



**L2 LEARNERS' SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS
OF SELF-INITIATED INTERACTION WITH
PEERS IN OUT-OF-CLASS SITUATIONS**

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Trabajo de grado elaborado como requisito parcial para optar al título de
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RESUMEN

TÍTULO: L2 LEARNERS' SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SELF-INITIATED INTERACTION WITH PEERS IN OUT-OF-CLASS SITUATIONS*

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PALABRAS CLAVES:

Representaciones sociales, suficiencia oral, iniciación de interacciones.

Este estudio identifica y describe las representaciones sociales que los estudiantes matriculados en el programa de licenciatura en inglés tienen hacia la iniciación de interacciones con pares en la lengua extranjera (inglés) fuera del salón de clase. Esto con el objetivo de saber por qué los estudiantes son reacios a iniciar una interacción por fuera del aula de clase y descubrir si existe alguna relación entre las representaciones sociales y el nivel actual de suficiencia oral. Este proyecto se basa en estudios teóricos sobre factores sociales tales como los contextos de aprendizaje formal e informal; la interacción y su relación con el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua y una lengua extranjera; y la manera como los aprendices construyen sus representaciones mentales de una segunda lengua.

Para su realización, el proyecto emplea un enfoque descriptivo que utiliza métodos cualitativos llevándose a cabo con 15 estudiantes de primero, tercero y quinto año de la licenciatura. Además, emplea varias técnicas de recolección de datos como cuestionarios, auto evaluaciones y entrevistas, que tienen como finalidad encontrar las representaciones sociales y los niveles actuales de suficiencia oral de los participantes.

El proyecto se realiza en dos etapas. En la primera, los estudiantes responden cuestionarios con preguntas abiertas y cerradas acerca de las representaciones sociales de los estudiantes con respecto a la iniciación de una interacción. En la segunda, los participantes auto evalúan su nivel de suficiencia oral utilizando una lista de indicadores de logro y poco después su nivel actual de suficiencia oral es evaluado por medio de una entrevista oral de suficiencia. Finalmente, se describen los resultados de cada uno de los instrumentos y se comparan entre si para dar respuesta a las preguntas de investigación propuestas en el estudio y se proponen algunas sugerencias para futuras iniciativas en el área.

* Proyecto de Grado

** Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Escuela de Idiomas. Director: Esperanza Revelo

ABSTRACT

TITLE: L2 LEARNERS' SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SELF-INITIATED INTERACTION WITH PEERS IN OUT-OF-CLASS SITUATIONS*

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KEYWORDS:

Social representations, oral proficiency, self-initiated interactions.

This research project seeks to identify and describe L2 learners' social representations of self-initiated interactions with peers in the TL outside the classroom. The aim of this search is to know why L2 learners enrolled in the English language teaching program at UIS are reluctant to self-initiate an interaction outside the classroom and to find out if there is any relation between L2 learners' social representations and their current level of oral proficiency. This project is based on theoretical foundations related to social factors such as informal and formal learning contexts, interaction and its relation to second and foreign language learning, and how learners construct their mental representations of the L2.

The project is conducted using a descriptive approach that involves qualitative methods and 15 participants from first, third, and fifth year enrolled in the ELT program. Furthermore, it appeals to several techniques of data collection such as questionnaires, self-assessments, and interviews, whose main purpose is to find students' social representations and their actual level of oral proficiency.

The project is divided into two stages. In the first stage, the participants answer the close and open-ended questionnaires intended to gather data concerning learners' social representations of self-initiated interactions. In the second stage, the participants self-assess their level of oral proficiency using a checklist with can do statements; and soon afterwards, their current level of oral proficiency is evaluated through an oral proficiency interview. Finally, the results obtained from each of the instruments are described and compared to give answer to the posed research questions and some suggestions are proposed for further research projects in the field.

* Proyecto de Grado

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INTRODUCTION

As students who have spent more than four years of our lives learning English as a Foreign Language and as teachers who have worked with Teenagers at UIS Language Institute for over a year; we have perceived that our present level of oral proficiency might not correspond to the level we are supposed to have (Advanced English Level) due to the lack of enough interaction in the TL outside the classroom. This situation can be particularly evidenced when one speaks or interacts with peers or teachers that use and speak the target language (TL) very well inside or outside the EFL classroom.

Although our interaction outside the classroom with peers is almost null; we consider that if we and L2 learners in general spoke more English in out-of-class-situations, we would improve somehow our oral proficiency. According to Ellis's (1994), "the strength of Gardner's Socio educational model is that it explains how setting is related to L2 proficiency [...] by identifying variables of psychological nature such as attitudes, motivation, self confidence and by trying to show how these are interrelated and how they affect learning". In this respect, the model accounts for the impact that social factors have on informal and formal learning. These two types can occur in natural and educational settings but the tendency is for informal learning to occur in natural settings and in formal educational settings.

Gardner has also asserted that *learning behaviour* seen in different learners in the formal learning context (educational settings) and in the informal learning context (non-educational settings) determine learning outcomes both linguistic, like L2 proficiency and non-linguistic such as attitudes, self-concept, cultural values, and beliefs (Ellis, 1994: 237). Taking into account the importance of both the educational context and the natural context for L2 development, learning in the latter would give L2 learners in our majority Spanish language context additional time of exposure to the L2 in contrast to the L2 contact in the classroom. Nonetheless, we observed that there are no informal learning situations fostering oral communication, as L2 learners are reluctant to interact with non-native speakers outside the classroom.

Gass and Varonis (1985a, 1986) and Varonis and Gass (1985b) argued that NNS-NNS interactions provide greater opportunities than NS (Native Speaker) –NNS (Non Native Speaker) interactions for the negotiation of meaning and therefore for obtaining comprehensible input (that in turn, according to Krashen's input hypothesis, facilitates L2 acquisition). They maintained that in NNS-NNS interactions, "*NNSs do not lose face by negotiating meaning in the same way as they might in NS-NNS interactions [...]*".(Shehadeh, 1999).

Therefore, if informal learning contexts play a significant role in L2 achievement and L2 learners might get remarkable benefits from interaction with peers as mentioned above, why are these students enrolled in the Teaching Training Programme averse to interacting with peers in out-of-class context? This research question leads us to find out and describe L2 learners' social representations of self-initiated interaction with peers outside the EFL classroom and their possible relations with L2 learners' oral proficiency.

1. RATIONALE

The intuitive belief that students lack the appropriate level of oral proficiency in relation to the semester they are studying due to the lack of enough interaction in the TL outside the classroom is disappointing. Not only is this situation worrying for teacher trainers in the UIS program who share with us the state-of-the-art trends in the field of teaching, but also for L2 learners who are regarded as sophisticated learners and in the near future expected to be sophisticated teachers able to conceptualize and improve the teaching field in our regional and consequently in our national context. Despite L2 learners with an advanced level of English, having been learning not only this foreign language but also its content such as teaching methodologies and research methods in second language acquisition; we cannot deny that something seems to be still lacking in most of L2 learners, that is: APPROPRIATE LEVELS OF ORAL PROFICIENCY.

This situation is particularly worrying since the current National Bilingual Programme Policies state that “as a vehicle to approach globalization, in ten years time from now students finishing their high school must have the B1 level (Pre-Intermediate) of English, teachers of elementary and secondary schools the B2 level (Intermediate), and senior EFL students, EFL teacher trainers and EFL teachers the C1 level (Pre-advanced)” (Rey & Rosado, personal communication, September 15, 2006). Therefore, being future English teachers we are aware of the importance of understanding our national context and of our responsibility in the development of competitive citizens. However, being socially committed teachers is not enough, as we need to have a very good command of the language (C1 level) with respect to the four language skills – Reading, Listening, Writing, and Speaking. Therefore, not only are L2 learners expected to be skilled readers, listeners, writers but very good speakers too that fulfil the demands of our society and of the global economy.

Consequently, being the speaking skill of great importance for individuals to survive in an era of globalization where Colombians need and are to communicate in English to open more windows to the world; we concur that our study will be of great significance to know if students reluctance to self-initiate interactions in English with peers is affecting somehow one of the requirements demanded by the Teacher Training Programme, that is: To have the appropriate level of oral proficiency at different stages of their learning process. Our research goal is to find out and describe the social representations L2 learners have about self-initiated interaction in the TL with peers outside of the EFL classroom and to describe possible relationships between the social representations and L2 learners’ current oral proficiency level. Language educators have long recognized that as soon as learners leave the EFL classroom they do not interact or speak in the TL (Chen, 2005). On that ground, EFL students now urgently need a solution to increase exposure and use of the target language during interactions not only inside but outside the classroom too.

2. OBJECTIVES

2.1. GENERAL

Identify the social representations of L2 learners enrolled in the Teacher Training Programme about self-initiated interactions with non-native speakers outside the EFL classroom situation.

2.2. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Describe L2 learners' social representations about self-initiated interactions with peers in the TL at different stages in their L2 acquisition process.

Find out the possible relations between the social representations L2 learners have about self-initiated interactions in the TL and their actual level of oral proficiency.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research on external factors and their role in second language acquisition has demonstrated that, for instance, both formal and informal learning contexts play a significant role in determining learning outcomes, either linguistic (L2 proficiency) or non-linguistic (attitudes, self-concept, cultural values, and beliefs) (Ellis, 1994: 237). Hence, studies on external factors have claimed that L2 learners can benefit from interaction with native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs). This study therefore wants to examine why L2 learners enrolled in the Teaching Training Programme at UIS are reluctant to initiate interactions with peers in out-of-class context. This research question leads us to explore L2 learners' social representations of self-initiated interaction and to find out L2 learners' oral proficiency level in order to state possible relations between these variables.

There are a variety of studies and some books related to the study of second language acquisition and learning that in our opinion will help us comprehend the different views that exist on each of the topics that involve the phenomenon under investigation. That is, we appealed to some of the literature existing on 1. Social factors (informal and formal learning contexts) and their influence on second language acquisition 2. Input, output, and interaction, and their relation to second and foreign language learning 3. Interlanguage theory from the perspective of how learners construct their mental representations of the L2 (we focused on Bialystok's view of second language learning).

To begin with, we believe that it is essential to present a brief history of language teaching to support the importance of oral communication within the approaches for language teaching and learning used in our current society in terms of learning a second or foreign language. Throughout history changes in language teaching methods have reflected recognition of changes in the kind of proficiency learners need, such as a move toward oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension as the goal of language study; they have also reflected changes in theories of the nature of language and of language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). In the eighteenth century, for example, when modern languages started to be implemented in the curriculum of European schools, speaking the foreign language was not the main concern, and oral practice was only limited to pupils reading aloud the sentences they had translated. According to Richards & Rodgers (1986) "this approach to foreign language teaching became known as the Grammar Translation Method". To this respect Titone said that "Oral work was reduced to an absolute minimum, while a handful of written exercises [...] came as a sort of appendix to the rules" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Moving from the 'focus on form' teaching approaches such as Grammar Translation Method which lasted over a century; increased chances for communication among Europeans created a demand for oral proficiency in foreign languages. Thus, toward the mid-nineteenth century in different parts of Europe new approaches to language teaching were developed by individual language teaching specialists like C. Marcel, T. Prendergast, and F. Gouin. It is the latter who was considered the best known of the three, because he emphasized on the importance to present new teaching items in a context that made their meaning clear, and the use of gestures and actions to convey meaning were practices that later became part of approaches and methods such as Situational Language Teaching and Total Physical Response. "Thanks to these individual language specialists, educators recognized the need for speaking rather than reading comprehension, grammar, or literary appreciation as the goal for foreign language programs". (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century teachers and linguists then began to write about the need for new approaches to language teaching. Due to their concerted effort, the discipline of linguistics was enhanced and Phonetics was established. Linguists emphasized that speech was the primary form of language and became interested in the controversies that emerged about the best way to teach foreign languages. For instance, Vietor, Sweet, and other reformers set the principles on which a new approach to teaching foreign languages should be based (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). These principles provided the theoretical foundations for approaches to language teaching and language learning, like The Direct or Natural Method, The Audiolingual Method, and The Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching, or more recently for approaches such as Counseling Learning, New Concurrent Approach, Total Physical Response, Natural Approach, and The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). However, it is in the latter in which British applied linguists emphasized another fundamental dimension of language that was inadequately addressed in the other approaches to language teaching previously mentioned – the functional and communicative potential of language. They saw the need to focus in language teaching on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

In order to complement the views mentioned above on the need and importance of speaking within innovative approaches to foreign language teaching as the CLT approach; Hymes; Lightbown and Spada have stated that the CLT approach highlights learners' communicative competence, which is defined as learners' ability to efficiently express what they mean in the target language and successfully achieve communications in real-life situations (Chen, 2005). In order to do so, learners not only are required to acquire the linguistic but pragmatic knowledge of the target language. Kasper has suggested that "competence, both linguistic and pragmatic, is the knowledge developed and acquired through exposure and use of the target language" (Chen, 2005). Consequently, without sufficient exposure

needed for learners to experience and acquire the language input and chances to use the new knowledge, communicative competence is not likely to be promoted.

Despite most EFL teachers trained in any kind of communicative methodology make use of resources and materials which help to bring the outside world into the classroom and try to promote as much communication as possible seeking a way to increase learners' communicative competence; it seems not to be enough for promoting the linguistic and pragmatic knowledge expected. As Pegrum (2000) has claimed, exposing students to fragments of the outside world has remarkable functions that allow to construct a bridge between the classroom and the world as long as learners at all levels are in an English-speaking country in order for them to make the most of their learning by doing outside-world tasks in a real setting. We know that opportunities are more limited for English practice outside the classroom in a non-English speaking country and that in our context we do not have that added impetus of the English-speaking environment, which may decrease students' motivation to speak or interact in the TL outside the classroom situation. Therefore, the research work that is about to begin in our own setting is more than needed, as not only do L2 learners in the program lack an English-speaking environment outside the classroom what in turn would give learners more time of exposure, but they live what Richards & Rodgers (1986) called the restricted time available for foreign language teaching in [educational settings] as well.

Moving on to the relationship between social contexts and L2 proficiency, the first one "context" known as the different settings in which L2 learning can take place – whether the setting is a natural or an educational one. The former refers to the learners' contact with other speakers of the L2 in a variety of situations such as the workplace, at home, through the media, in the street, etc. (Ellis, 1994: 214); the latter thus makes reference to learners' contact with other speakers of the L2 in submersion, immersion, mother tongue maintenance, segregation, and foreign language classrooms contexts. According to Ellis (1994) "each setting can be seen as a context in which several social factors like gender, social class, age, and ethnic identity can influence learning outcomes". Ellis has also asserted in this respect that "the evidence presented in some studies on social contexts of L2 learning suggests that learners who have access to natural settings achieve greater functional proficiency than those who are limited to educational settings. We could assume then that learners who are exposed to the L2 in both natural an educational settings can achieve greater functional proficiency than those L2 learners like us who live in a majority context where most people speak Spanish and the only contact with the L2 with respect to oral communication is limited to interactions inside the foreign language classroom. However, we have imagined that possibilities still exist, so it is perhaps a case of encouraging L2 learners to initiate interactions with peers outside the classroom or what is the same to use

interlanguage talk (ILT)¹, and of making L2 learners aware of the possible benefits of initiating interactions with peers.

To encourage L2 learners to speak outside the classroom with peers, it would be first necessary to know learners' values, ideas, beliefs and practices; that is, their social representations of self-initiated interaction outside the classroom, which function both as rule systems structuring social life and as codes facilitating communication. Social Representation Theory is a body of theory within Social Psychology originally coined by Serge Moscovici, which he introduced to account for the influence of social life on psychological processes.

Social representations conventionalize objects, persons, and events we encounter. Even new things are categorized into some representation. Each experience is added to a reality predetermined by conventions. Lewin stated that "Reality for the individual is, to a high degree, determined by what is socially accepted as reality" (Moscovici, 1984).

Representations are also prescriptive based on the collectivity of past social conventions. Changing the definition of words can change our collective thoughts. Asch said that social interactions are happenings... psychologically represented in each of the participants" (Moscovici, 1984). Individuals and groups create representations in the course of communication and co-operation. Representations are born, change, and change other representations.

According to Moscovici (1984), social representations should then be seen as a specific way of understanding and communicating what we know already. They are connectors between image and meaning. For this study, the social representations are connectors between the event of initiating an interaction with peers outside the classroom by the group of students enrolled in the teaching training program and what is socially accepted by this group as out-of-class interaction.

Therefore, if individuals do not self-initiate interactions outside the classroom situation, one cannot say that it is an obvious behavior in our context. Nonetheless, whether self-initiated interaction outside the classroom in the TL in our natural setting is seen to be senseless, ineffective, appropriate, inappropriate, difficult, beneficial, etc. reports on its implementation or use are not found. Only a few studies have investigated learners' views of communicative practices in the classroom (Schulz, 1996) and of post-classroom experience in an English-speaking country (Pegrum, 2000) but again, it seems that none has investigated so far learner social representations of out-of-class interaction in the TL in a country where a foreign language is not spoken by the majority of the population. And yet, as Savignon (1997) has asserted "if all the variables in L2 acquisition could be identified and the many intricate patterns of interaction between learner and

¹ Defined as the language used by a learner when addressing another learner.

learning context described. Ultimate success in learning to use a second language most likely would be seen to depend on the attitude of the learner". Consequently, in accordance to these words, learner views of communicative practices like the one we want to explore cannot be ignored, in particular, when there is not a clear-cut theoretical foundation concerning L2 learners' social representations of communicative practices outside educational settings.

With regard to making L2 learners in the study program aware of the possible benefits of initiating interactions with peers outside the classroom, we can appeal to Gardner's Socio educational model and to some studies on second and foreign language learning through interaction.

According to Ellis (1994) " the strength of Gardner's Socio educational model is that it explains how setting is related to L2 proficiency [...] by stating variables of psychological nature such as attitudes, motivation, self confidence and by trying to scheme how these are interrelated and how they affect learning". In this respect, the model accounts for the impact that social factors have on informal and formal learning. These two types, as it was mentioned before, can occur in natural and educational settings but the tendency is for informal learning to occur in natural settings and formal in educational settings.

Gardner has also asserted that learning behaviours seen in different learners (for example, the lack of interlanguage talk outside of the classroom) in the formal learning context and in the informal learning context determine learning outcomes both linguistic – L2 proficiency – and non-linguistic – attitudes, self-concept, cultural values, and beliefs – (Ellis, 1994: 237). Taking into account the importance of both the educational context and the natural context for L2 achievement, autonomous learning in the latter would give L2 learners in our majority Spanish language context additional time of exposure to the L2 in contrast to the L2 contact in the classroom. That is to say, that if L2 learners make use of the informal learning context to initiate interactions in an autonomy way, the logical outcome would be that L2 learners' oral proficiency improve, as they are being exposed to the L2 twice over. Nevertheless, we need to take into account the role of interaction in second and foreign language learning.

Research on interaction and second language learning grew out of early studies on foreigner talk (FT), defined as the language used by native speakers when communicating with non-native speakers (Ferguson, 1975). Once it was determined that the NSs do indeed modify their input when talking with NNSs in a manner similar to the way caretakers modify their talk to babies , the FT research expanded from just describing the linguistic features of FT to explore FT's role in interaction. Given the achievement differences between first and second languages, Freed (1980) sought to determine the differences between Baby Talk (BT) and Foreigner Talk (FT) and found that although both were syntactically similar; they differed functionally (Hall & Verplaetse, 2000). The primary function of

FT was to convey information, while the function of BT was to elicit interaction. Short time after, Long's (1981) study on modifications in NS input to NNSs made a distinction between linguistic modifications and interactive modifications, claiming that interactive modifications were facilitative and necessary for second language acquisition. Verplaetse (1993) found NS modifications to have negative effects on NNS participation in conversations thus questioning Long's general idea that NS are primarily beneficial to NNSs. She suggested that at some developmental point in the second language learners' acquisition process, certain NS modifications become an impediment to the NNS's opportunities for production (Hall & Verplaetse, 2000).

Also of great importance for our study are those investigations on NNS's role in interaction. Research of this kind outlined the importance of interaction in SLA focusing on NNS's role in the negotiation of meaning. These studies recognized that comprehensible input is necessary for second language acquisition, but they claimed that it is the NNS's work in the negotiation of meaning that increases and ensures that the input is highly comprehensible. For instance, Gass and Varonis (1985a) and Varonis and Gass (1985b) argued that NNS-NNS interactions provide greater opportunities than NS-NNS interactions for the negotiation of meaning and therefore for obtaining comprehensible input [that in turn, according to Krashen's input hypothesis, facilitates L2 acquisition]. The assumption is that a greater amount of negotiation work takes place in NNS-NNS discourse than in either NS-NS or NS-NNS discourse. They maintained that in NNS-NNS interactions, NNSs do not lose face by negotiating meaning in the same way as they might in NS-NNS interactions [...].(Shehadeh, 1999). Thus, the NNS's role in the process of negotiating meaning with other NNS became crucial to the acquisition process.

Beginning in the mid – 1980s, on the other hand, investigatory concerns included the importance of the learners output in interaction. Swain (1985) argued that comprehensible input is not sufficient for successful second language acquisition (SLA), but that opportunities for non-native speakers (NNSs) to produce comprehensible output are also necessary. She based her conclusions on findings from studies she conducted on immersion students in Canada. She found that although immersion students were provided with a rich source of comprehensible input, their interlanguage (IL) performance was still off-target; that is, they were clearly identified as non-native speakers [...]. Thus, Swain claimed that understanding new forms is not enough and that learners must also be given the opportunity to produce them. She, therefore, doubted that interactions and comprehensible input on their own are sufficient for SLA (1985: 252):

Conversational exchanges ... are not themselves the source of acquisition derived from comprehensible input. Rather they are the source of acquisition derived from comprehensible output: output that extends the linguistic

repertoire of the learner as he or she attempts to create precisely and appropriately the meaning desired.

Of particular relevance to the current study is Swain's argument that output provided three functions: noticing, hypothesis testing, and reflection. During the time that a learner is required to process input only, he or she may not need to attend to all features of language to understand the context. However, at the point that he or she must produce output, the learner may first notice that a gap of linguistic knowledge exists between what she or he wants to convey and his or her ability to convey it. When the learner tries to produce using his/her linguistic knowledge currently available in his/her interlanguage the learner tests hypotheses about the organization of the language system. Finally, through the learner's output and the interlocutor's response to that output, the learner can reflect and consequently modifies his or her language use.

Finally, we will focus on Bialystok's view of second language learning. This view explains the diverse processes associated with second language learning using a comprehensive framework in which to interpret a variety of observations regarding the learning and use of second language. Therefore, Bialystok's theoretical model is organized on three levels: input, knowledge, and output. Input refers to the language experienced by the language learner in various situations such as the classroom, books, personal contacts, and so on. These experiences are not differentiated in the general statement of the model. Knowledge is the representation of information, both linguistic and non-linguistic. Output refers to the production of language responses and involves both language production and language comprehension.

The knowledge level is differentiated into three knowledge sources – implicit linguistic knowledge, explicit linguistic knowledge, and other knowledge. According to Bialystok's view, "implicit knowledge is developed through exposure to communicative language use and is facilitated [...] by the attempts made by the learner to maximize exposure to language through communication. Explicit knowledge arises when learners focus on the language code, and is facilitated by [...] either conscious study of the L2 or attempts to automatize already learnt explicit knowledge." (Ellis, 1994: 356).

Bialystok's model also differentiates output into two kinds. Type I output is spontaneous, immediate and relies on implicit knowledge, whereas type II output is deliberate and occurs after a delay involving both implicit and explicit knowledge. (Ellis, 1994: 357).

Consequently, if L2 learners enrolled in the English Language Teaching program consciously study the language, their explicit knowledge of the L2 (knowledge of rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, and so on) will become implicit (automatic and intuitive) and will be facilitated by attempts made by the L2 learners in the program

to increase their exposure to language through the self-initiation of interactions in English with peers outside the EFL classroom. As a result, the oral production of the language and oral comprehension (output) will be more spontaneous and immediate.

In sum, living in a non-English speaking country where there is a lack of that English-speaking environment (informal setting) is not conclusive to state that L2 learners cannot benefit from each other when interacting in the TL in our Spanish-speaking environment. Furthermore, theoretical models like Bialystok's model fit perfectly with our research project and the studies on second language acquisition and learning already discussed, because it involves some aspects like input, knowledge, and output, which are important to support the idea that L2 learners can benefit from self-initiated interactions in the TL with peers outside the classroom to achieve the appropriate level of oral proficiency.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1. RESEARCH SAMPLE

With respect to our population, we decided to accomplish the present study with 15 L2 learners enrolled in the Teacher Training Programme at UIS. As we did not find an accurate listing of this population, we decided to make a distinction between the population we wanted to generalize to, and the population that was accessible to us. We called the former the **theoretical population** (more than 400 full time students) and the latter the **accessible population** (137 full time students from three different years– first year students, third year students, and last year students enrolled in the Teacher Training Programme). Thus, it was from the list of the accessible population that we chose our sample using a procedure defined as stratified random sampling; also sometimes called *proportional* or *quota* random sampling. With regard to the first year students' sample, we will not take into consideration L2 learners enrolled in the first semester since we believe that the condition of being freshmen could affect the validity of the study because they have just begun the term, have not had enough chances of interacting both inside and outside the classroom, and might not have the appropriate language competence to understand the data collection instruments.

We are aware of the necessity to establish the error margin of the obtained data to validate the findings. Using a Sample Size Calculator presented as a public service of Creative Research Systems, we found that in order to have a relative error margin of 5% the sample size should be of 100 subjects, and for that margin to be 10% the number of students selected should be of 57 subjects. Although the number of individuals selected for the project is of 15 and the relative error margin is of 23.8% (far away from the appropriate margin), we will stick to this sample size despite our research sample can be regarded as non-representative and convenient. However, theory on descriptive research, as it is the case, contains that the size of the population can vary widely; in case studies, for example, they may involve one or two subjects (Seliger & Shohamy, 2000). Thus, taking into account this reason we consider that the three focus groups conformed by 5 students each from the three years previously mentioned are more than a convenient sample of the population, they are representative.

The random selection procedure to be used in our research is defined as stratified random sampling; also sometimes called *proportional* or *quota* random sampling. It involves dividing the population into homogeneous subgroups (students in 1st, 3rd, and 5th year) and then taking a simple random sample in each subgroup. Thus, the objective is to divide the population into subgroups (i.e., *strata*) N_1 , N_2 , and N_3 such that $N_1 + N_2 + N_3 = N$. Then do a simple random sample of $f = n/N$ in each strata.

N = the number of cases in the sampling frame (listing of the accessible population).

N1, N2, AND N3 = the number of cases in each subgroup (students in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year)

n = the number of cases in the sample (5 per each subgroup)

${}_N C_n$ = the number of combinations (subsets) of n from N

f = n/N = the sampling fraction (must be done in each strata)

With regard to the simple random process, the purpose is to select n units out of N such that each ${}_N C_n$ has an equal chance of being selected. In doing so, we are going to copy and paste the lists of students in each subgroup into a column in EXCEL spreadsheets. Then, in the column right next to we will paste the function =RAND () which is Excel's way of putting a random number between 0 and 1 in the cells. Then, both columns will be sorted -- the list of names and the random number -- by the random numbers. This rearranges the list in random order from the lowest to the highest random number. Then, all we are to do is take the first five names in each of the sorted lists.

The study is limited to meetings outside of the EFL classroom context at Universidad Industrial de Santander. Therefore, in order to avoid any manipulation or interference with the subjects under investigation or in the research context, we will gather as much information as possible (at least three different instruments will be used), so it can also be considered more reliable and can facilitate validation and triangulation. Moreover, with the use of a cross-sectional analysis of the sample data we intend to see possible variations among focus groups.

4.2. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This research project will be heuristic because we begin with an intuitive belief of an observed phenomenon that is the basis for our research project: we have perceived that our present level of oral proficiency might not correspond to the level we are supposed to have (Advanced English Level) due to L2 learners reluctance to self-initiate interactions in the TL outside the classroom. Besides, the research will employ a descriptive research method, as it will describe the social representations of L2 learners enrolled in the Teacher Training Programme about self-initiated interactions with peers outside the EFL classroom situation and will compare these social representations with L2 learners' oral proficiency level to state possible relations.

Therefore, we will firstly find out and describe learners' social representations using a close-ended questionnaire on the topic which will require the use of qualitative and quantitative procedures to analyse the data collected; then, we will apply two instruments, one to establish L2 learners' oral proficiency and the other to know the perceived oral proficiency level L2 learners have of themselves. These tools may tell us whether the intuitive belief - students lack the appropriate level of oral

proficiency in relation to the semester they are studying due to L2 learners reluctance to self-initiate interactions in the TL outside the classroom - that motivates the proposed study must be ruled out. Finally, we will apply learners an open-ended questionnaire to look into the situations in which students initiate or which stimulate them to self-initiate interactions.

4.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Why are L2 learners enrolled in the Teaching Training Programme at UIS reluctant to self-initiate interactions with peers in out-of-class context?
- Is there any relation between L2 learners' current oral proficiency level and L2 learners' social representations of self-initiated interaction with peers in out of class situations?

4.4. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

To better understand the fact that most L2 learners in the programme do not interact outside the classroom and if this phenomenon is somehow causing the problem under investigation that we have perceived: Lack of the appropriate level oral proficiency levels in L2 learners, specially in most L2 students who have already taken English advanced; **a close-ended questionnaire** will be developed to investigate first-year, third-year, and last-year L2 learners' social representations of self-initiated interaction out-of-class context. In addition to this quantitative tool to gather students' social representations, **an open-ended questionnaire** intended to provide students the opportunity to report the situations where their self-initiated interactions take place (if they do), why they stop, and what things may encourage them to speak; this instrument will be used to see what relation exists between L2 learners' social representations measured by the close-ended questionnaire and the open-ended one. To know the actual oral proficiency level of L2 learners in the three focus groups, an **Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI)** following the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines will be done with a native speaker or with a native-like speaker engaged in the teaching of English as a Foreign or Second Language. Hence, **a self-evaluation** of students' oral proficiency level based on the ACTFL OPI scale and the European Language Portfolio will be taken into account for stating relations between these two tools of data collection. The students will firstly respond the self-evaluation and then a blank copy of this will be handed in to the oral proficiency interviewer to facilitate the assessment process and therefore to assess what the student can do with regard to his/her person-to-person communication and his/her spoken interaction, in an easier way².

² For reliability purposes, authors considered the possibility of including students' scores of a standard test as an additional tool for the analysis of the oral proficiency level. However, no systematic data were available unfortunately.

Finally, with the combination of both techniques for finding out learners' social representations and the instruments concerning learners' proficiency, we expect to establish possible relations between the social representations L2 learners have about self-initiated interactions in the target language and their actual level of oral proficiency. With all these data collection tools, we hope to gather useful data that help us achieve the primary and secondary goals proposed for the investigation. Since we will use data from different sources applied at different times, we are going to log the data collected and then, the data base will be checked in order to establish its accuracy taking into account if the responses are legible, if all important questions are answered, and if the responses are complete. For this data analysis the SPSS version 10.0 for windows will be used.

5. IMPLEMENTATION

Close-ended questionnaire: To identify L2 learners' social representations, respondents took a Likert scale based survey consisting of 18 items, designed to look into the social representations in our context. This instrument was validated by three experts of the school of languages and piloted as recommended by some of the experts. The questionnaire was organized in terms of 5 domains related to L2 students' social representations. The first domain asked participants about their likes related to the initiation of an interaction. Next, another segment of items determined their L2 learners' preferences to interact either in Spanish or in English. A third one revealed their feelings when initiating an interaction in English with a peer. The next one in the scale identified their preferences to initiate an interaction with certain peers. Finally, the last one showed under what circumstances the students self-initiated an interaction with peers. For the purpose of this analysis, the responses to "Totally agree" and "Agree" were combined to create an overall score of agreement with the question, and the sum of responses to "Disagree" and "Totally disagree" were similarly calculated to gain a measure of disagreement. "No comments" was treated as a) L2 learners have never initiated an interaction in English with a peer or b) they did not take a stand on either side – "disagree" or "agree". The whole close-ended questionnaire is shown in Appendix A.

Open-ended questionnaire: To the close-ended questionnaire four open ended questions were added to provide students the opportunity to report the situations where their self-initiated interactions took place (if they do) and the reasons that make them stop from initiating interactions (if they have never initiated one). This information was contrasted with the close-ended questionnaire results. The open-ended questionnaire is shown in Appendix B.

To analyze these two instruments that include qualitative data, we used the SPSS data editor to work with two ordinal variables: L2 learners' social representations and research sample. Numbers were assigned to the attributes of these variables (for instance, no comments = 1, I totally disagree = 2, I disagree = 3, I agree = 4, I totally agree = 5), but the numbers are understood to indicate rank order and the "distance" between the numbers has no meaning. Then, the analysis started by using **the Graphs bar of the SPSS editor – Interactive – Scatterplot** – after that, the two variables were assigned to the *x* and *y* –axis. Finally, an interactive graphic is generated showing the data. To facilitate the analysis and interpretation of the data shown, descriptive statistics were used.

Self-Assessment Of L2 Learners' Oral Proficiency and OPI: After collecting the information provided by this instrument, in which the subjects used a checklist to record what they thought they could do with regard to oral communication practices; we determined their oral proficiency level by counting the ticked statements in each level of proficiency (i.e. Novice mid, Novice High, Intermediate Low, Intermediate mid, Intermediate High, Advanced Low, and Advanced Mid/High) and obtaining the corresponding percentage for each of these intervals. The interval that had over 80% of the items checked corresponded to students' oral proficiency level. After the application of this tool, a blank copy of the self-assessment was given to the oral proficiency interviewer (UIS Language Institute Young Learner Program Coordinator) to facilitate the placement of the subjects in a level of oral proficiency; in addition to this, the interviewer had to prepare several questions involving the majority of "can do statements" described in the self-assessment checklist. The checklists that were given back by the interviewer were ticked in one level of oral proficiency establishing in this way L2 learners' oral proficiency level. The entire self-assessment checklist is shown in Appendix C.

To analyze these instruments that include qualitative data, we used the SPSS data editor to work with two ordinal variables: Actual L2 learners' Oral Proficiency and Students' self-assessment of oral proficiency. Numbers were assigned to the attributes of these variables (for example, novice mid= 1, novice high= 2, intermediate low= 3, intermediate mid= 4, intermediate high= 5, advanced low= 6, advanced mid/high= 7), but the numbers are understood to indicate rank order and the "distance" between the numbers has no meaning. Then, the analysis began by using **the Graphs bar of the SPSS editor – Interactive – Scatterplot** – after that, the two variables were assigned to the *x* and *y* –axis. These variables were defined by a third (control or marker) variable: "Sample". Finally, an interactive graphic is generated showing the data. To facilitate the analysis and interpretation of the data shown, descriptive statistics were used.

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1. ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW (OPI) AND SELF-ASSESSMENT OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS (SUBGROUP 1)

The results of the oral proficiency interview (OPI) for first year students (2nd semester) were analyzed and contrasted to those of the self-assessment of L2 learners' oral proficiency using the subgroup 1 as a control variable. These variables and its attributes can be appreciated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. OPI and self-assessment subgroup 1

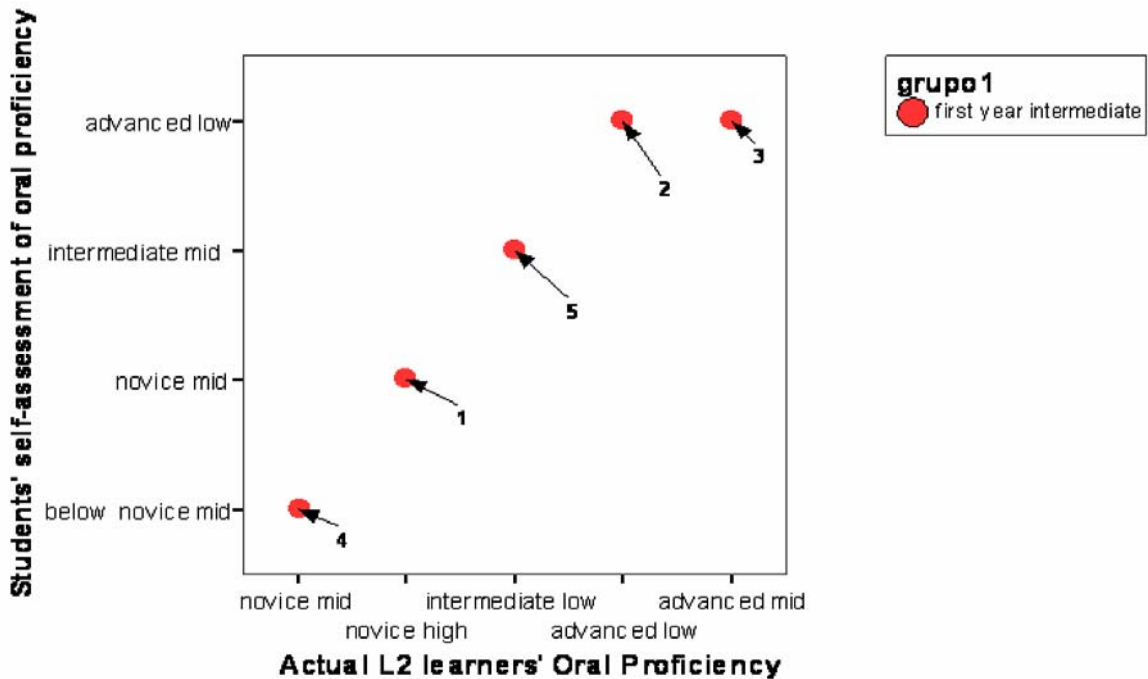


Figure 1

To begin with, the overall findings of the first subgroup were stated with respect to their actual level of oral proficiency measured by the OPI and then a comparison of findings between the OPI and the self-assessment was presented. Figure 1 and the Frequency table 1 show that 2 out of 5 subjects (40%) in the subgroup 1 “first year students taking English Intermediate” have a current level of oral proficiency (Novice Mid and Novice High) that is below the level they are supposed to have – at least a low Intermediate level of English taking into account that the subjects did the OPI interview in the middle of the second semester of 2007; 2 out of 5 subjects (40%) in this subgroup demonstrate to have a high level of oral proficiency (Advanced Low and Advanced Mid) that is beyond the English level they are currently taking; only one out of 5 subjects (20%) is placed in a level of oral

proficiency (Intermediate Low) that corresponds to the intermediate level of English the student is studying. Therefore, 4 out of 5 subjects (80%) in the first subgroup confirmed the idea that the actual level of most students' oral proficiency does not correspond to the level they are supposed to have (intermediate low). However, it is worth mentioning that 2 out of 4 subjects described had a higher oral proficiency level than the one required. On the other hand, when comparing the results obtained from the OPI and from the students' self-assessment of their oral proficiency in all the 5 subjects (100%), it was found that there was an interesting similarity between these two variables in that the subgroup's oral proficiency level on certain communication practices assessed by the self-evaluation and applied before the OPI interview corresponded to the level established by the OPI interviewer. For example, 2 out of 5 subjects (40%) were placed in a novice level by the OPI interviewer and they self-assessed their oral proficiency in a novice level too. The same trend can be observed in the other cases. This correspondence seems to indicate that these students are conscious of what they "can do" when they engage or have engaged on oral communication practices. Tables 1 and 2 summarize these results.

Table 1. Subgroup 1's current oral proficiency level

Actual L2 learners' Oral Proficiency					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	novice mid	1	6,7	20,0	20,0
	novice high	1	6,7	20,0	40,0
	intermediate low	1	6,7	20,0	60,0
	advanced low	1	6,7	20,0	80,0
	advanced mid	1	6,7	20,0	100,0
	Total		5	33,3	100,0
Missing	System	10	66,7		
Total		15	100,0		

Table 2. Results of self-assessment, subgroup 1

Students' self-assessment of oral proficiency					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	below novice mid	1	6,7	20,0	20,0
	novice mid	1	6,7	20,0	40,0
	intermediate mid	1	6,7	20,0	60,0
	advanced low	2	13,3	40,0	100,0
	Total	5	33,3	100,0	
Missing	System	10	66,7		
Total		15	100,0		

6.2. ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW (OPI) AND SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THIRD YEAR STUDENTS (SUBGROUP 2)

Looking into the second subgroup (third year students), the outcomes given by the OPI interviewer revealed that 5 out of 5 subjects (100%) have a current level of oral proficiency (Intermediate Mid and Intermediate High) that is below the level they are supposed to have – The students in this subgroup should have, at least, an advanced low English level of oral proficiency considering that the 5 subjects (100%) have already taken the four levels of English contemplated in the ELT program at UIS and are taking the English conversation course – Only one of these cases (20%) has already taken the English conversation course.

Consequently, the second subgroup once again validates the belief that the current level of most L2 learners' oral proficiency does not correspond to the level they are supposed to have (Advanced level of English). The results show that none of the subjects demonstrated to have at least an Advanced Low level of oral proficiency. Table 3 sums up these findings.

Table 3. Subgroup 2's current oral proficiency level

Actual L2 learners' Oral Proficiency					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	intermediate mid	3	20,0	60,0	60,0
	intermediate high	2	13,3	40,0	100,0
	Total	5	33,3	100,0	
Missing	System	10	66,7		
Total		15	100,0		

Comparing the results from the OPI and from the students' self-assessment of their oral proficiency in the subgroup 2, we observed that these variables differ greatly seeing that 4 out of 5 subjects (80%) perceived that they have an advanced level of oral proficiency, whereas in the OPI interview these subjects were placed in an Intermediate level of oral proficiency. It has been interesting to find that a high percentage of subjects in this subgroup are opposed to the perception that propels our study: Lack of the appropriate oral proficiency level in most L2 learners in the program. Whatever the reasons these four subjects have, they think that what they can do when getting involved on oral communication practices correspond to the correct advanced level required for the fifth and sixth semester. Figure 2 shows this contrast.

Figure 2. OPI and self-assessment subgroup 2

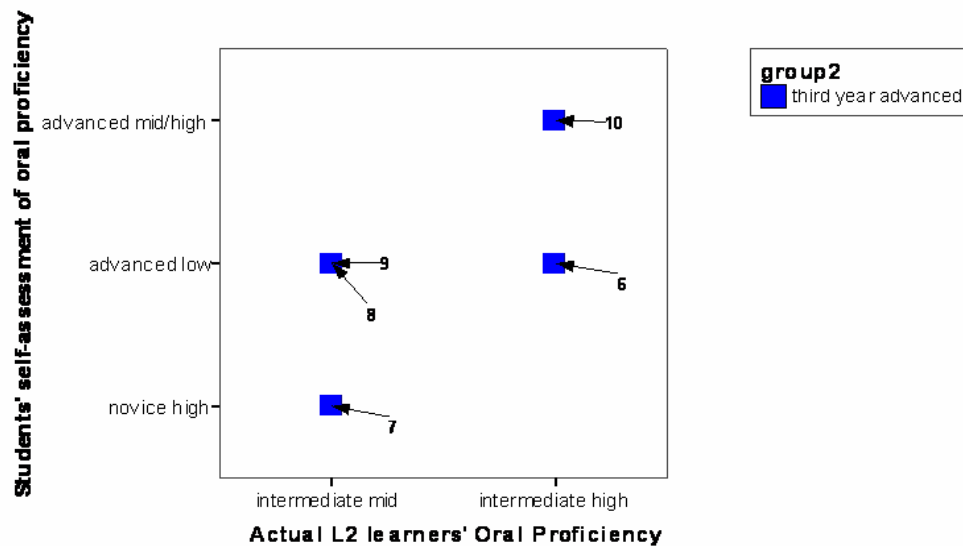


Figure 2

6.3. FINDINGS OF THE ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW (OPI) AND SELF-ASSESSMENT OF FIFTH YEAR STUDENTS (SUBGROUP 3)

Finally, analyzing the results obtained from the subgroup 3 (fifth year students) with regard to the OPI interview, we found that 3 out of 5 subjects (60%) were placed in an Advanced Low level of oral proficiency and 2 out of 5 subjects (40%) in an Intermediate High level of oral proficiency. Although most L2 learners in this subgroup demonstrated to have an appropriate level of oral proficiency in relation to the level they are supposed to have (Advanced English Level); it is still worrying that a moderate percentage of the subjects in the subgroup 3 did not achieve, according to the Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés, the C1 level required for senior EFL students, EFL teacher trainers, and EFL teachers. Table 4 summarizes the actual oral proficiency level of L2 learners in the subgroup 3.

Table 4. Subgroup 3's current oral proficiency level

Actual L2 learners' Oral Proficiency					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	intermediate high	2	13,3	40,0	40,0
	advanced low	3	20,0	60,0	100,0
	Total	5	33,3	100,0	
Missing	System	10	66,7		
Total		15	100,0		

Looking through the results obtained from the OPI and from the students' self-assessment of their oral proficiency in the subgroup 3, we encountered that 3 out of 5 subjects (60%) have an Advanced level of oral proficiency (placed in an Advanced Low level by the OPI interviewer) which corresponds somehow to the level these three subjects had in their self-assessment (Advanced Low and Advanced Mid/High). Besides, we found that 2 out of 5 subjects (40%) self-assessed their oral proficiency in an advanced level which differs from the results obtained in the OPI interview (Intermediate High level). In brief, taking into account these findings we can say that all the subjects in the subgroup 3 consider that they can carry out all the oral communicative practices described in the self-assessment checklist for the advanced low and advanced mid/high level though their actual level of oral proficiency did not correspond to the level they perceived to have. Figure 3 sums up the results of these two variables.

Figure 3. OPI and self-assessment subgroup 3

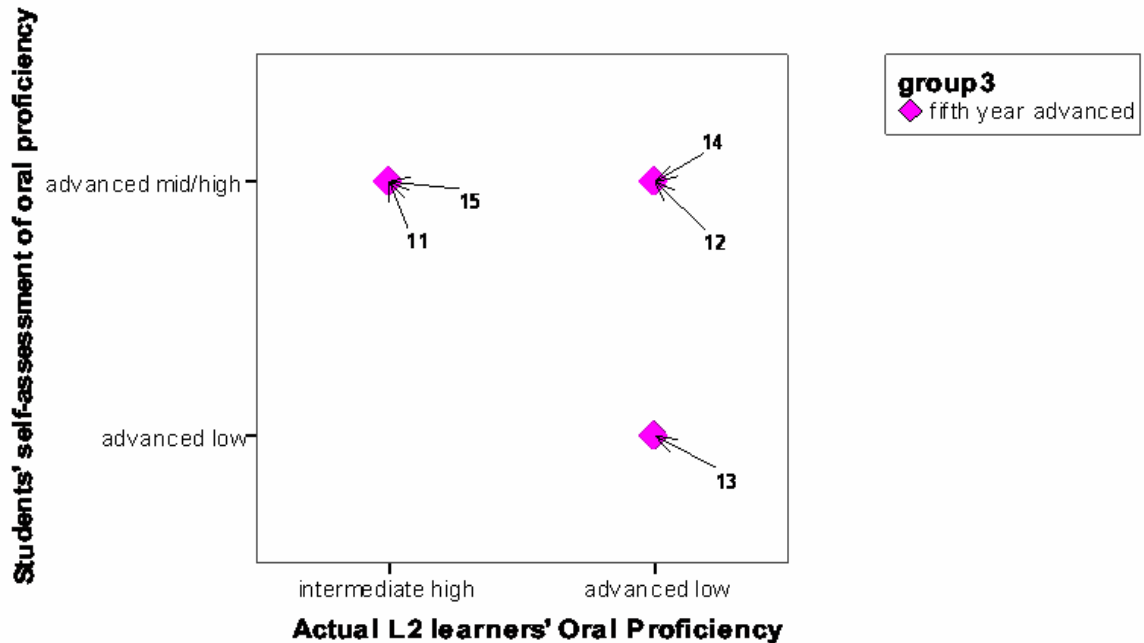


Figure 3

6.4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS OF THE ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW (OPI) AND SELF-ASSESSMENT OF L2 LEARNERS' ORAL PROFICIENCY

In general terms, the idea to be discussed is whether or not the actual level of most L2 learners' oral proficiency corresponds to the level they are supposed to have (Intermediate and Advanced level of English) and if their perceived level of oral proficiency corresponds to the level of oral proficiency established by the OPI interviewer. Looking into the results of the OPI interview for each of the subjects, it can be concluded that the actual level of most L2 learners' oral proficiency does not correspond to the level they are supposed to have, since 11 out of 15 subjects (73.3%) do not fulfill the level expected; however it is important to state that 2 out of the 11 subjects (13.4%), who are enrolled in the second semester, demonstrated to have more than an Intermediate level of oral proficiency, they were placed in an Advanced Low and Advanced Mid level. This can be considered as a positive fact for the English learning process of these two students, since the logic leads us to assert that once these two subjects have finished taking the first four semesters of English and English conversation their level of oral proficiency will surely correspond to the level required by the school of languages (Advanced level of English) or it will be even higher. On the other hand, the remaining 9 out of the 11 subjects (59.9%) were placed under the oral proficiency level required (Intermediate level for the first subgroup and Advanced level for the second and

third subgroup). Surprisingly, we found that 7 out of the 9 subjects are part of the subgroups 2 and 3 that are supposed to have an advanced level of English. As a matter of fact, this supports what has been stated by The Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés - the achievement of the C1 level or Pre-advanced level by senior EFL students, EFL teacher trainers, and EFL teachers. Therefore, being future English teachers L2 learners need to be aware of the responsibility in the development of competitive citizens. In doing this, it is clear that we need to have a very good command of the language (C1 level) with respect to the four language skills – Reading, Listening, Writing, and Speaking.

By observing the frequency tables on the fifteen L2 learners' oral proficiency and self-assessment, we could notice that 8 out of 15 subjects (53.4%) self-assessed their level of oral proficiency in the same way as they were placed by the OPI interviewer. This finding could mean that these subjects are highly conscious of their own oral proficiency process. Nevertheless, there are some findings that are not positive as we can see 7 out of 15 subjects (46.6%) self-assessed their oral proficiency in a higher or lower level with relation to the level given by the OPI interviewer. Thus, this could signify that these subjects who are in the second and third year (English advanced level) presuppose that they can carry out the majority of oral communication practices without being conscious if they are well performed or not. Figure 4 and tables 5 and 6 illustrate results for the three subgroups, since the data described may be confusing for the reader.

Figure 4. OPI and self-assessment of research sample

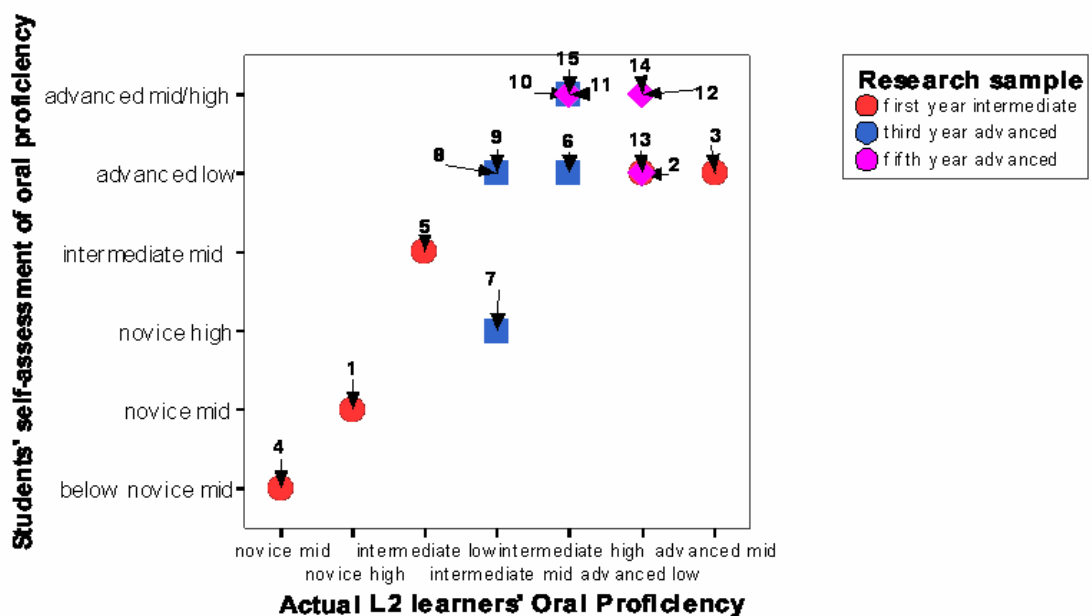


Figure 4

Table 5. Participants' current oral proficiency level

Actual L2 learners' Oral Proficiency					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	novice mid	1	6,7	6,7	6,7
	novice high	1	6,7	6,7	13,3
	intermediate low	1	6,7	6,7	20,0
	intermediate mid	3	20,0	20,0	40,0
	intermediate high	4	26,7	26,7	66,7
	advanced low	4	26,7	26,7	93,3
	advanced mid	1	6,7	6,7	100,0
	Total	15	100,0	100,0	

Table 6. Participants' self-assessment

Students' self-assessment of oral proficiency					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	below novice mid	1	6,7	6,7	6,7
	novice mid	1	6,7	6,7	13,3
	novice high	1	6,7	6,7	20,0
	intermediate mid	1	6,7	6,7	26,7
	advanced low	6	40,0	40,0	66,7
	advanced mid/high	5	33,3	33,3	100,0
	Total	15	100,0	100,0	

6.5. FINDINGS OF CLOSE-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE ON SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF L2 LEARNERS

The first results on L2 learners' social representations were obtained through the close-ended questionnaire (Likert scale). Results concerning the first domain, "I like initiating interactions in English outside the classroom", was ranked as a positive social representation by 9 out of 15 subjects (60%) since they expressed some kind of agreement towards the domain. Therefore, these students agree with categories such as: "When I initiate an interaction, I like that my peer speaks to me in English as well" and "I like initiating interactions with peers whose speaking level is unknown for me" among others. The other 6 subjects (40%) seem to dislike initiating interactions according to their answers in the questionnaire. This was

evidence that showed that the percentage of the 6 subjects was below than initially expected, as one of our research questions states that L2 learners are averse to initiating interactions with peers outside the classroom. However, we did not discard this observed fact because we had to look into the other domains in search of possible contradictions that allowed us to accurately give answer to this question. Turning into the second domain, "I prefer initiating interactions in Spanish rather than in English outside the classroom", the results were even more surprising. 12 out of 15 subjects (80%) showed affirmative responses towards the practice of initiating interactions in English for their own sake, as against 3 out of 15 subjects (20%) that prefer speaking in Spanish outside the classroom. This is a stunning finding in that language educators have long recognized that as soon as learners leave the EFL classroom they do not interact or speak in the TL as indicated by Chen (2005); once again, this social representation contradicts our intuitive belief. Thus, the twelve students diverge with category labels like: "I take too much time to interact with a peer in English than when I speak to peers in Spanish" and "I resort to Spanish when I notice that a topic I choose to initiate a conversation is not of my peers' interest". Looking into the third domain, "I feel bad when I initiate interactions outside the classroom", 8 out of 15 subjects (53.3%) agreed on this domain and 5 out of the 15 (33.3%) manifested a disagreement with respect to the same situation. Making part of this domain was found the following category labels: "I tend to get embarrassed when I initiate an interaction with a peer" and "Initiating an interaction with peers is a frightening communication practice". Only 2 out of 15 subjects (13.3%) indicated a neutral position. The interesting and contradictory thing about this domain is that 5 out of the 8 subjects that feel bad when initiating interactions in English expressed that they like initiating interactions in English outside the classroom as well. Consequently, the first and third domain led us to investigate the remaining domains since there had not been conclusive results so far to elucidate whether or not L2 learners are reluctant to initiate interactions outside the classroom. With regard to the fourth domain, "I prefer initiating interactions in English with certain peers", 13 out of 15 subjects (86.7%) showed not to mind about initiating interactions with those peers they do not have a close relationship with, or even with those they consider having a higher oral proficiency level. Again, it was strange to find that most of the cases do not feel inhibited when initiating an interaction in English, even those who have never initiated an interaction in English outside the classroom. Finally, in the fifth domain, 8 out of 15 subjects (53.3%) took a stand on the agreement side; that is, they initiate interactions in English under certain circumstances such as: When learners drink, when they do not want other people to listen to them and understand what they say, and when they need to practice for a speaking examination. Concerning the remaining 7 subjects (46.7%), results can be interpreted as if these students were intrinsically motivated to initiate interactions in English for the sake of improving their oral proficiency. Tables 7 to 11 and figure 5 sum up the results of the close-ended questionnaire.

Figure 5. Participants' social representations

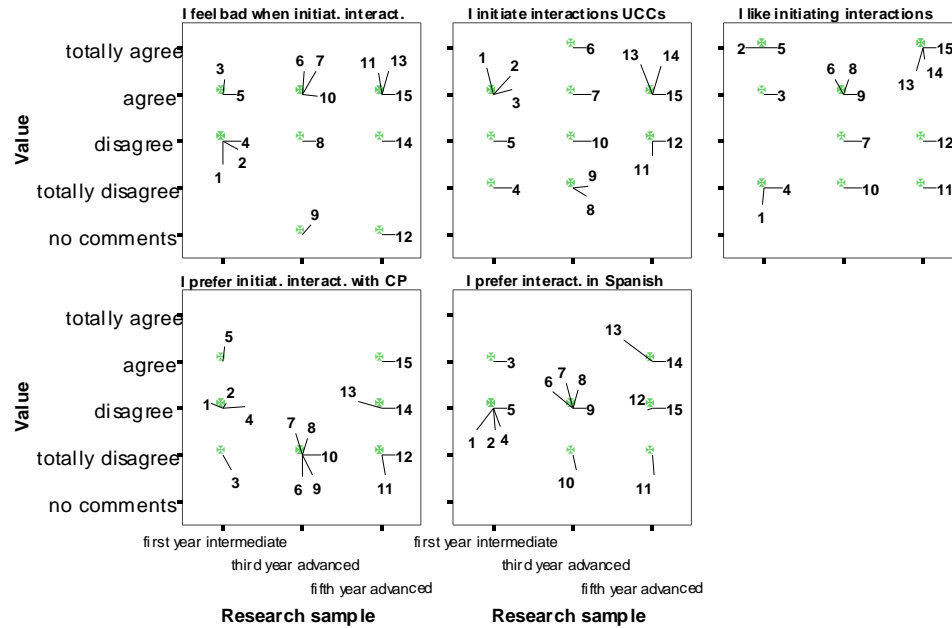


Table 7. Results of the first domain

I like initiating interactions					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	4	26,7	26,7	26,7
	disagree	2	13,3	13,3	40,0
	agree	4	26,7	26,7	66,7
	totally agree	5	33,3	33,3	100,0
	Total	15	100,0	100,0	

Table 8. Results of the second domain

I prefer interact. in Spanish					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	2	13,3	13,3	13,3
	disagree	10	66,7	66,7	80,0
	agree	3	20,0	20,0	100,0
	Total	15	100,0	100,0	

Table 9. Results of the third domain

I feel bad when initiat. interact.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no comments	2	13,3	13,3	13,3
	disagree	5	33,3	33,3	46,7
	agree	8	53,3	53,3	100,0
	Total	15	100,0	100,0	

Table 10. Results of the fourth domain

I prefer initiat. interact. with CP					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	8	53,3	53,3	53,3
	disagree	5	33,3	33,3	86,7
	agree	2	13,3	13,3	100,0
	Total	15	100,0	100,0	

Table 11. Results of the fifth domain

I initiate interactions UCCs					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	3	20,0	20,0	20,0
	disagree	4	26,7	26,7	46,7
	agree	7	46,7	46,7	93,3
	totally agree	1	6,7	6,7	100,0
	Total	15	100,0	100,0	

6.6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS OF THE CLOSE AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRES OF L2 LEARNERS' SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

Within the analysis process of these two instruments was observed that the findings obtained from the close-ended questionnaire on social representations were inconsistent what made it impossible to give a clear answer to one of our research questions: Why are L2 learners averse to initiating an interaction in English outside the classroom?. Therefore, with the aim of validating the results got from the close-ended questionnaire, it was decided not to take into consideration the results from subjects 4, 7, 10, 11, and 12 (33.3% of the sample) because they were contradictory with those findings obtained from the open-ended questionnaire that inquired whether or not students have ever initiated an interaction outside the classroom. In other words, although these five subjects reported in the open-ended questionnaire (Question 1) that they had never initiated an interaction outside the classroom; they manifested in the close-ended questionnaire to feel bad when initiating interactions and to initiate interactions with those peers they do not have a close relationship with, or even with those they consider having a higher oral proficiency level, what indicates that the five subjects have "imaginatively" initiated an interaction in English outside the classroom. This, therefore, might have been the reason for which there was a contradiction among the domains of the close-ended questionnaire. To identify the five subjects' social representations that reported never having initiated an interaction, the views provided by these students in the open-ended questionnaire (Question 4) were taken as social representations; since not having initiated an interaction do not mean that these L2 learners' views of this communication practice can be ignored.

As regards those five cases that stated never having initiated an interaction with peers outside the classroom, all of them (33%) viewed this communication practice as a negative event. Each one of the subjects reported in the open-ended questionnaire (Question 4) different reasons such as: "I find it silly to hold conversations in English with people that speak your own language." (subject 10); "I don't like to initiate interactions outside the class." (subject 11); "It seems to me English is not a need in our context, you don't need it to survive." (subject 12); "No tengo vocabulario, no sé pronunciar, y no tengo en claro ni rápido el orden de la idea para decir al respecto." (subject 4); " I think this is a cultural problem as people are not used to speak in English outside the classroom...If you do it, people look at you...I don't like to call the attention of others" (subject 7). From what could be inferred, subjects 10 and 12 agreed entirely that opportunities are more limited for English practice outside the classroom in a non-English speaking country and that in a majority Spanish context the lack of that added impetus of the English-speaking environment decreases their willingness to speak or interact in the TL outside the classroom situation. On the contrary, subject 4 suggested that she lacks both the linguistic and pragmatic competence defined by Kasper as the knowledge developed and acquired through exposure and use of the target

language” (Chen, 2005). Finally, subject 7 described that her reluctance to initiate an interaction has to do with a kind of cultural pressure exerted by society. In conclusion, these 5 subjects (33.3% of the sample) are averse to initiate an interaction in English outside the classroom due to their views above described.

Concerning the 10 out of 15 subjects (66.6%) that reported in the open-ended questionnaire (Question 1) having initiated an interaction with peers outside the classroom, it was found when taken a second look to the results obtained from the close and open ended questionnaire (Question 2) that 8 out of 10 subjects (53.4%) initiated interactions in English under certain conditions and/or with certain peers. Aside from these results 5 out of the 8 subjects expressed to feel bad when initiating an interaction with a peer. For instance, they agreed to begin an interaction if the following conditions were present: “When I am drinking; when I do not want people to understand what I am saying to my peer; when I want to practice for a speaking examination” (subjects 2, 3, 6, 13, 14, and 15). With respect to the self-initiation of interactions with certain peers, they coincided with the following representations: “I initiate an interaction with those peers I consider have an oral proficiency level lower than mine; I initiate an interaction only with those peers I have a close-relationship with; I initiate a conversation with those peers I’ve worked with in communicative activities within the classroom” (subjects 5 and 15). Lastly, the social representations of those 5 out of 8 subjects that stated feeling bad at initiating an interaction with peers outside the classroom are: “I get embarrassed when I initiate an interaction; I see the initiation of an interaction as a frightening communication practice” (subjects 3, 5, 6, 13, and 15). In sum, the results of the 8 subjects described (53.4% of the sample) established that this group of L2 learners are averse to initiate an interaction in English outside the classroom unless there exist a condition that forces them to self-initiate an interaction.

Not less important were the remaining 2 out of 10 subjects (13.4%) that demonstrated to have very positive social representations of self-initiated interaction with peers. That is to say, they really like self-initiating interactions no matter the absence/presence of conditions and of certain peers’ preferences. Thus, only these two subjects were considered to self-initiate interactions with peers for the sake of improving their English oral proficiency. Figure 6 and table 12 support these findings.

Figure 6. Grouping of participants according to their social representations

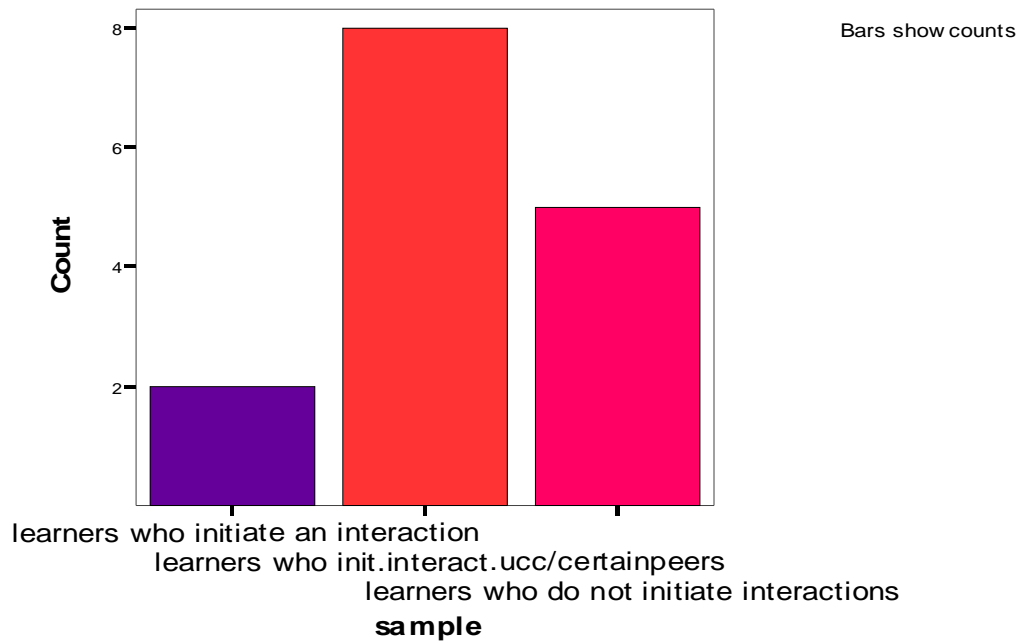


Figure 6

Table 12. Grouping of participants according to their social representations

SAMPLE					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	learners who initiate an interaction	2	13,3	13,3	13,3
	learners who init.interact.ucc/certainpeers	8	53,3	53,3	66,7
	learners who do not initiate interactions	5	33,3	33,3	100,0
	Total	15	100,0	100,0	

6.7. L2 LEARNERS' SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS VS. L2 LEARNERS' CURRENT ORAL PROFICIENCY LEVEL AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF THEIR L2 LEARNING PROCESS.

To find out possible relations between the social representations L2 learners had about self-initiated interactions in the TL at different stages in their L2 learning process (1st, 2nd, and 3rd year students) and their actual level of oral proficiency; the results from the OPI interview were contrasted with L2 learners' social representations, which in turn were grouped under three category headings. **1.** L2 learners' social representations disapproving the event of initiating an interaction outside the classroom. **2.** L2 learners' social representations acknowledging the event of initiating an interaction outside the classroom but under certain conditions and with certain peers. **3.** L2 learners' social representations acknowledging the event of initiating an interaction outside the classroom for the sake of improving their oral proficiency.

When comparing L2 learners' social representations and L2 learners' current oral proficiency level of first, second and third year students; it was found that: **1.** Those students whose social representations favoured the self-initiation of interactions with peers (subjects 8 and 9) were placed in an intermediate high level of oral proficiency that did not correspond to the advanced level they are supposed to have for being enrolled in the fifth and sixth semester. Thus, there was not a direct relation between these L2 learners' social representations of accomplished self-initiated interactions and the level of oral proficiency. **2.** Those students whose social representations favoured the self-initiation of interactions with peers but under certain conditions and with certain peers (subjects 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 13, 14, and 15) were placed in different levels of oral proficiency. Subjects 1, 6, and 15, for example, were evaluated as if they had a novice high level (subject 1) and an intermediate high level (subjects 6 and 15) of oral proficiency which did not correspond to the intermediate (subject 1) and advanced level (subjects 6 and 15) they are expected to have for being in second, fifth, and tenth semester respectively. Again, a direct relation was not found between these two variables. On the contrary, there were three subjects (5, 13, and 14) whose intermediate and advanced level of oral proficiency according to the OPI interviewer match the intermediate (subject 5) and advanced level (subjects 13 and 14) they are supposed to have for being enrolled in the second and last semester; however, it was considered that the appropriate level of oral proficiency of these learners has nothing to do with their social representations of accomplished interactions since they only self-initiate interactions under particular circumstances thus limiting the time of exposure outside the class to occasional interactions. **3.** Those L2 learners whose social representations disapproved the self-initiation of interactions and reported never having initiated one (subjects 4, 7, 10, 11 and 12), showed that the level of oral proficiency was similar to those L2 learners who had self-initiated interactions with peers outside the classroom. The lack of any relation between

these variables is additionally supported by case 12 in that he had never initiated an interaction with a peer and despite of this he was placed in and advanced level of oral proficiency (advanced low). Figure 7 shows the mismatch between L2 learners' social representations and their current level of oral proficiency.

Figure 7. Social representations and OPI of research sample

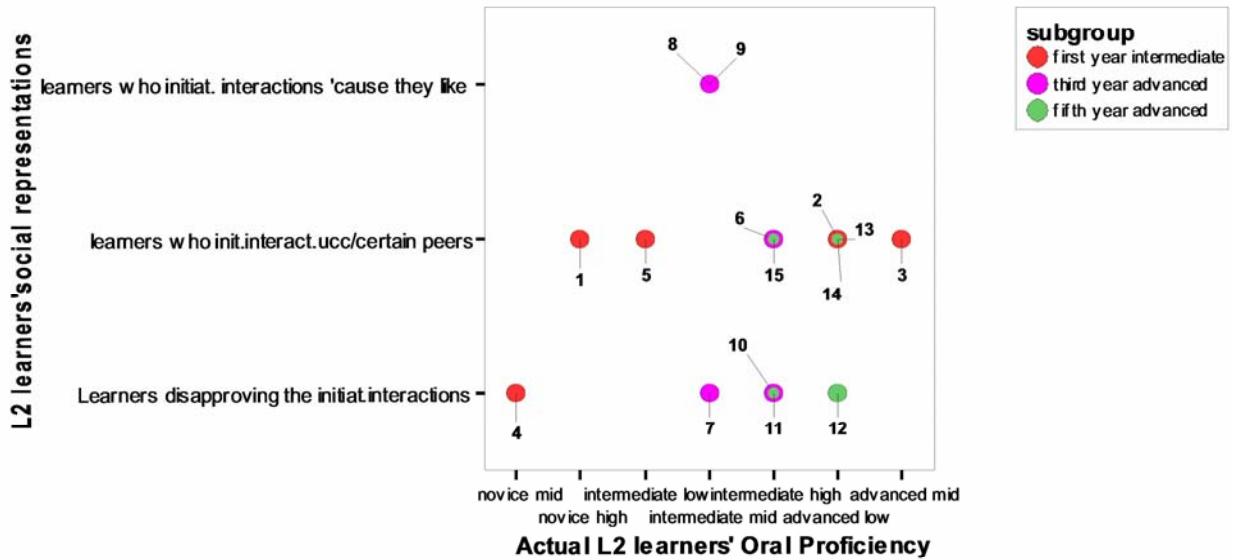


Figure 8

7. LIMITATIONS

The first difficulty found was the reluctance from the majority of the students to participate in the study mainly because they were going to be exposed to a stressful situation like putting their level of oral proficiency to the test.

After that, a more serious obstacle was encountered. This time, it was difficult to find a suitable person willing to do the OPI interview that could also meet the following requirement established in the ACTFL proficiency guidelines – speaking: To be a native-like speaker engaged in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Gardner has asserted that both the educational setting and the non-educational setting are important for determining learning outcomes both linguistic, like L2 proficiency and non-linguistic such as attitudes, self-concept, cultural values, and beliefs (Ellis, 1994). This claim presupposes that learning behaviour in a non-educational setting would give L2 learners in a majority Spanish language context like ours additional time of exposure to the L2 in contrast to the L2 contact in the classroom; and consequently, L2 learners' oral proficiency would increase. Nonetheless, it was found that most participants 13 out of 15 subjects (86.6%) were reluctant to self-initiate an interaction with peers outside the classroom due to two main reasons. 1. Their social representations of this oral communication practice are disapproving, even without having initiated an interaction. 2. In their social representations must exist a condition and/or preference that lead them to self-initiate an oral communication practice. Therefore, the social representations with respect to the interactions in a non-educational context for each learner were determined, to a high degree, by what was socially accepted by the group as social representations (social representations that somehow rejected the self-initiation of interactions with peers outside the class).

Being the self-initiation of interactions with peers outside the class rejected and restricted to occasional interactions by the majority of the 15 subjects, the time of exposure to the L2 outside is to a large extent limited and in others null. Thus, appealing to Gardner's socio educational model it would have been reasonable to find that 13 out of 15 subjects whose social representations somehow rejected the self-initiation of interactions with peers outside the class had had a lower level of oral proficiency than the remaining 2 subjects whose social representations favored and carried out the self-initiation of this oral communication practice because they like it. However, the findings were quite different from what has been stated since the 2 subjects that viewed the self-initiation of interactions as something positive had a lower level of oral proficiency as well. Consequently, the participants' level of oral proficiency that is below or corresponds to the expected level has nothing to do with their social representations, but to other factors.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Although, it was confirmed that the majority of the students are averse to initiating an interaction and that there is not a direct relation between their social representations and their level of oral proficiency, the benefits of being exposed to the L2 in a non-educational context and those of interacting between peers stated by Gardner (Ellis, 1994), Gass and Varonis (1985a, 1986), and Varonis and Gass (1985b) should not be dismissed or unrecognized. Therefore, we suggest that it is important to encourage L2 learners to initiate interactions with peers outside the classroom and of making L2 learners aware of these benefits through an autonomous learning model. This model would then aim at changing L2 learners' social representations disapproving the self-initiation of interactions with peers into most favorable ones so that this practice can be socially accepted and accomplished in a more spontaneous and natural way by the whole group. This is feasible since "Individuals and groups create representations in the course of communication and co-operation. Representations are born, change, and change other representations" (Moscovici, 1984).

2. It would be of great importance to evaluate L2 learners' level of oral proficiency at least every two semesters during the length of the program making use of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) which was developed to evaluate speaking proficiency in a foreign language, or the levels described in the Common European Framework (CEF). In this way, if future researchers in the program want to inquire into the speaking skill and wish to conduct cross-sectional studies like ours, they will have at their disposal a valuable source of information that in turn will benefit researchers (less time consuming to convince the sample to present the OPI interview and to find a suitable person willing to interview the sample) and the ELT program (students whose level of oral proficiency does not fit in with the expected level could be encouraged to use the TL in oral communication tasks assigned to be accomplished outside the classroom).

3. It would be worthy, if future researchers replicated our study recruiting a more representative sample of the population so that outcomes can be generalized to all L2 learners enrolled in the ELT program in Spanish speaking majority contexts.

GLOSSARY

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: the knowledge that users of a language have internalized to enable them to understand and produce messages in the language. Various models of communicative competence have been proposed but most of them recognize that it entails both linguistic competence (for example, knowledge of grammatical rules) and pragmatic competence (for example, knowledge of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior in a particular situation).

COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT: input refers to language that learners are exposed to. Input that can be understood by a learner has been referred to as comprehensible input.

COMPREHENSIBLE OUTPUT: is language produced by the learner. It can be comprehensible or incomprehensible to an interlocutor.

EDUCATIONAL SETTING: is a setting where formal instruction of the L2 takes place.

ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL): It refers to the English language learning process in a non-English speaking country.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAM (ELT): A program in English language teaching offered by the Universidad Industrial de Santander in Bucaramanga, Colombia.

EXPLICIT L2 KNOWLEDGE: explicit L2 knowledge is that knowledge of rules and items that exist in an analyzed form so that learners are able to report what they know.

FOREIGNER TALK: When native speakers address learners, they adjust their normal speech in order to facilitate understanding. These adjustments, which involve both language form and language function, constitute “foreigner talk”.

IMPLICIT L2 KNOWLEDGE: implicit knowledge of a language is knowledge that is intuitive and tacit. It cannot be directly reported. The knowledge that most speakers have of their L1 is implicit.

L2 PROFICIENCY: refers to a learner’s skill in using the L2. It can be contrasted with the term competence. Whereas, competence refers to the knowledge of the

L2 a learner has internalized, proficiency refers to the learner's ability to use this knowledge in different tasks.

NATIVE SPEAKER (NS): a speaker of a particular language who has spoken that language since earliest childhood.

NATURAL SETTINGS: is a setting where the L2 is used normally for everyday communicative purposes (for example, in the street or the workplace).

NEGOTIATION OF MEANING: Communication involving L2 learners often leads to problems in understanding and breakdown. Frequently, one or more of the participants tries to remedy this by engaging in interactional work to secure mutual understanding. This work is called "negotiation of meaning".

NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS (NNSs): It makes reference to peers enrolled in the Teaching Training Program at UIS.

SECOND LANGUAGE (L2): This is any language learned after the first language is acquired.

SELF-INITIATED INTERACTION: defined as the language used by a learner when addressing another learner.

TARGET LANGUAGE (TL): A language that a non-native speaker is in the process of learning.

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Appendix A. Close-ended questionnaire

The following questionnaire is composed of two parts. In part 1, you will find a set of closed-ended items reflecting various beliefs of self-initiated interaction with peers outside the classroom. Part 2 is made up of some open-ended questions intended for you to report the situations where your self-initiated interactions take place (if they do) and why you stop talking.

Part 1: Please tick (√) below the number that best reflects what you think.
1= I totally disagree 2= I disagree 3= no comments 4= I agree 5= I totally agree

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I like beginning conversations in English with peers outside the classroom.					
2. When I decide to initiate an interaction in English with a peer, I like that the peer speaks to me in English as well.					
3. I perceive that it takes too much time to interact orally with a peer in English than when I speak to him/her in Spanish.					
4. I tend to get embarrassed when I initiate a verbal interaction with a peer.					
5. I see verbal interaction outside the class with peers as a frightening communication practice because I consider my peers better speakers than me					
6. I initiate verbal interactions with peers whose speaking level is unknown for me.					
7. I consider that initiating a conversation out-of-class situation is a senseless practice.					
8. I tend to initiate a verbal conversation outside the classroom only with those peers who I have a close relationship with.					
9. I tend to initiate a verbal conversation outside the classroom with those peers I have worked in communicative activities in the classroom.					
10. I tend to initiate and keep a verbal interaction out-of-class situation with those peers I consider have an oral proficiency level lower than mine.					
11. I resort to Spanish when I notice that a topic I choose to initiate a conversation is not of peers' interest.					
12. I tend to initiate a conversation in English with a peer when I am drinking.					
13. I tend to initiate a conversation in English when I feel ashamed of expressing feelings of affection, disagreement, anger, etc. to a peer in Spanish.					
14. I tend to initiate a conversation in English with a peer when I do not want people to listen and understand what I am saying to the peer.					
15. I tend to initiate a conversation in English with a peer when I know that he/she likes speaking in English outside the classroom.					
16. I tend to initiate a conversation in English with a peer when I want to practice for a speaking examination.					
17. I tend to initiate a conversation in English with peers I consider are the same age as me.					
18. I tend to initiate a conversation in English with peers with the same gender as me.					

Appendix B. Open-ended questionnaire

Part 2: Please answer the following questions:

1. Do you ever start a conversation in English with a peer outside the classroom or outside the University?

If your answer to question 1 is YES, please answer the following questions:

2. In what specific situations or circumstances do you initiate interactions in English with a peer? Please list them below.

3. After having initiated an interaction with a peer outside classes, in what specific situations or circumstances do you decide to stop using English to interact with your peer? Please list them below.

If your answer to question 1 is NO,

4. What reasons stop you from initiating interactions in English with a peer? Please list them below.

Appendix C. Self-Assessment of oral proficiency



Self-Assessment Checklist For: _____ **Semester:** _____
Student's Name

This self-assessment form will help you evaluate your level of speaking or level of oral proficiency on oral communication practices. Use the following checklist to record what you think you can do (Column 1) by writing **yes** or **no** in front of each statement. After that, an interviewer will assess what he/she thinks you can do (Column 2).

NOVICE MID	(1) Me	(2) Inter.
Oral Proficiency		
I can introduce myself and others and use basic culturally-appropriate greetings.		
I can ask memorized questions and answer simple questions, on very familiar topics such as leisure activities, family, food, school, and weather using memorized phrases.		
I can handle numbers, quantities, cost, time and dates in simple situations.		
I can make myself understood in a simple way, and understand the other person provided he talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.		
I can in simple fashion ask somebody to repeat what he or she says or asks him or her to speak more slowly.		
I can ask and answer in simple terms questions about likes and dislikes.		
I can give personal information (address, telephone number, nationality, age, family)		
I can talk about things I like and dislike		
I can describe myself		
NOVICE HIGH	(1) Me	(2) Inter.
Oral Proficiency		
I can make simple transactions in real-life situations such as stores, restaurants, post offices or banks, sometimes hesitantly or in incomplete sentences.		
I can ask for and give directions referring to a map or plan.		
I can make social arrangements that include date, time, and place.		
I can exchange information about what I like and dislike.		
I can discuss with other people what to do, where to go, and when to meet.		
I can ask people for things and give people things.		
I can ask people questions about where they live, people they know,		

things they have, etc. and answer such questions addressed to me, provided questions are articulated slowly and clearly.		
I can give a basic description of myself, my family, other people using simple sentences and phrases.		
I can give a basic description of my activities and personal experiences using simple sentences and phrases.		
I can give a basic description of my hobbies and interests using basic sentences.		
INTERMEDIATE LOW	(1) Me	(2) Inter.
Oral Proficiency		
I can often start, maintain, and end a simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest, but I have difficulty expressing exactly what I want to say.		
I can ask for and follow simple directions and instructions.		
I can express and react to feelings such as surprise, happiness, sadness, interest and indifference.		
I can create simple sentences and deal with uncomplicated situations.		
I have a sufficient vocabulary to engage in conversation in complete sentences on most topics pertinent to my everyday life such as family, household tasks, hobbies, interests, and work.		
I can deal with some situations likely to arise when traveling to an area where the language is spoken.		
I can describe myself, my family, other people using several simple sentences.		
I can describe where I live using several simple sentences.		
I can describe my interests, activities, and personal experiences using several simple sentences.		
I can describe my interests, activities, and personal experiences using several simple sentences.		
I can talk about things that are happening and are going to happen.		
I can talk about my needs, wants, and preferences.		
I can summarize short passages in a simple fashion.		
INTERMEDIATE MID	(1) Me	(2) Inter.
Oral Proficiency		
I can ask and answer questions about routine personal information concerning myself, my family, home, and daily activities.		
I can communicate in sentences about my interests and personal preferences.		
I can ask and answer questions about food, shopping, travel, and lodging in uncomplicated situations.		
I can participate in a spontaneous discussion, but sometimes gaps in communication may occur.		
I can give and seek personal views and opinions in an informal discussion with friends.		
I can explain and give reasons for my plans, intentions, and actions.		
I can express my plans for the near future.		

I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.		
I can narrate and describe in at least two time frames.		
I can occasionally correct some errors when I hear myself make them.		
I can describe past activities, and personal experiences.		
I can give detailed accounts of experiences and express feelings and reactions.		
I can give clear, detailed descriptions on subjects related to me and my world.		
I can narrate a story based on picture prompts.		
I can summarize short stories and news items.		
INTERMEDIATE HIGH	(1) Me	(2) Inter.
Oral Proficiency		
I can engage in extended conversations and participate in discussions on most general topics.		
I can, with occasional difficulty, formulate questions and gather information related to work, school, recreation and particular areas of interest.		
I can exchange considerable quantities of detailed factual information on matters within my fields of interest.		
I can convey degrees of emotion and react appropriately to the emotions of others.		
I can support my opinions and make recommendations by providing relevant explanations, arguments, and comments.		
I can give clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my fields of interest.		
I can describe my dreams, hopes, and ambitions.		
I can summarize news items, interviews, stories, films or plays.		

ADVANCED LOW	(1) Me	(2) Inter.
Oral Proficiency		
I can engage comfortably in conversation with most native speakers, although with some hesitation.		
I can use the language fluently, accurately, and effectively on a wide range of topics that may occur in the present, past or future.		
I can express my ideas and opinions clearly and precisely when engaged in lengthy conversation.		
I can get through unfamiliar situations by paraphrasing.		
I can handle unpredictable occurrences in everyday situations.		
I can give clear and detailed descriptions, integrating themes and developing my point of view.		
I can give presentations on a subject in my field of personal and/or professional interest and respond to audience questions.		
I can summarize long texts.		
I can construct a persuasive argument linking my ideas logically.		
I can accurately narrate and describe in the past, present, and future time frames.		
I can speculate about causes, consequences, and hypothetical situations in a limited way.		
I can generally correct my errors when I hear myself make them.		
ADVANCED MID/HIGH	(1) Me	(2) Inter.
Oral Proficiency		
I can take part with ease in all conversations and discussions with native speakers and can adapt to the demands of the conversation.		
I can often convey and understand finer shades of meaning by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of expressions to qualify statements.		
I can use and understand many idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms effectively.		
I can exchange complex information about work-related or professional tasks.		
I can participate in discussions and support my opinions and viewpoints on contemporary issues, such as current events, politics, business and other important matters.		
I can develop and support hypotheses, working around occasional difficulties.		
I can summarize information from different sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation.		
I can present ideas and viewpoints in a very flexible manner in order to give emphasis, to differentiate, and to eliminate confusion.		
I can express myself naturally and effortlessly; I only need to pause occasionally in order to select precisely the right words.		
I can consistently speak appropriately and accurately using present, past, and future time frames.		
I can give clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects.		
I can give a clearly developed and well-organized presentation on a subject in my fields of personal or professional interest in a style appropriate to the audience.		
I can depart when necessary from the prepared text of my presentation and follow up spontaneously to points raised by members of the audience.		
I can backtrack and restructure smoothly when speaking, so that others are hardly aware of it.		
I can discuss some abstract topics related to my interests and fields of expertise.		

Student's oral proficiency level according to self-assessment: _____

Student's oral proficiency level according to OPI interviewer: _____

Taken and adapted from the European Language Portfolio and ACTFL guidelines.