participants referred to. Data analysis also demonstrated that motivation was not just psychological depending on the individual, but social as well, changing according to the positive experiences in social interactions. This concept of motivation was more in line with Gardner's model of motivation than Krashen's.

The fact that my participants were not familiar with the Canadian settings, topics, and people also affected their social interactions. In short, their lack of knowledge about

the Canadian way of doing things in the beginning affected their social interactions. I used Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of "legitimate peripheral participation" to argue that the more my participants became familiar with the Canadian culture, the more proficient they became.

For my participants, cultural differences ware demonstrated to be the biggest challenge in their social interactions. I defined culture as a frame of reference that consisted of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meaning. Data analysis revealed that cultural differences between my participants and Canadians gave them different frames of reference which affected their social interaction. I argued that certain linguistic and social habits of my participants in their native language led to confusions and misunderstandings in their social interactions in Canada.

This finding concurred with Ochs's (2002) argument. Ochs attributes difficulties and breakdowns in communication to unexpected actions, stances and social roles that learners and native speakers adopt in a certain social interaction. Scollon and Scollon (2001), too, argued that the transfer of values, beliefs, and socially established norms of conversation from native language to the target language can result in confusions and misunderstandings.

I also used Ting-Toomey's (1999) argument to demonstrate the effect of cultural differences on second language acquisition. She argues for a direct and inseparable link between language and culture, and then, argues that it is the transfer of cultural values, beliefs and norms that makes speaking a second language especially challenging, and causes confusions and misunderstandings in social interactions.

The Iranian cultural features of Tarof (talking about indelicate topics indirectly) and Rodarbayesti (reluctance to say "no" to someone's request, etc), were, in particular, demonstrated to affect their social interactions. They were facing two difficulties because of these cultural features: first, these two cultural features had instilled in them different etiquette from Canadians as to how to start a conversation, finish it, and respond appropriately according to a certain topic or a situation. Second, these cultural features necessitate a high level of language proficiency, which they did not possess, and even if they had such a high proficiency to express these nuances of meaning, Canadians might still be confused as it would not be the way Canadians would approach these topics.

My participants' religious identity was another cultural issue affecting their social interactions with Canadians. The obligations that their religion imposed on them affected the social interactions in two ways: they were not relaxed in the interactions that did take place with Canadians, or/and they decidedly avoided participating in many social interactions because they did not want to risk compromising their religious identity or hurt other people's feelings. Although research literature on the specific cases of Islamic identity interfering with social interactions is rare, this finding is supported by studies that implicate the role of personal beliefs on social interactions in general (Gonzalez, 2004). Since religion is an important part of culture, this finding is also supported by research that implicates "culture," as a whole, on learners' social interactions (Schumann, 1978 and Kohls, 1994).

Another cultural issue that affected my participants' social interaction with Canadians was gender. This study showed that my participants' cultural construction of gender necessitated a distinct code of behavior, and demanded certain expectations that

were different from those of Canadians, and as a result, interfered with their social interactions in Canada. In a study on women immigrant in Canada, Norton (2000) also demonstrated how gender affected her participants' speaking opportunities as well as their investments in their language learning.

My study also demonstrated that my participants' social obligations as mothers and/or wives created more speaking opportunities for them, and helped them improve their English. It was argued that, because of these obligations, they simply had to get more involved with the Canadian society than my single participants. This necessity acted as a positive pressure for them to improve their English language. My single participants, however, had very few responsibilities and family ties in Canada, and their social interactions were limited to their academic settings.

In this study, I also illustrated that my participants' social interactions were affected depending on how they were treated by the people they talked to. My participants reported more comfort and more proficiency speaking to Canadians who were patient, kind and supportive. On the contrary, they were reluctant to engage in social interaction with people who were sarcastic or made fun of their accents. Norton (2000) and Day (2002) were quoted to illustrate how a language learner's relations with peers and a teacher could mediate possibilities of social interactions and language learning.

Limitations of the Study

Just like any other researcher, I am an inevitable part of my study. I focus on what *I* consider important and what *I* think is related to the process of SLA. Therefore, the

findings of this research should be perceived with an eye on truth claims and the subjectivity of the researcher. My findings in this research should not be perceived as the final word on language socialization; rather, as grounded theory puts it, my findings would be an approximation of the story of second language learning constructed between me and my interviewees. Although I have tried to support my findings with the related literature, I must also acknowledge that as a researcher I have had my own biases in my selection of the research topic, participants and their quotations. It should be noted that all my findings are the result of my interpretations of what my participants have most likely meant.

One other important limitation of my study is that my participants came only from the Iranian *student* population. As I explained in Chapter 3, because of my status as a student, most of the participants that I managed to recruit through networking ended up being from the student population. Therefore, I cannot be certain if my participants' concerns are shared by the Iranian community at large.

This research has been all about perceptions. Whether my participants are right or wrong in their perceptions is not the focus of this study, and not a limitation in itself, because these perceptions, as they report, have affected their social interactions, which is perfectly in line with the purpose of this study. The limitation, however, is their ability to have accurately described their perceptions to me. Just as much of a limitation is *my* ability to have understood their descriptions as what they have really meant. As I said, I was not able to observe them in real life situations, and there was no way I could back up their perceptions detailed in their interviews with their actions in their social interactions.

Implications of the Study

Based on the findings of my study as well as my several years of experience in teaching English, I agree with the assertion of socio-cultural approaches to SLA that learners should be at the center of the learning process. These approaches have made a lot of recommendations in this regard, but their suggestions seem to have focused on how, for example, curriculum should consider power relations or how teachers should teach in order to ensure the centrality of the learners in language learning. I looked at the centrality of learners, especially adult immigrants, in a different way, and now offer a few suggestions accordingly. I suggest that adult learners be informed of challenges ahead. For example, adult immigrants should be informed of, and more importantly expect, some form of power relations, gender issues, cultural difference and religious concerns in their social interactions with their interlocutors. I believe adult immigrants would benefit greatly from this advance notice, and it would cause less stress and more confidence in their interactions. Adult immigrants who are informed in advance would evaluate their priorities, needs, and personalities, and as a result, would prepare themselves, in ways that only they can think of, for what is to come.

My study also concurs with the socio-cultural approaches to SLA in that language is mediated in a community of practice where learners actually do things with the language, and where they can be active participants in the learning process. Therefore, in foreign language teaching contexts, like the one in Iran, classrooms *must* take the place of learning environments. The following are a few suggestions in this regard.

The first suggestion, recognizing that classrooms are environments of social activity, is that educators should have the highest concern for what learners bring to these

learning contexts, and build on them. Starting with the Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis to current sociological studies of language, there has always been an emphasis on the role learners can play in their learning process. This emphasis has just grown in strength and nature.

The way educators view language learners can also have a bearing on making the classroom an environment of social activity. They should start looking at learners as social participants rather than language acquirers. In current literature on socio-cultural research, there is a shift of terminology from "acquisition" to "participation." This shift should draw our attention to the distinction between "having or possessing something by a recipient" as opposed to "becoming a participant in various aspects of practice, discourse, activity, and community" (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000). This distinction has profound implications for learning. If we, for example, adopt the term "acquisition" as a measurement for achievement, then failure to achieve may be attributed to an individual's low aptitude, lack of motivation, etc. If, on the other hand, participation is adopted, then an individual's failure to achieve could be accounted for by, for example, an individual's marginalization from the community of practice, insufficient mediation from an expert, or inadequate access to a learning community.

Still in accordance with the centrality of the learner, there are a few more suggestions that my participants have made to any Iranian who plans to come to the West. They advised their fellow Iranians that they emphasize vocabulary even more, improve their pronunciation, practice speaking, learn about the Canadian culture before arriving, and be prepared for the challenges.

There are a few other suggestions that can be made based on my teaching experience and my participants' descriptions of their social interactions. Most of my Iranian students complained about lack of ideas in their conversations and the fear of making mistakes in front of their friends. I suggest that teachers divide their students into small groups, and devise tasks that invoke ideas like asking them to describe a picture, a map, or a diagram. They can also give them topics to think about before the class. This would reduce their stress, and help them with a certain topic to discuss.

It is clear from my participants' stories that English language learning is deeply linked with social, cultural, and ideological customs of the community of practice. This calls for Iranian institutes to adapt their curriculum, teaching, and materials to the reality of the English language as spoken by native speakers. English culture in particular should be included in teaching materials.

Suggestions for Further Research

As my study of the Iranian community showed, each minority group, due to its unique background, has its own challenges in social interactions with mainstream interlocutors. Therefore, as a general line of inquiry, I suggest that more ethnographic research on minority groups be conducted. These studies would provide a detailed description of the actual situations and needs of each minority group, which in turn would help them overcome their challenges, improve their English, and facilitate their integration into the Canadian society.

In my study, I focused on learners' perceptions of their challenges in socializing with the Canadian community, and have mainly collected my data through interviews. A

recommendation for future research would be to complement interview data with a longitudinal study. A longitudinal study would give a much more comprehensive picture of how learners' perceptions of themselves and their interlocutors would actually play out in real time interactions.

One of the findings of my study was that most of my participants became more acculturated with time even if the degree of acculturation varied with each participant. It is, however, interesting if a future research could follow up participants like "Hoda" and "Kobra", who seem very resistant to adapt to the Canadian culture to understand how they would change, if any, or what would be like for them if they remain as resistant. It would also be interesting to conduct a more detailed study to identify the factors that make such participants so resistant in the first place.

Two of my participants were married with children. Although it was not the focus of my study to investigate how they deal with their children, it could be an interesting research project if these two cases were further investigated to see if and to what extent they were comfortable in their dealings with their children. Another related suggestion for research could be an exploration of how these young people, the second generation immigrants, would negotiate their identity.

Final Word

This study demonstrated that the major obstacle for my participants' social interactions with Canadians was their cultural differences. Their Iranian culture had instilled in them a certain set of socially-construed rules and norms of social interaction that, as Haslett (1989) argues, enabled them to interpret, understand and communicate

with one another. This study showed these norms and rules had given my participants a frame of reference in social interaction that was different from that of Canadians, and therefore, resulted in confusions and misunderstandings in their communications.

I demonstrated that English language instruction in Iran had not prepared my participants for effective communication with Canadians. This study also demonstrated that, despite a few years of social interactions in Canada, almost none of my participants had yet become comfortable with the Canadian frame of reference and faced various challenges in their social interactions. Are ESL researchers and educators, therefore, neglecting the fact that, as Sridhar and Sridhar (1986) stated, the goal of SLA is bilingualism?

The lived experiences of my participants and myself about our social interactions in Canada, however, prevent me from answering "yes" to this question. If a bilingual, as Sridhar and Sridhar expect, has to master the cultural frame of reference of a society in order to freely communicate with its members, how does he/she reconcile with two identities and two value systems? Some of the examples that my participants shared with me about the effect of their religious identities on their social interactions question the assumption that adults can ever get comfortable with these issues. It seemed that they had to make a choice between two value systems. They had to compromise one way or another. In this sense, bilingualism seems to be better explained as a process of approximation, one that may never correspond with that of native speakers. No matter how comfortable a person, like Edward Said (1999), is in two languages, there will be times when he/she feels the nostalgia of one language when he/she is speaking the other.

I, therefore, tend to concur with Hoffman (1991) who said, "From whatever angle we look at it, bilingualism is a relative concept."(p.31)

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APPENDIX I

Letter of Information and Consent Form

Project Title:
The Impact of Adult Iranians' Social Identities on their English Oral Proficiency

My name is Mohsen Mahmoudi and I am a PhD student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into Iranians' social identity and their English language learning, and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

What is the purpose of this study?

The aims of this study are to explore different speaking opportunities for adult Iranians and see if their social identity help or hurt their efforts in English language learning, and in what way. I am particularly interested to explore speaking situations where Iranians are most comfortable or most uncomfortable to interact with Canadians.

What is the criterion for participating in this study?

If you are an Iranian who has left Iran at the age of 18 and above, you are invited to participate in this study.

What is the procedure?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed at a time and place of mutual convenience. The interview can be in Persian or English, depending on your preference, will be audio taped, and will last 45 to 60 minutes. It will ask you to talk about your experience of English language learning and your perception of interacting with native speakers in Canada. I would also like to observe you in a real-time interaction. Participation in the observation is optional. You may decide to participate in the interviews and not the observations, or you may agree to participate in both sections. If you also agree to be observed, I will get your instructor's permission to attend one of your courses for a few sessions, and I will make notes about your oral performance in English, your potential difficulties in interaction, the interactional contexts in which you feel most uncomfortable with, or most comfortable with. The observation won't be audio or video taped.

Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation:

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. There are no known risks to participating in this study. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your academic status. Should you decide to participate, the information you provide will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study

will be kept confidential. Throughout the study, pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and privacy. Data gathered will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office at the Faculty of Education. One year after the completion of the study, all materials and records will be destroyed.

Who should you contact with any questions?

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research subject you may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics, the University of Western Ontario at 519-661-3036 or ethics@uwo.ca. If you have any concerns or questions about this project, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor Dr. Suzanne Mijhanovich.

Thank you,

Mohsen Mahmoudi

CONSENT FORM

The Impact of Adult Iranians' Social Identities on their English Oral Proficiency
Mohsen Mahmoudi

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

Signature:---------- Date: ----------

Printed Name of the Person Obtaining Informed Consent:----------

Signature of the Person Obtaining Informed Consent:----------

Date:----------

APPENDIX II

Interview Guide

Demographic Information:

First name:
Last name:
Age:
Gender:
Major:
Length of stay in Canada:

Five Major Themes of Investigation:

- Process of English language learning both in Iran, if any, and in Canada
- Your perceptions of your proficiency
- Comfort level in communicating in English, interacting with native speakers, and participating in social events
- Contexts in which and people with whom you are more comfortable and more skilled to socialize
- Contexts in which and people with whom you are less comfortable and less skilled to socialize

The Question Guide to Investigate the above Themes

1. What was your purpose of immigrating to Canada? (Educational, cultural, political, social reasons)
2. Why did you decide to learn English? Do you think you have achieved your purpose? Has that purpose changed at all along the way?
3. What was English language teaching like in Iran both at public schools and English Language Teaching Institutes? What do you think of the books, methods, etc. used there?
4. What was particularly good/bad about their teaching method? Why?

5. Have you ever had the opportunity to talk to native speakers of English (Canadian, American, British) before coming to Canada? Did you ever have native English-speaking teachers?

6. Have you taken any English proficiency test? How did you perform in its oral section? Was that with a native speaker? What do you think of these language proficiency tests?

7. How do you perceive your English language ability? How satisfied are you with it? What shortcomings, if any, do you see in it?

8. What do your friends, both Iranians and Canadians, think of your English? What do your teachers think of your oral performance?

9. Have you taken any English language classes in Canada to improve your English?

10. How do you describe your interactions with Canadians inside and outside the classroom?

11. What subjects are you particularly good at or bad at?

12. Do you have an English nick name?

13. What do you most use your English language for in Canada?

14. How comfortable are you speaking to Iranian/Canadian men/women?

15. Are there any contexts in which you are more willing and more comfortable to talk? How? In what language?

16. Are there any people with whom you are more willing and more comfortable to talk? How? In what language?

17. Are there any contexts in which you are less willing and less comfortable to talk? How? In what language?

18. Are there any people with whom you are less willing and less comfortable to talk? How? In what language?

19. Do you speak English at home?

20. Do you speak English with your brothers and/or sisters?

21. How many Canadian friends do you have? How and when did you become friends?

22. How do you describe your relationship with Canadians?

23. Do you have a girl friend/boyfriend?

24. Do you like reading? What do you read most? In Persian or in English?

25. How comfortable are you in Canada? Do you plan to stay in Canada?

APPENDIX III

APPROVAL OF PhD THESIS PROPOSAL **Form A**

If the proposed research does not involve human subjects or the direct use of their written records, video-tapes, recordings, tests, etc., this signature form, along with ONE copy of the research proposal should be delivered directly to the Graduate Education Office for final approval.	**If the proposed research involves human subjects, this signature form, along with ONE copy of the research proposal and THREE copies of the Ethical Review Form must be submitted to the Chair of the Ethical Review Committee, Graduate Office, Faculty of Education.**

IT IS THE STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE A COPY OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL (INCLUDING REVISIONS) TO THE THESIS SUPERVISOR AND ALL MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

Student's Name: Mohsen Mahmoudi

TITLE OF THESIS: Iranian University Students' perceptions of their Social Interactions in Canada

DOES THIS RESEARCH INVOLVE THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS: YES ☐ NO ☐

Name of Thesis Supervisor: _____

Name(s) of Members of the Thesis Advisory Committee: _____

_____

APPROVAL SIGNATURES:

Graduate Student: _____

Thesis Supervisor: _____

Advisory Committee: _____

_____

Ethical Review Clearance: _____

Review #: _____ Date: _____

Chair of Graduate Education: _____ Date: _____

A STUDENT MAY PROCEED WITH RESEARCH WHEN A COPY OF THIS FORM CONTAINING ALL APPROVAL SIGNATURES HAS BEEN RECEIVED.

A COPY OF THIS PROPOSAL MAY BE MADE PUBLIC AND KEPT ON A TWO-HOUR RESERVE IN THE EDUCATION LIBRARY.