

LEARNER PERCEPTIONS OF SMALL GROUP AND  
PAIR WORK IN THE ESL CLASSROOM:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR CONDITIONS IN  
SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

by

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ABSTRACT

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Second language acquisition (SLA) research finds that small group (SG) and pair work (PW) are essential tools in language learning, specifically creating optimal conditions for negotiation of meaning (e.g., Long, 1985; Pica, et al., 1996). Limited research has focused on learner perceptions playing a part in establishing these conditions. This study examines learner perceptions of participation in SG/PW

and the actual character of their participation in creating necessary conditions for SLA.

This study involved 29 adult ESL learners enrolled in a private institute. Using focus group discussions, video-recorded SG/PW activities, and “stimulated recall” (Gass & Mackey, 2000), learner perceptions of SG/PW are identified. In addition, learner levels of participation were calculated through conversational “turns” (Edelsky, 1981). Findings show a majority of learners noted communicative breakdown as motivating and it forced them to negotiate for meaning. Further, learners displaying positive perceptions toward SG/PW took more turns, allowing for an opportunity-rich environment for SLA.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The ESL classroom is composed of an array of languages, cultures, and perceptions. It is within this array that both learners and instructors bring their perceptions of a flourishing language learning environment. The hope is that the perceptions would converge with sound theoretical practices and second language acquisition would occur. One aspect that has theoretical backing in language acquisition is using small group and pair work activities to create a setting conducive to second language acquisition (SLA).

#### 1.1 Group Work and the ESL Classroom

The use of small group (SG) and pair work (PW) in the ESL classroom has been shown to be an effective means for improving language competence (Long, 1996, 1985; Pica, et al., 1996; Pica & Doughty, 1985). SG/PW promotes a variety of opportunities for learners that fully teacher-led classrooms do not always afford. The opportunity for learners to build confidence in a smaller setting that is limited to language learning peers, as well as the increased individual talk time available in an SG/PW environment are examples of the benefits. When learners interact with one another, they sense a level of control in their language learning which lends itself to building confidence in acquiring a second language. Johnson (1995) found this to be true:

Student-student interaction in second language classrooms can create opportunities for students to participate in less structured and more spontaneous language use, negotiate meaning, self-select when to participate, control the topic of discussion, and most important, draw on their own prior knowledge and interactional competencies to actively communicate with others.

(Johnson, 1995, p. 116)

Language learners are constantly looking for ways to use their skills in order to improve their fluency and instructors are also seeking new avenues to motivate and provide optimal environments for learners to accomplish this.

### 1.2 Learner Perceptions and SG/PW

Discovering learner perceptions about building their language skills has been done in a variety of ways. From observing learners during tasks, to interviewing to direct inquiry of the learners, each venue has its advantages and drawbacks. While there are multiple studies on learner perceptions in general, at this time there is limited research that delves into the learner's perceptions of their participation in SG/PW and how this may create optimal conditions for second language acquisition (SLA). Prior research has focused on what utterances the learners construct and not how they perceive their environment or how that may shape their production. Mackey (2002) elaborated on this very point:

In sum, interaction is believed to facilitate the necessary connections between input, output, feedback, noticing, scaffolding, processing, and control that can benefit the comprehension and acquisition process for various aspects of the target language. To date, researchers have pointed to evidence of these processes in interaction data mainly through examining the *production* of learners and their interlocutors.

(Mackey, 2002, p. 381)

While production is an important aspect in language acquisition and theory, language learners' perceptions are a vital strand that needs to be knit within the fabric of SLA theory and practical application. When theory is integrated with the actual thought processes of the learners, their acquisition opportunities could be greatly enriched.

### 1.3 The Research Question

The research question I wish to address is the following: To what extent do learner perceptions of their participation in SG/PW (e.g., with regard to the usefulness of activities, their own motivation to participate during activities, and their level of comprehension of interaction during activities) and the actual character of their participation facilitate or constrain the conditions necessary for SLA? I came to this question in part from research and in part from my practical experience with this issue in the classroom. For example, I believe there could be a relationship between the learner perceptions of SG/PW and their level of participation in SG/PW such that consistent levels of participation might increase the learners' exposure to the linguistic input essential in facilitating SLA

The ESL classroom can have many opportunities available every class period for SG/PW interaction related to a variety of different topics. When instructors and learners take advantage of these opportunities, the language learning experience can be enhanced. If the instructors and learners have an understanding of the benefits of SG/PW, in addition to comprehending the perceptions of both learner and instructor in relation to participation, the environment can be conducive to SLA. It is with this purpose in mind that the following study proceeds.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Whether researchers are studying the socio-cultural or meta-cognitive aspects of interaction, most would agree that interaction is beneficial in the second language (L2) classroom. Finding the type of interaction that promotes SLA to the greatest degree is the source of constant study and diverging opinions. Krashen (1985) felt the key to SLA was “comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1985, p.2), which he defines as “that bit of language that is heard or read and that contains language slightly ahead of a learner’s current state of grammatical knowledge” (Gass, 1997, pp. 81-82). So, in effect, this means that as long as a learner hears input that is understandable, SLA will follow. This was further developed by the explanation of why some learners are not able to acquire a second language due to a mechanism called “the affective filter” (Krashen, 1985). If learners felt anxiety or other emotions during their language learning, this “affective filter” could hinder their progress. Starting with Wagner-Wagner-Gough and Hatch (1975) the path was paved for many other scholars (e.g., Long, Gass & Varonis, Pica & Doughty, Pica, Doughty, & Young) in the next 30 years to explore and develop further the position that comprehensible input was not only a key factor, but so was the negotiated interaction between NSs and NNSs.



Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis basically states that certain types of feedback that take place during interactive negotiation can smooth the progress of SLA. This negotiated interaction requires that both speakers in a conversation take part and provide input for the other that is simplified in order for understanding to take place.

Varonis and Gass (1985) created a model for non-understanding in order to look at how negotiation of meaning might take place within different group work scenarios. "Because the 'fault' of non-understanding may reside with either the speaker or the hearer or both, the interlocutors have a shared incompetence. Therefore, NNS-NNS discourse allows greater opportunity than NS-NNS or NS-NS discourse for the negotiation of meaning" (Gass & Varonis, 1985, p. 71). Pica, et al. (1996) expanded on Long and Porter's 1985 study that compared negotiated interaction. They found that "learners working together in groups were found to display greater motivation, more initiative, and less anxiety regarding their learning. They were found to produce more language, and their language was characterized by a broader range of sociolinguistic functions" (Pica, et al., 1996, p. 60). Allwright (1984) proposed that "interaction in the classroom" was not just part of the methodology of the day but rather was "the fundamental fact of classroom pedagogy-the fact that everything that happens in the classroom happens through a process of live person-to-person interaction" (Allwright, 1984, p. 156). The value of interaction between the

teacher and learner as well as interaction between learners themselves has been explored. While group work has sometimes been thought of as “break-time” for the instructor, it has been researched in such a way as to prove its benefit in the ESL classroom as a facilitative method for SLA. Gass addresses this issue in the context of the conversation channel: “Within the current orthodoxy, conversation is not only a medium of practice; it is also the means by which learning takes place” (Gass, 1997, p. 104). Further research provides insight on how learners’ function within SG/PW tasks and how language acquisition is helped or hindered in this setting.

### 2.1 Benefit of SG/PW Activities

Study upon study has found benefits from classroom interaction in many shapes and forms, group work being one of these forms. Long & Porter (1985) found that SG/PW research had a solid basis in the pedagogical arena and, in addition, added their support for many psycholinguistic benefits. These benefits include a larger number of instances to use the language and to negotiate for meaning as compared to the lockstep lessons (i.e., lessons that involve a structured teacher-fronted instructional format) (Pica & Doughty, 1985). They found in their studies that learners have more options for involving themselves in a deeper level of negotiation when in the small group environment. Pica and Doughty (1985) researched how learners functioned in a whole classroom setting with the teacher as the focal point and also how the learners functioned in group settings. The conclusion of their study is as follows:

Finally, we found that individual students appeared to have more opportunities to use the target language in group than in teacher-fronted activities, through

either taking more turns or producing more samples of their interlanguage.

Such opportunities may have had a positive effect on students' development of linguistic and strategic competence in giving them practice in hypothesizing about interlanguage structures which were still at variable levels of accuracy, or in enhancing their development of second language fluency.

(Pica & Doughty, 1985, p. 131)

This quote suggests that the opportunities in SG/PW have explicit benefits for the learners in terms of the communicative competencies necessary for fluency in language learning.

In light of considering negotiation as a useful tool in SLA there is one further aspect of the process that is worthy to note. This is Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990). Philp (2003) discussed how the hypothesis comes into play during interaction. "It is only what the learner notices about the input that holds potential for learning because intake-that is, the detection, processing, and storage of input is conditional upon noticing" (Philp, 2003, p. 101). So the learner "noticing the gap" (Schmidt, 1990) between their interlanguage and the target language needed for clearer communication is a vital component in negotiation. Through this noticing the learner can modify their interaction and reformulate their interlanguage rules. At this point I will transition to examine aspects of SG/PW interaction, the ESL classroom context and tasks used to create conditions for SLA.

Long (1985) points out that in the lockstep method of teaching, the instructor usually “sets the same instructional pace and content for everyone, by lecturing, explaining a grammar point, leading drill work, or asking questions of the class” (Long, 1985, p. 208). Long (1985) goes on to give an example of a 50 minute class period in a typical classroom consisting of half of the class period spent with the instructor talking and the remaining 25 minutes left for administration, reading, writing, and student talk time. If the reading, writing and administration were completed possibly 15 minutes would remain, which in a classroom of 30 learners would leave approximately 30 seconds of talk time per learner during each lesson. The lack of time available in many ESL classrooms for individual speaking opportunities could result in a slower progression of language acquisition. The type of task used in SG/PW can have an impact on the effectiveness of learning.

Long (1981) as well as Doughty & Pica (1984) found that a greater level of modified interaction takes place in two-way tasks than in one-way tasks. This modified interaction allows more comprehensible input to be obtained by learners. Greater language acquisition can occur as a result of the availability of substantial comprehensible input provided through negotiation.

Storch (2002) studied the relationships that were created during pair work interaction in the ESL classroom. While studies that have been done show the assignment of groups to be an important aspect of effective group work, Storch focused on “the nature of the relationship formed in the pair or

group” (Storch, 2002, p. 306). She looked at 10 pairs of learners and found that how the pairs approached the task resulted in a greater or lesser comprehension of the task. If the pair went into the task in unity and addressed uncertainties about language choice and shared their knowledge, they were able to complete the task with understanding. Alternatively, if the pair competed for the control of the task, they often were unable to complete the task. Storch noted in the study that the way the groups interact is an important observation for the instructor to make because this factor could help or hinder the progress of the group. “The findings also reiterate the need for teachers to monitor very closely the kind of relationships that are formed when student work in small group or pairs in the language classroom, whether those groups are assigned by the teacher or self-selected” (Storch, 2002, p. 318). With the many insights about the benefits of SG/PW documented above, I would like to examine another aspect of the SG/PW continuum, that of learner motivation.

## 2.2 Learner Motivation in SG/PW Activities

Motivation is an intricate learner attribute that has multiple facets. Finding avenues to motivate learners in the classroom takes a creative approach due to the many differences that can arise in that environment comprised of many peoples, languages, and nations. “Individual differences in motivation are influenced and supported by factors originating in environmental characteristics (i.e. cultural, personal, social, educational, etc.)” (Gardner, 2006, p. 240). Gardner (2006) discusses the socio-educational

model as a “dynamic ongoing process” that looks at many factors contributing to SLA. He views motivation as “a mediator for any link between attitudes toward the learning situation and integrativeness and language achievement. Thus, it would be hypothesized that motivation and perhaps ability would mediate relationships between second language achievement and other variables such as gender, personality, etc.” (Gardner, 2006, p. 251). How does this attribute of motivation play into SLA? Motivation is one of the key factors in determining the direction and degree of a language learners’ progress. Dornyei & Csizer elaborate on this:

When trying to explain any success or failure in second language (L2) learning, the term ‘motivation’ is often used by teachers and students alike. We take the view that L2 motivation is one of the most important factors that determine the rate and success of L2 attainment: it provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process.

(Dornyei & Csizer, 1998, p. 203)

In order to narrow motivation to this study’s specific area of SG/PW, the focus will be directed to the relationship between participation and motivation in this setting. Participation by learners’ in the SG/PW setting is a necessity or interaction would be non-existent. Simply stated, learners’ need to expose themselves to interaction through participation to build up their skill and confidence. Participation in classroom interaction was found to have an

impact on proficiency levels and further on SLA based on Ely's (1986) study. In another study, Tomizawa (1990) investigated adult ESL learners' from Japan and why they were reticent in using oral English. The three main categories that affected learners' desire to use oral English were: (1) "socio-cultural factors such as careful thought vs. spontaneity in responding, etc.; (2) psychological factors such as intolerance of ambiguity, motivation intensity, etc. and, (3) linguistic factors such as lack of sufficient knowledge of English such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, etc." (Hwang, 1993, p. 25). So motivation and participation seem to interrelate and may drive the other during interaction. If a learner has a high or low level of motivation it may be reflected in their discourse, for better or worse.

In the 1990's there was a revisiting of earlier research on motivation with the specific intent of looking closer at the ESL classroom to gain a more accurate assessment of how motivation fits into this setting. The complexities of motivation are so vast that various scholars have broken it down into smaller pieces in order to see the relevance of its role in SLA. Three components arose from a study by Clement, (1994), consisting of "integrative motivation, linguistic self-confidence and the appraisal of the classroom environment" that forged a new way of seeing motivation as integral in the ESL classroom (Clement, 1994, p. 419). The purposes of the current literature review need only focus on the "appraisal of the classroom environment" (Clement, 1994, p. 420). Dornyei & Csizer (1998) reformed the term from "appraisal of the

classroom environment” to “learning situation level” (Dornyei & Csizer, 1998, p. 206). An aspect of this situation level is the “group-specific motivational components, which are related to the group dynamics of the learner group” (Dornyei & Csizer, 1998, p. 207). Many aspects of the interrelationship of motivation and participation have been shown to be beneficial in the second language classroom.

Bejarano (1987) conducted a study using the STAD technique (Student Teams and Achievement Divisions) (Slavin, 1978) and the DG technique (Discussion Group) (Sharan and Lazarowitz, 1978). “By offering each individual an equal opportunity to contribute to the group grade, the STAD technique raises the motivation of all students and prevents a danger that might occur in small-group learning, namely that the contribution of lower level student is not appreciated at all” (Bejarano, 1987, p. 487). DG encourages “attentive listening, effective implementation of peers’ ideas, cooperation and sharing of information, mutual help, talking in turn, serving as group leader, and so on” (Sharan & Sharan, 1975, p. 65). As a result, the findings revealed “these social processes encouraged active participation of all members of the group and intensive interaction among them” (Bejarano, 1987, p. 493). The students enjoyed the activities that were set in a communicative style and, further, were motivated to work through communication and finish the assignment. (Bejarano, 1987, p. 493).



This is just a brief review of the extensive research that has been done in relation to motivation and participation in the ESL classroom. The final aspect to consider in past research is whether the activities in SG/PW function to promote comprehension of the second language. Ultimately, comprehension and SLA go hand in hand as a part of the language learning process.

### 2.3 Comprehensibility of SG/PW Activities

There is a vast array of theory and activity that is used in the attempt to increase comprehension in the second language classroom. During the time period of 1981 through 1994 Krashen alone introduced five theories on language acquisition. The process and outcomes of these activities have been studied over the past few decades. Previous studies have focused on NS/NNS interactions and used the NS as a sort of “control” to see what the NNS would comprehend in the second language. There has been a move toward more in-depth review of NNS/NNS interaction and these studies are revealing, at least as much, if not more, viable information about interaction in the language classroom. While not every study reveals a clear relationship between NNS/NNS interaction and comprehension there are a growing number that do point in that direction. Long (1985) has reviewed other scholars in parallel with his research and found similarities and differences among the research relating to NNS/NNS interaction.

A recent study by Hawkins (1985) has shown that it is dangerous to assume that the adjustments always lead to comprehension by NNSs, even when they

appear to have understood, as judged by the appropriateness of their responses. On the other hand, at least two studies (Chaudron 1983 and Long 1985) have demonstrated clear improvements in comprehension among groups of NNSs as a result of specific and global speech modifications, respectively.

(Long, 1985, p. 214)

In Bejarano's study (1987), the results of cooperative procedures in two small groups were compared with a whole-class technique in the EFL context. What he found was that group work resulted in higher improvement rates: "Particularly noteworthy are the findings revealing that both group methods registered significantly greater improvement than the whole-class method on the total score of the test and on the listening comprehension scale" (Bejarano, 1987, p. 483).

The past notion that only native speakers can offer assistance in the language learning process is now less relevant as studies continue to confirm that NNSs can offer valuable language skills to one another. There has been some debate on whether only input is necessary or whether output is also a vital aspect in second language development. While Krashen (1985) thought comprehensible input was the major condition necessitating SLA, Swain (1995) hypothesized that in the production of language a learner must consider syntax. If input and output are both necessary pieces in the puzzle then it seems only right that NNS-NNS pairs or small groups could also provide an

environment conducive to language learning within the confines of their own interaction.

Varonis and Gass (1985) believe that communication originating from NNS/NNS can be important to these learners for the following reasons:

First, it allows them a non-threatening forum within which to practice developing language skills. Second, it provides them with an opportunity to receive input which they have made comprehensible through negotiation.

(Varonis & Gass, 1985, p. 87)

In a study shortly following the above, Gass and Varonis (1985) proposed that NNS-NNS dyads offer one another the furthestmost probability to receive input that is comprehensible as well as providing output that can be understood through negotiation. In 1996, Pica, et al. completed a study that showed that NNSs interaction tended to meet some of the needs for “L2 input modified toward comprehension, feedback focused on form, and modification of output” in a similar way as with NSs (Pica, et al., 1996, p. 78).

#### 2.4 The Missing Link – Is There One?

While the past research has been pervasive in many areas of SG/PW in the ESL classroom, there remains an area of somewhat uncharted territory. A review of the theoretical aspects of the utility of SG/PW, the motivation of learners’ in this setting, and the comprehensibility of tasks have been discussed. Yet, there remains limited study on the learners’ perceptions of their own participation in SG/PW in light of usefulness, motivation, and

comprehensibility. In addition, the character of learner participation (marked by conversational turns) and how a combination of these factors may facilitate or constrain optimal conditions for SLA needs further examination. Claims have been made that second language learners do not always realize that they can learn a significant amount from one another (Schwartz, 1980). I agree with this and believe that uncovering learner perceptions of SG/PW may expose both learners and instructors alike to the manifold learning opportunities available in this setting.

There are few scholarly articles that give account for the learners' actual thoughts about SG/PW and if they perceive it to be a positive way to improve their language or a useless part of their required classroom prospectus. Mackey (2002) sees learner insights as an integral part of seeing the whole picture of interactional processes in the language classroom: "L2 research suggests that learners' perceptions about interactional processes warrant investigation as part of the interaction-learning research agenda" (Mackey, 2002, p. 381).

Being an instructor, I have often pondered what my learners think about certain processes that occur in the classroom. Because I have studied methods and pedagogy, I often think they comprehend why I am instructing in a particular way. The reality has been that if they do share their opinions, these opinions are far different than what I perceived them to be. Different cultures have varying beliefs on what an effective L2 environment is and what

beneficial “interaction” looks like. A study done by Hwang (1993) looked at the factors affecting Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese students’ passiveness in oral interaction in the ESL context. From this study, it was discovered that “the student’s cultural background was significantly related to the level of class participation” (Hwang, 1993, p. 7). There are many threads that twist together concerning how cultural experience, interaction norms in a culture, and learner perception of classroom activities function to promote learning outcomes. In her studies Lindemann (2005) felt that “looking closely at a whole system of beliefs held by one group of people can give us a better understanding of both theoretical and practical issues” (Lindemann, 2005, p. 190). While researchers cannot zero in on every aspect of a “whole system” of beliefs, it is possible through examining learner perception of their participation in SG/PW that eventually research may prove to be generalizable.

Learner perceptions of their own interaction should be a welcome addition to the field of language acquisition research. As Mackey (2002) states, “the claims of input and interaction researchers might be further specified if learners’ insights are taken into account, particularly in relation to learner-learner interactions” (p. 393). One learner that Hwang (1993) interviewed had the following response about group interaction: “I want to say something in class. I really want to say a lot. But problem is that I don’t understand sometimes teacher, when he talks fast, and sometimes I don’t understand Hispanic students and African students who talk strangely”

(Hwang, 1993, p. 58). If instructors do not know learner perceptions, can they create a classroom that is an effective multiethnic learning environment? The worlds of the instructor, researcher, and learner need to be synthesized to form relevant pedagogy. I agree with Allwright (1984) when he states:

The importance of interaction in classroom language learning is precisely that it entails this joint management of learning. We can no longer see teachers simply as teachers and learners simply as learners, because both are, for good or ill, managers of learning.

(Allwright, 1984, p. 156)

With these insights in mind, I encourage you to journey with me as 29 ESL learners and I attempt to forge a new path within the current body of research on learner perceptions of participation in SG/PW in the ESL classroom.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate answers to my research question- to what extent do learner perceptions of their participation in SG/PW (e.g., with regard to the usefulness of activities, their own motivation to participate during activities, and their level of comprehension of interaction during activities) and the actual character of their participation facilitate or constrain the conditions necessary for SLA? -- I gathered relevant data using qualitative methods. I researched numerous methods used in the past in order to gain insight on the most effective way to view learner perceptions on SG/PW. I began by using focus groups to initiate discussion about learner perception of SG/PW and to create a foundation on which to build additional methods. The reason I chose the focus group survey as the beginning stage of the research is because this type of survey is found to be effective in gaining a bird's eye view of a process. Johnson & Christensen (2004) discuss this in their book:

Focus groups are especially useful as a complement to other methods of data collection. They are very useful for providing in-depth information in a relatively short period of time. In addition, the results are usually easy to understand.

(Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 186)

Following the focus groups, a co-investigator and I video-taped the same ESL learners while they were completing tasks in small groups or pairs. I used these video recordings as a spring board for the stimulated recall activity. The learners viewed the recordings shortly after and shared their thoughts about the interaction and what their perceptions were at the time of the taping when communicative breakdown occurred.

This research was classroom-based because I agree with Mackey (2002) in that the classroom is the most appropriate location for studying learner/learner interaction due to the fact that lab settings can be sterile and unproductive in showing natural learner interactional patterns (Mackey, 2002, p. 382).

While these methods proved valuable within the confines of this study I believe it is necessary to mention possible limitations to these methods. One example was the group orientation. The learners self-selected a small group or pair to work in and it is possible they could have functioned better in one setting than the other. Learners were, in general, very positive toward their education as well, even before engaging in interactions, and there is the possibility that they wanted to maintain such a positive image for me as the teacher/researcher—a possible result of the Hawthorne Effect. In addition the groups were often made up of a variety of cultures and native language backgrounds which could produce different results than if the groups were culturally and linguistically homogenous as well as the reverse being true. In addition, the type of task chosen could always cause variation in the study depending on the comfort level of the learner with a particular type of task. With these variables in



mind I would like to introduce the learners in this study and the data collection/analysis methods.

### 3.1 Research Site and Participant Sample

This study took place at a private institute in a large metropolitan city in the U.S. Participants were enrolled in a 16 week general ESL course that covered the four core areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking. The class meets three times per week for 50 minutes each class session. The institute offered ESL levels 1 through 3 during this semester. While the institute serves both domestic and international students for private Biblical training, the student body consists of a 30% international student population which necessitates the English as a Second Language program. The campus is rich in cultural diversity with 64 nations represented, which created an ideal research environment for this study.

This study was approved under IRB Protocol Number 07.008s. In order to launch the study, I spent the first class period explaining the research and made a request for willing participants. I passed out the consent forms and allowed the learners to completely read through them before asking for those interested in volunteering for the study. I clearly explained that this study had no bearing on their course grade whatsoever. The learners also had the option of stopping the study at any point simply by communicating their wish. The entire class, except for two learners, consented to take part in the study. Each learner who consented was asked to supply the name they wanted to be identified as in the study or I provided a pseudonym for them. I was granted permission by the institute to complete this study during regular

class time so those who opted out of the study were given alternative work to do. The small group and pair work aspect of the research allowed learners to carry on with most of their regular coursework and to take part in the study in selected intervals throughout the class period. The research took place over 6 class periods.

The sample was made up of 29 learners of English as a second language. The learners are enrolled at a private institute for secondary education. As Table 3.1 below illustrates, these learners came from a variety of L1 backgrounds, with Korean (13 learners) and Latin American backgrounds (9 learners) being the most prevalent.

Table 3.1 Learner Demographics

Name	Native Land	L1	Group*
Isaac	South Korea	Korean	PW 1
Silvia	Brazil	Portugese	PW 1
Bo	South Korea	Korean	PW 2
Lee	South Korea	Korean	PW 2/FG
Diana	Mexico	Spanish	SG 1
Meeza	Ethiopia	Tribal	SG 1/FG
Pedro	Mexico	Spanish	SG 1
Yoshi	Japan	Japanese	SG 1
Shin	South Korea	Korean	SG 2
Debbie	Argentina	Spanish	SG 2/FG
Herry	Indonesia	Malay dialect	SG 2
Jay	Brazil	Portugese	SG 2/FG
David	Mexico	Spanish	SG 3
Sarai	Mexico	Spanish	SG 3
Beka	Spain	Spanish	SG 3
Daniel	South Korea	Korean	SG 3
Grace	South Korea	Korean	SG 4
Esther	South Korea	Korean	SG 4
Sang	South Korea	Korean	SG 4
Evan	Brazil	Portugese	SG 4
Jane	Spain	Spanish	SG 5
TJ	South Korea	Korean	SG 5
Ho	South Korea	Korean	SG 5/FG
Tanaka	Japan	Japanese	SG 5/FG
David	South Korea	Korean	SG 6
Stanley	India	Hindi	SG 6/FG
Pam	South Korea	Korean	SG 6
America	Guatemala	Spanish	SG 6
Yoo	South Korea	Korean	FG
*Group	PW=pair work (2 learners)		
	SG= small group (4 learners)		

Other nations that were represented were Ethiopia, Japan, Spain, India, and Indonesia. The sample consisted of 17 males and 12 females, respectively. They were assessed by their institute as having achieved level three in English language proficiency, equal to that of a high intermediate/low advanced learner. These learners were in a classroom that used SG/PW as a means for learners to interact while learning ESL skills. The teacher was also the primary investigator in this study.

### 3.2 Data Collection

Data collection for this study involved three stages consisting of (1) focus group discussions, (2) video-taping of the SG/PW tasks, and (3) a stimulated recall activity. First, the method used for gathering data during the focus groups involved audio recordings of the learners' discussions. Each focus group consisted of 4-5 learners and was facilitated by a non-native speaking learner in the group. A set of questions prepared by the primary researcher relating to learner background and perceptions they had about SG/PW was used (See Appendix A). The questions specifically requested information concerning the length of time the learner has studied English, where their learning took place, if they participated in SG/PW during their previous learning, and how often they participated in the SG/PW. The second segment of the study consisted of the researcher's video taping of the SG/PW tasks. The sample consisted of 2 sets of two learners, each to form pair work, and 6 sets of four learners, each to establish the small groups. Learners were given a brief introduction to the task and were able to ask basic questions about the task. The learners were assigned a set of communicative tasks to complete in their SG/PW

setting. The tasks were arranged in a way that each learner was expected to ask questions and give answers during the activity. Then the video recorder was turned on and the researchers allowed the groups to complete the task with limited intervention from the researchers. The third portion of the research was completed by using a method called “stimulated recall.” This is an introspective method that focuses on the learners thoughts during interaction. Stimulated recall can be useful for at least three reasons:

- 1) It can help to isolate particular “events” from the stream of consciousness. In so doing, it can help to identify the type of knowledge a learner uses when trying to solve particular communicative problems, when making linguistic choices or judgments or just when generally involved in comprehension and/or production;
- 2) Stimulated recall can also help to determine if this knowledge is being organized in specific ways.
- 3) Stimulated recall can be used to help determine when and if particular cognitive processes, such as search, retrieval or decision-making are being employed.

(Gass & Mackey, 2000, p. 21)

In this study the focus is primarily on the first “use” for stimulated recall mentioned above, in an effort to separate the learner perceptions about SG/PW in the ESL classroom from other perceptions in their language learning process.

The tasks were two-way information gap format, taken from H. D. Brown’s (1999) New Vistas: Student Book and D. Hover’s (1986) Think Twice: Students’ Book. In this type of communicative task, information is divided into two parts and

each person, if in a pair, or each pair, if in a small group, received half of the information needed while the remainder of the group is given the other half of the information. The learners then converse with one another to obtain the information needed to complete the task. Gass & Varonis (1985) felt this type of activity is a benefit to learners because each learner has information that the other learner does not have and they need to interact and share their information equally to complete the task. Long (1981) and Doughty & Pica (1984) felt that the two-way task created larger scale benefits than one-way tasks because negotiation of meaning and modified interaction occurred more frequently. The modified interaction led to more comprehensible input being available to the learners. SLA research has shown that comprehensible input is an important factor in the language learning process.

When learners' interact with one another there are so many variables involved including but not limited to: setting, perspectives toward the activity, and cultural background. "A number of researchers have pointed out, interaction is a dynamic construct shaped by participants' expectations, experiences, and beliefs about the communication and their interlocutor" (Mackey, 2002, p.383). Each small group or pair work dynamic was different because each learner brought their own perceptions about participation to the group.

Next, the learners' reviewed the video taped segments of their interactions and were asked to discuss their thoughts about when they were in the original interaction. Stimulated recall is also known as introspection research where the researcher is attempting to glean insight into what the learner is actually thinking while doing the

activity and using the language. Often in second language research the learners' perceptions are taken from the production of the language and not their actual thoughts. In this study I opted to both look at the production, in terms of negotiated routines and conversational turns, and add in the learners' perceptions. This stimulated recall segment was audio taped in order to later transcribe the feedback.

Reliability and validity are aspects that need to be considered when using these methods. Because stimulated recall focuses on the memory of the learner, timing plays a vital role in the reliability of the process. Bloom's (1954) study created a measure for reliability of the stimulated recall. He wanted to find out how much time could elapse between the actual event and the recall that followed. The results indicated that if the recall took place within a 48 hour time frame following the event there was a 95% accuracy rate in the recall (Bloom, 1954, p. 26).

With this information in mind, the researchers followed up with the stimulated recall within 1 hour of the original video recording with the exception of 1 learner who was followed up on within 48 hours. I followed Gass & Mackey's (2000) protocol for stimulated recall such that "while hearing or seeing these stimuli, learners are asked to recall their motivations and thought processes during the original event" (Gass & Mackey, 2000, p. 25). In their book on stimulated recall they share their insight on the process:

We conclude this book with the claim that stimulated recall data can provide valuable information about some of the complex processes involved in

learning second languages.

(Gass & Mackey, 2000, p. 132)

Now that I have covered the data collection methods I will move on to discuss how the data was analyzed.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Following the learner portion of the study, I transcribed the segments of data including the focus group discussions, segments of the video taped task, and the stimulated recall sessions for all small groups and pairs in the study. During the transcription of the video taped task, I tracked the conversational turns of each learner. Edelsky (1981) defines “turn” as “an on-record ‘speaking’ (which may include nonverbal activities) behind which lies an intention to convey a message that is both referential and functional” (Edelsky, 1981, p. 403). In addition to tracking turns, I also noted instances in the feedback where learners’ discussed their perceptions, whether positive or negative, about (a) the usefulness of the task, (b) motivation to participate, and (c) their comprehension during the activity. I followed up on the perceptions of the learners by reviewing the dialogs during the SG/PW tasks to note communicative breakdown. These instances of breakdown were due to one or more learners’ not understanding the communication and desiring to clarify before continuing on in the dialog. This is where I applied Varonis & Gass’ (1985) research.

Varonis & Gass’ (1985) model for non-understanding is defined as “those exchanges in which there is some overt indication that understanding between participants has not been complete” (Varonis & Gass, 1985, p. 73). This model

includes descriptors of what negotiation of meaning entails. This model contains a trigger, indicator, response, and resolution. A trigger (T) is defined as “that utterance or portion of an utterance on the part of the speaker which results in some indication of non-understanding on the part of the hearer” (Varonis & Gass, 1985, p. 74). Next is the indicator (I) which is the portion of the dialog that lets the speaker know that the hearer did not comprehend their utterance and the conversation halts for possible clarification to take place. The following descriptor is the response (R) to the indicator (I) and is how the speaker recognizes and responds in some way to confirm the “non-understanding” (Varonis & Gass, 1985, p. 75). Lastly, an optional descriptor, is the “reaction to the response (RR)” which functions “in some way tying up the routine before the speakers pop back to the main flow of conversation” (Varonis & Gass, 1985, p. 75, 77). The model of non-understanding by Varonis & Gass (1985) is in Figure 1 below.

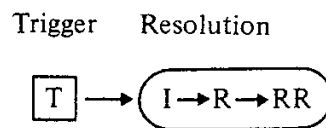


Figure 3.1 Model for Non-understanding by Gass & Varonis, 1985

If the learner noted that there was communicative breakdown that led to negotiation of meaning which resulted in comprehensible input, then it was documented as an inclusive response (IR). This means that the entire set of descriptors in the model for non-understanding were played out in the dialog and comprehensible



input was obtained. The following transcript was taken from this study and exemplifies the IR process in the non-understanding routine:

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Interactional Routine</b>	<b>Moves</b>	<b>Result</b>
	Ahh, I would like to buy girls		
Isaac	jean.	Trigger (4a)	
Silvia	Jeans?	Indicator (a)	
	Yes, girls jean, item number		
Isaac	0017G.	Response (a)	IR

With every utterance there is opportunity for comprehension to occur. In this case Silvia wanted to confirm what Isaac was talking about. The trigger was created because Silvia was not certain of what he said. She repeated back to him what she understood. This confirmation check was an indicator of the non-understanding. This was a brief routine because Isaac responded to the indicator she gave and as a result she was able to move on in the activity because they had reached comprehensible input through the negotiation that took place.

On the other hand, if there was communicative breakdown in which no understanding resulted and the learners' feedback confirmed this, then that dialog segment was marked no resolution (NR). Below is an example of a non-understanding routine that results in no resolution.

<b>Learners</b>	<b>Interactional Routines</b>	<b>Moves</b>	<b>Results</b>
	We have for apartment from one hundred to one hundred fifty dollars.		
Ho		Trigger (3c)	
Tanaka	One hundred to fifty?	Indicator (c)	
	No, from one hundred to one hundred fifty dollars.	Response (c),	
TJ		Trigger (3d)	NR

Tanaka	Ahh. 100 to 150 till? 150 dollars is the lowest price?	Indicator (d)	
Ho	Yea. Yea. The highest price is 150 dollars and another house...a fee is 160 dollars per month.	Response (d)	
TJ	This is rent fee.	Reaction to Response (d)	IR

Ho is attempting to explain the rent prices to Tanaka but Tanaka doesn't understand what he is saying so indicates this with a clarification check. Ho responds but Tanaka still doesn't understand what price range he is stating so this non-understanding routine which has covered all of the descriptors of trigger, indicator, and response has ended in a NR or no resolution. At the same time it ends, another begins because Tanaka uses Ho's response as a trigger to try again to clarify what numbers he is expressing. This time Tanaka rephrases his question and gets a simple response from Ho and an additional response from another group member, TJ.

The data set in this study consists of the focus group discussions, the video taped SG/PW task, the audio taped stimulated recall sessions, conversational turns log, and the non-understanding code sheets. In this way, the essence of what this study captures is the learners' perceptions of their participation during SG/PW interaction and the extent to which these perceptions facilitate or constrain the optimal conditions necessary for SLA.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter reflects the findings of the focus group surveys, which reveal the learners' general perceptions of SG/PW. Next, the SG/PW interaction from the video-taped activity illustrates the actual character of the learners' participation while in a SG/PW activity. Finally, the learner perceptions shared during the stimulated recall activity reveals learners' specific perceptions of their participation in the SG/PW activity as well as additional general perceptions about SG/PW following their participation.

#### 4.1 Learners' General Perceptions of SG/PW

Results from the focus group surveys showed that all learners stated that they had experienced benefits while taking part in SG/PW. A few of the benefits that were mentioned were increased confidence, grammar and rule assistance, further awareness of proper context for using language, and deeper understanding of word meaning. The results highlighted the learners' perceptions of SG/PW usefulness, motivation to participate, and comprehension of interaction in the group setting. An interesting aspect of this focus group survey (see Appendix A) was that on question 5 where answer options were listed, learners limited their selection to one or two options even though the question stated "check all that apply," yet when learners were given an

open ended question on survey question 6 they discussed benefits that they could have selected on the previous question (5) but did not.

Question 5 specifically asked “what benefits (if any) have you derived from small group or pair work?” The learners had five options to choose from: a) increased confidence in speaking English, b) assistance with learning grammar and rules, c) further understanding about when and where I should use specific language, d) greater understanding of word meaning, and e) I have not received benefits from working in small groups or pairs. There were 7 individual responses to this question and all responded with choices that indicated one or more benefits were derived from SG/PW. Table 4.1 shows the responses for question 5 (\*) as well as additional benefits that were noted or reiterated in question 6 (■) on the survey.

Table 4.1 Focus Group Survey Results

<b>Learner</b>	Increased Confidence in Speaking English (a)	Assistance with Learning Grammar and Rules (b)	Further Understanding of When and Where to Use Language (c)	Greater Understanding of Word Meaning (d)	No benefit from working in SG/PW
Tanaka	*	*			
Lee	*	■		*	
Yoo	*	*			
Debbie		■		*	
Jay	*		*	■	
Meeza	*		*		
Stanley	*			■	

As the table shows, six out of the seven learners who responded noted an increase in confidence due to SG/PW interaction. In addition, Tanaka and Yoo noted that they received assistance with learning grammar and rules. Jay and Meeza reported that they received further understanding about when and where to use the language (context). Finally, Lee and Debbie felt they obtained a greater understanding of word meaning when working in SG/PW settings.

In order to look further into their perceptions, another question was asked that was open-ended (question 6). This question asked the learner to discuss their experience with small group/pair work. They were also asked in the same question to list positive and negative experiences with it and give examples of what they learned during group work. Tanaka answered question 6 as follows:

I think pair work help[s] [for] increasing confidence in speaking English. This is very important for us. In Japan, they are very shy, they don't want to speak English. So we need confidence so it help[s] a lot. But sometimes working in pair work there is no instructor or teacher so if I don't want to say something I choose quiet time. So if we have a some motivation it's gonna be great working.

(audio recording, 11/20/06)

Tanaka was very relaxed throughout the entire study. He was practical and realistic about his language learning experience. He saw SG/PW as a way to increase the comfort level of speaking. He felt this was a necessity considering his country of

origin, Japan. He recalled that if the learners' were motivated as a complete group the end product would be a good environment to work in.

Usefulness was highlighted, as well as improving comprehension through practice in the SG/PW atmosphere. Lee alluded to the utility of SG/PW when he shared his perceptions on SG/PW:

I think small group/pair work is very important for English student because I can study, but sometimes other student study together and talk about many things and they change my pronunciation. And they change my grammar and if many times [frequently] they talk together in small group and pair work it increase my English help.

(audio recording, 11/20/06)

Lee felt there were many benefits by just studying together with other non-native speakers in SG/PW. As he participated with other learners in SG/PW and heard them speak he felt his pronunciation was altered for the better, not to mention his grammar. He indicated "many times" which refers to frequency of small group and pair work and how this frequency increased his "help" in English. Lee displayed a high degree of motivation during his participation in the study and seemed to thoroughly enjoy his discussions with learners from other first language backgrounds.

The value of interacting with other learners was pinpointed by most of the learners in the survey. Both Yoo and Debbie mentioned that through the SG/PW their English was improved. They also make mention that they have no negative experiences related to SG/PW. Debbie further mentions the usefulness of group work

in terms of building fluency, the advantages of working with other language learners, and grammar assistance:

For me it help(s) me not only to increase my English but to interact with other people and also to not to know [to not only know] other people but to know the way they work and learn English maybe, and learn expressions or things that are wrong, it would be in the grammar.

(audio recording, 11/20/06)

Debbie comes from Argentina and Yoo from Korea, so it was interesting to hear that while they come from different learning environments prior to entering this program, they both took part in SG/PW activities in their nations and that provided them with meaningful opportunities to increase their English skills.

While many learners mentioned increasing their English skills, their individual definition of “increase” was defined in a variety of ways. For some it is grammar, confidence, or comprehending more about the language in context. Specifically, for Jay improving his English in SG/PW settings meant the comprehension of when and where to use the language:

What helped me was with the...for the understanding of where I should use specific language. I have learned how to express what I wanted to say in different ways and I learned different situations/expressions that you can learn through different situations everyday. Everyday situations... and that's what really helped me and I liked the most about small group works.

(Jay, audio recording, 11/20/06)

Jay had the sense that SG/PW was a valuable part of him gaining in the area of context comprehension or sociolinguistic competence. Stanley saw the value of SG/PW in that it offered him a chance to practice the skills he had been learning through his language study. “It was a time I got to practice what I had learned, increased confidence, I really only knew I could use English by using SG/PW” (Stanley, audio recording, 11/20/06).

For the learners in the focus group survey, the question of participation in SG/PW was addressed in their positive outlooks of their own improvements through SG/PW opportunities that they were afforded. With this thought I want to look at the final aspect of the survey discussed, participation in SG/PW.

Question 7 asked, “How often would you actively participate in SG/PW activities?” Both Yoo and Lee are from South Korea and they agreed that in Korea SG/PW was not a common opportunity in their traditional schools. This was due to the large ratio of learners to instructors so the classes tended to be more lecture oriented. Lee replied, “I studied at Korea and mostly a big group and I cannot study small group/pair work because we have one teacher and many student and we can’t study in small group/pair work” (audio recording, 11/20/06). Yoo noted that when he attended a night class at an English institute in Korea there were more opportunities to work in SG/PW settings. In contrast, Debbie from Argentina had ample time in SG/PW environments during her EFL training. Her response to question 7 is as follows:



In Argentina, most of the institutes, they work in pairs or small groups I think most of the time because it's the way that they work and the two years that I was in the institute I think every time I did it in pairs or in groups. I almost never did it by myself. I always work in groups or pairs.

(audio recording, 11/20/06)

The final question (number 8) asked why the learners participated in SG/PW in the amount they listed in question 7. Stanley, who is from India shared his perception of why he participated.

Because it will help me to build conversation and practically work out on my English, so I will know how much I am learning. Most of the time, it is useful to work in small groups.

(audio recording, 11/20/06)

What Stanley's response indicates is there are many ways that SG/PW can benefit a learner from conversation practice to measuring improvement in the language. It was interesting to transcribe these responses, as they were varied but held to a common notion that SG/PW is useful, that motivation to participate is a key factor toward success in SG/PW, and that there are opportunities for gaining comprehension skills during SG/PW discourse. I want to further expand on the aspects listed above by sharing the results of the video-taped interaction in SG/PW for this study.

#### 4.2 Video Taped Interaction and Character of Participation

There were a total of two pairs (PW) and six small groups (SG) in this study. The results of the video-taped interaction show a variety of results across the breadth of the groups. While time did not allow for expanding on every group in the study within the contents of this paper, the following table gives an overview of the results of the interaction in terms of the number of inclusive responses (IR's) and no resolutions (NR's) within the negotiated interactional routines.

Table 4.2 below illustrates the number of negotiated routines that each group participated in based on the transcripts from the video. A negotiated routine shifts the flow of conversation to clarify some aspect of the speech that was not understood by another party in the group.

Table 4.2 Outcomes of Negotiated Interaction

	<b>Negotiated Routines</b>	<b>Inclusive Responses (IR)</b>	<b>No Resolution Resulted (NR)</b>
<b>PW 1**</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>
PW 2	5	9	0
SG 1	3	3	1
<b>SG 2**</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>SG 3**</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
SG 4	5	7	0
<b>SG 5**</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3</b>
SG 6	3	3	0
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>11</b>

The IR's were recorded based on how many full non-understanding routines were completed with every aspect (i.e., trigger, indicator, response) used during the negotiation, resulting in comprehensible input. The NR code was used when a non-

understanding routine was engaged in, yet no comprehensible input was obtained.

The total number of negotiated routines in this study was 42. Within the routines, the number of inclusive responses obtained was 75 and the number of no resolutions in the negotiation was 11. Qualitative results will be given for the groups marked with the double asterisks (see Table 4.2) in order to give a representative range of the results.

#### 4.2.1 Pair Work 1: Character of Participation and Video Taped Interaction Results

Silvia from Brazil and Isaac from South Korea were the learners in PW 1. Their transcribed interaction from the information gap activity resulted in seven negotiated routines. The total resulting inclusive responses (IR) were 15, and no resolutions (NR) 2. Table 4.3 illustrates the routine contents in terms of the non-understanding descriptors used by each learner.

Table 4.3 PW 1 Overall Results

	Conversational Turns	Triggers	Indicators	Responses/ Reaction to Response
Silvia	23	4	13	4
Isaac	20	13	4	16

In pair work it is more common than in small group work to see an even exchange of turns due to the necessity of both parties participating. It was clear from the beginning that both learners were willing to negotiate to get the activity done. As Table 4.3 reveals Silvia gave 13 indicators following Isaac's triggers to point out that the dialog needed to halt in order to clarify the meaning of the discourse at hand. The following is an example from the transcribed dialog that shows the progression of one

of their non-understanding routines during their quest to complete the information gap activity.

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Negotiated Interaction Routine</b>	<b>Moves</b>	<b>Result</b>
Silvia	The size?	Trigger (3a)	
Isaac	Size? Man. What kind of sizes do you have?	Indicator (a)	
Silvia	You can see on your paper, you have the size, the number, the size.	Response (a)	
Isaac	Ahh, yes. The regular size.	Reaction to response (a), Trigger (3b)	IR
Silvia	Regular?	Indicator (b)	
Isaac	Yea.	Response (b)	IR

During this interaction Silvia is requesting the size of the item that Isaac had ordered because she didn't have that on her paper and needed it from him. The difficulty was that Isaac had ordered a watch when she thought he had ordered clothing, so he was confused by her question about the size. Isaac shared his perceptions about their dialog during the stimulated recall:

Yes, communication is some problem but English is second language. But two or three times she can understand and I can understand. It is good communication....good dialog.

(audio recording, 11/27/06)

In spite of their need to negotiate Isaac felt it was a positive interaction. During Silvia's recall of the negotiation listed above she had the following feedback:

When I was talking about watch I was asking about size because I was thinking he was want girl jeans and he asked...what kind of size? And I don't

know man[s] [size], I don't have the paper. Because I was talking about something and he was talking about other stuff.

(audio recording, 11/27/06)

So while there were confusion and challenge, they worked through the activity and succeeded in completing each segment. The length of the interaction that was needed to come to an IR depended on the content involved.

Another example of their negotiated interaction exemplifies a lengthier dialog to reach the desired comprehensible input. The following interaction involves numerous non-understanding routines which require negotiation:

<b>Learner Negotiated Interaction Routine</b>		<b>Moves</b>	<b>Result</b>
Isaac	Color is blue and size is..	Trigger (5a)	
Silvia	Ahh, this is the other one?	Indicator (a)	
Isaac	No, same one, the size is 7.	Response (a), Trigger (5b)	IR
Silvia	What is the first one you say the number is 7876Q? And the color was gold?	Indicator (b)	
Isaac	Yes.	Response (b), Trigger (5c)	IR
Silvia	This is the girl jeans?	Indicator (c)	
Isaac	Yes, another one.	Response (c), Trigger (5d)	IR
Silvia	Oh, another one? What is the number?	Indicator (d)	
Isaac	0017. That is girls jeans.	Response (d), Trigger (5e)	IR
Silvia	Describe for me...the description.	Indicator (e)	
Isaac	Excuse me?	Response (e), Trigger (5f)	IR
Silvia	Description..describe for me.	Indicator (f)	
Isaac	Girl jeans.	Response (f)	IR

This routine shows a near even exchange of conversational turns with Isaac taking 7 turns and Silvia taking 6 turns. Silvia used indicators regularly to let Isaac know she did not comprehend enough information to go back into the normal conversation flow. Every non-understanding routine in this segment had an inclusive result. All negotiation ended in comprehensible input with a total of 6 IR's.

In reviewing the stimulated recall data related to the interaction above, Isaac felt the length of the interaction was due to his pronunciation, but Silvia indicated more confusion about what item he actually wanted. Each learner's response during the stimulated recall gave clues to what they actually perceived during their dialog. Isaac shared this during his recall session:

Yes, she understand but some word she can't understand. I think because my pronunciation is not good and she [her] listening is some not good. Is both them [We both have] problem. Some [problems] [for] both me and her.

(audio recording, 11/27/06)

Silvia felt a great sense of desperation to gain understanding and incurred frustration during segments of their activity. The following is an example of her stimulated recall perceptions:

I feel so confused and frustrated because I can't understand it. Oh my goodness, I can't believe that I cannot understand what he want. Because I don't know exactly what he want because I was thinking about jeans but he was talking about watch. But just now I know this but at the time I was not...I don't know exactly what he want. Anyway I was asking to him

describe..description and he start to talk about all the other..."I want two more girl jeans..." I don't know what he want. I'm just so confused and frustrated.

(audio recording, 11/27/06)

Silvia had in her mind that he was ordering a specific item so she continued to question him about it because she thought he would clarify the same item she was assuming he ordered. When he did not clarify that item, she felt frustration about how to go forward. Eventually, she just settled for what he said and moved onto the next part of the activity. Even in her frustration she made the choice to continue to work out the details of the activity with him.

In another segment these learners continued using the non-understanding routine to reach an inclusive result as illustrated in the dialog below:

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Negotiation Routine</b>	<b>Moves</b>	<b>Result</b>
Silvia	What is item number?	Trigger (1a)	
Isaac	No Response	Indicator (a)	
Silvia	Item 10?	Response (a) /Trigger (1b)	NR
Isaac	No, 7876Q	Indicator (b)	
Silvia	Q?	Response (b)	
Isaac	Yes, 7678Q	Reaction to Response (b) / Trigger (1c)	NR
Silvia	Q?	Indicator (c )	
Isaac	Yes.	Response (c)	IR

In this part of the dialog, Silvia and Isaac both take four conversational turns in the sequence; yet during Isaac's first turn he does not respond orally but rather in non-verbal eye contact that indicated non-understanding. His reaction caused Silvia to recast using different wording in an attempt to clarify for Isaac. The first two non-understanding routines end in no resolution. Finally, after the third set of descriptors

the item number is confirmed and an inclusive response was reached. This is the only segment of their dialog that contains the “no resolution” code.

Overall, the dialog was a positive challenge for both learners. Isaac mentioned his pronunciation a few times during the recall session but insisted that talking a lot with his partner was the key to gaining understanding. Near the end of the recall session Isaac was asked how he felt about this and other SG/PW activities. This was his response:

It’s funny, it’s joy that is [an] important [part] in communication and important in dialog. Phone talk is very difficult but very important...important, yea.

(audio recording, 11/27/06)

Isaac felt the activity was useful to participate in even though the pronunciation differences had to be worked through. He was diligent to respond to all of Silvia’s indicators in every non-understanding routine in their activity which allowed the dialog to continue on after the non-understanding had been resolved.

Silvia also felt the activity was useful and that SG/PW was a way to improve her skills in English. She elaborated on this extensively during the recall session. First, she shares what her perceptions were about the activity she had just completed with Isaac:

For me this exercise is good because we need to understand other accent because when I talk with the teacher the accent is better for understanding because it is correct. And so [with] my friends sometimes is no easy. Sometimes for them it is hard to understand me and for me it is hard to



understand them. So I like this exercise because I can...I can practice to listen and understand. For me this is better than just write or read something. I need to listen and speaking...listen and speaking.

(audio recording, 11/27/06)

Silvia perceived the benefit of the SG/PW for access to differing accents and pronunciation. She felt that learning other accents of non-native speakers was a very good skill in her language learning. She believed the interaction was an important opportunity to take advantage of because sometimes when doing just reading or writing those benefits do not exist for her. Later in the recall session she commented on SG/PW activities when asked if she felt they were a benefit to language learning. Her response was the following:

About the small group...this kind for conversation and trying to understand what the person is talking. I think it is the best way to learn English. For me this is the best way to learn because you are gonna practice and practice and practice.

(audio recording, 11/27/06)

Silvia considered the opportunities in SG/PW as the best way for her to learn English. Throughout the dialog she felt moments of confusion and frustration and yet her overall perception was that it was the best environment for her to gain the practice needed to advance in the language. At this point I will further expand by moving from pair work (PW) results to the small group (SG) results involved in the study.

4.2.2 Small Group 2: Character of Participation and Video Taped Interaction Results

The next group, SG 2, consisted of Debbie from Argentina (focus group participant), Jay from Brazil (focus group participant), Herry from Indonesia, and Shin from South Korea. Table 4.4 is a summary of the non-understanding routines as well as the conversational turns taken during communicative breakdown. This group had a total of six negotiated routines.

Table 4.4 SG 2 Overall Results

	Conversational Turns	Triggers	Indicators	Responses/ Reaction to Response
Debbie	8	4	0	5
Jay	14	6	4	8
Herry	11	1	7	5
Shin	9	4	3	4

Table 4.4 illustrates that during the non-understanding routines, Jay led the group with 14 turns, then Herry, followed by Shin and Debbie. Jay was the clear leader in terms of fluency. He was willing to dig into the questions in the activity and this often put him in the place of creating triggers because the others were attempting to keep up with him by negotiating in order to confirm their comprehension. Herry led the group for indicators at 7. Debbie did not have any indicators and shared in her recall that she was often waiting for others to clarify because she had difficulty with some of the accents and didn't want to appear rude by asking "what?" all the time.

Below is one of the non-understanding routines this group entered into:

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Interactional Routine</b>	<b>Moves</b>	<b>Result</b>
Debbie	We need a flat, a three rooms, kitchen, bathroom	Trigger (1a)	
Jay	You need three bedrooms?	Indicator (a)	

Debbie	No, 3 rooms, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom.	Response (a), Trigger (1b)	NR
Jay	Places to sleep? 1 bedroom, 2 bedroom, 3 bedrooms?	Indicator (b)	
Debbie	3 rooms, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, that's it.	Response (b)	IR

This routine was the first of the activity, so the learners were just getting adapted when this occurred. They were both focused and worked through it quickly. Debbie admitted during the recall that it took her a little while to get oriented to the SG setting and the topic at hand, but that she enjoyed it. Here is her response in the recall:

For me it was funny because it's like I could....I don't know how to say [or] introduce [in my mind] my head in what I was doing. It was like play[ing] games and it was fun. So I could do it if I was doing it for real.

(audio recording, 11/29/06)

Debbie knew what she wanted to say, but it took her awhile to adapt to group work and it struck her funny that she couldn't get in the English "mode" of thinking as quickly as she wanted. The first set of descriptors resulted in a NR because they were unable to clarify with the other whether it was 3 rooms or 3 bedrooms but when they went through the routine the second time Jay used further clarification and confirmed with her that it was 3 rooms. Jay was relaxed with the process and showed no signs of being bothered by the repetition. His recall retained his relaxed perception of the process.

This routine was resolved relatively quickly and the other two learners did not intervene during the dialog. As the learners became more engaged in the activity they all began to take turns more consistently during questioning by either side. The following is an example where 3 of the 4 group members worked together to clarify the information needed.

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Interactional Routine</b>	<b>Moves</b>	<b>Result</b>
Debbie	Can you tell me the...ahhh	Trigger (3a)	
Herry	the address?	Indicator (a)	
Debbie	yea, the address	Response (a), Trigger (3b)	IR
Jay	The address for the ground room one or the third floor?	Indicator (b)	
Herry	For the flat near school.	Response (b), Trigger (3c)	IR
Jay	For the one mile one?	Indicator (c)	
Herry	Uh-huh.	Response (c)	
Jay	It's 76 Broadway...b-r-o-a-d- broadway.	Reaction to Response (c), Trigger (3d)	IR
Herry	How do you spell the street?	Indicator (d)	
Jay	B-r-o-a-d-w-a-y.	Response (d)	IR

This dialog began with Debbie and Herry, with Jay entering later to clarify which of the apartment addresses she needed. Debbie took two turns and then the conversation continued with Herry and Jay confirming what the address was. They became very good at completing the routines with IR as the result. All three learners triggered negotiation at some point in this interaction. This segment resulted in 4 completed non-understanding routines that all resulted in IRs. Jay responded to how he thought the process went in his recall session:

I think overall it was very good, there were a couple of times where maybe a guy asked me a question, he wasn't speaking so clearly so maybe they may have had some doubts but overall I think there weren't any problems at all. I think all the questions were answered fine and we got all the answers we needed and everything.

(audio recording, 11/29/06)

Jay was confident that the non-understanding was a normal part of the process. The stops in the conversation did not seem out of the ordinary to him but rather a natural part of the learning process.

The next dialog segment that involved a non-understanding routine included all four learners. The process to reach comprehensible input was accomplished yet it took a bit longer with more learners involved:

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Interactional Routine</b>	<b>Moves</b>	<b>Result</b>
Jay	What is your marital status? Single...single mother?	Trigger (5a)	
Debbie	Yea		
Shin	She not married? She had one daughter?	Indicator (a)	
Debbie	Yea.	Response (a) Reaction to	
Jay	She's not married.	Response (a), Trigger (5b)	IR
Shin	Single mom?	Indicator (b)	
Jay	Yea? (looking to group for confirmation)	Response (b), Trigger (5c)	NR
Herry	Hmmm?	Indicator (c)	
Jay	Not married? You are married?	Response (c), Trigger (5d)	NR
Shin	A single mother..are you married?	Indicator (d)	
Jay (to Shin)	No, she's not married.	Response (d)	

Herry	Yes, single mother.	Reaction to Response (d)	IR
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The purpose of the dialog was to determine the marital status of the renter. The concept of the single mother seemed a bit difficult for some of the learners to comprehend. Shin had a particularly difficult time and put forth three indicators during the course of the dialog in his attempt to understand her status. The total process went from one IR and then through two NR's before finishing the overall routine with an IR. It seemed that Jay was waiting for confirmation from someone else but the others just answered him with more questions. Debbie attempted to answer the question quickly because she knew the answer but when Shin didn't respond to her answer she allowed the others to confirm the status of the single mother. Her recall of it follows:

In communication- yes it was different for me, at least for me for the different pronunciations. I don't understand so much the Korean people pronunciation and even Herry. I don't know where he is from and their accents. So that would be the problem in communication.

(audio recording, 11/29/06)

She felt the accents, or possibly the pronunciation, caused some barriers in their communication. Shin differed in that he felt that the difficulty was more likely to be from the vocabulary and its use in this context of apartment finding:

We usually memorize every vocabulary, but what kind? You know [many] every vocabulary has the same meaning so we don't understand what kinds of vocabulary we use this way [for] this situation.

(Shin, audio recording, 11/29/06)

This discussion created a variety of ideas about why the non-understanding might occur. In spite of the accents and the vocabulary this group negotiated through their misunderstanding and reached comprehensible input.

Near the end of each learners' stimulated recall session they were asked if they felt there were benefits or disadvantages to SG/PW. Here is one perception from this small group:

I like it because back home in my country I have been working in this [setting]. But the disadvantage can be that one of the group cannot participate or just be more passive. But if everybody likes, I think it is better because you can learn new words that the other one, the other person working with you, the other people can have and for ideas and even the pronunciation- to learn all the pronunciation. [If all] are willing to work, you can have fruit of the work in the group.

(Debbie, audio recording, 11/29/06)

Debbie was used to working in SG/PW from her training in Argentina. She noted that participation is an important factor in the success of the group. She felt there were advantages in that you could learn new vocabulary and pronunciation from others in your group. The following is Shin's perception of SG/PW in the ESL classroom: "I

think small group is the better. Better than the individual group [be]cause we can talking about the some subject we know” (audio recording, 11/29/06). Shin sensed that interaction with the other learners, about subjects they were familiar with, was an advantage over individual work. Herry shared his thoughts on this question of the benefits/disadvantages of SG/PW in terms of both the topic used in the SG activity and SG/PW as a whole:

I like the topic because it is for real life. It is not just for the middle of somewhere so it is really real and there will be sometime when we really need to know how to rent a flat and everything about apartment. I think if you have a small group it is a good way to learn English because so far I think I got something from the SG from that moment. It think that’s a good idea.

(audio recording, 11/29/06)

The last small group member, Jay, had much to say about SG/PW in the ESL context. First, he shares about the SG he just took part in and some possible disadvantages if the group had not been made up of certain types of learners.

We have a pretty outgoing group. So I think anyone that is shy or might have a problem speaking...if a person is shy or doesn’t really like activities like that I don’t think it is productive, I don’t think it is good for them. But I think these activities are good [be]cause we can help each other or clarify something for someone else.

(audio recording, 11/29/06)



Jay shared his insight about what learners' sometimes feel when they are in the ESL classroom. They may have some reticence about asking a question in front of the large group or even may be embarrassed to ask a classmate. But he goes on to say that when working in the SG context all members are responsible for the activity, so with that responsibility comes the freedom to ask questions in order to comprehend the activity. Now, I will move onto the results for the last two small groups reported on in this study.

#### 4.2.3 Small Group 3: Character of Participation and Video Taped Interaction Results

This group represents one of the two extremes of this study in terms of its character of participation in light of using the non-understanding routine. Table 4.5 reveals that this group had very little communicative breakdown as well as a lack of participation from one group member.

Table 4.5 SG 3 Overall Results

	Conversational Turns	Triggers	Indicators	Responses/ Reaction to Response
Beka	2	1	0	1
Sarai	1	0	1	0
David	No Negotiation	-	-	-
Daniel	No Participation	-	-	-

This group consisted of three speakers of Spanish, Beka (Spain), Sarai (Mexico), and David (Mexico). Daniel was from South Korea and a Korean L1 background.

As Table 4.5 illustrates the overall dialog went smoothly with a lot of comprehensible input obtained throughout the activity. Sarai and David are both from Mexico so possibly due to their familiarity they did not have any observable non-

understanding routines between them. The only routine that came from the dialog was very brief and it was between Sarai and Beka. That negotiation resulted in two turns for Beka and one for Sarai and was resolved in one non-understanding routine with a trigger, indicator, and response.

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Interactional Routine</b>	<b>Moves</b>	<b>Result</b>
Beka	And I want two handbags.	Trigger (1a)	
Sarai	Two? Two handbags?	Indicator (a)	
Beka	Yea.	Response (a)	IR

Sarai reflected in her recall on why she may have had some difficulty when speaking with Beka:

Well, when Beka started to talk I didn't understand so well. I have trouble with her because she has a different accent and she pronounce in a different way then me and I had difficulties with that.

(Sarai, audio recording 11/27/06)

Even though they were Spanish speakers, their accents varied and caused some difficulty in their interaction. Beka did not comment during her recall about having any difficulty with the other accents but mentioned briefly that the only difficulty was with the English language itself, and this was what posed a challenge when she didn't understand some parts of the dialog.

This group represents the fewest non-understanding routines in the entire study. The variables for this group could be fluency, familiarity with accent, and/or Spanish as L1. I did not include Daniel in these variables because he did not participate in the activity. He listened and read the activity hand-out but did not join

the interaction except for brief non-verbal instances when Sarai would joke about him being the boss of the company in order to engage him in the interaction. His stimulated recall expresses his thoughts on SG/PW:

I want a talking about interview, I want to attend the conversation but I am afraid because my English is not good. I think Sarai speaking English very well so I am very happy because I can believe her. During the interview a little bit I don't understand conversation because my English is not good. I can read the scripture [script] but she [Sarai] just used Spanish pronunciation so I don't understand. I enjoyed interview but so many times I am afraid [that] someone [will] ask to me..I am nervous.

(audio recording, 11/27/06)

Daniel was hesitant and fearful about participating in the SG activity. He noted that he wanted to participate but also may have been intimidated because he mentions that his partner Sarai spoke very well and he did not feel the same confidence about his own English speaking. Daniel went on in the recall session to share his preference for learning. He stated that for him it was easier to learn by himself than with others in a group. The group composition may have been a factor in his fearfulness as well as his lack of confidence in his oral speaking skills. Sarai commented in her recall about working with Daniel as her partner:

My partner was so scared about it. I think he was scared as me. But this [small group] was really good because I could remember my last job and I could do this all the time. I enjoy it because I love to talk, I love to listen to

my classmates. It was hard to work with my partner because I felt that I didn't have any partner because he didn't want to participate in it.

(audio recording 11/27/06)

Sarai also felt a bit nervous about speaking in this activity but this was not reflected in her participation. Her overall perception of SG/PW was positive in her recall session about SG/PW benefits as well as her preference for the ESL classroom:

Exactly I didn't learn anything new but it was really good because every time that you practice its fun and I like to practice because I really want to improve my fluency and listen to the accents of the other people and I enjoy it. I like to work in partners or groups because I really can come there and can practice my English and I really love together with the people I really love that people participate in the activities that they request us.

(Sarai, audio recording 11/27/06)

Sarai was definitely the leader in the group and interacted more than the others, due in part to her partner not participating. Beka and David also spoke of their perceptions of SG/PW in the ESL classroom. The following is Beka's account of her SG/PW experience:

I like the small group because I feel comfortable. I feel more security for me because the accent is different and that all the people is [are] in the same level and the same vocabulary and the same mistakes and it is very comfortable.

(audio recording, 11/29/06)

Beka felt comfort being in a group with fellow learners that shared the same L1. She also mentions other reasons for her comfort such as proficiency at a similar level and that they are all learning and making mistakes together. David felt the same way in terms of being comfortable with the group setting:

Yes, I enjoyed it pretty much, it was fun for me. Was it difficult to do this activity with a classmate? No, I don't think so. It was easy for me because I know them. For me [it] was [a] very good way to learn how to place an order and talk to the girl who was on the other line, so it was a very good thing to learn. We can share ideas and correct each other for a mistake or something.

(David, audio recording, 11/27/06)

David shared that the activity was not difficult but was helpful in terms of practicing to order from a catalog. The three learners who participated had a lot of positive feedback. The only drawback that was stated was Beka and Sarai mentioning that Daniel could have participated more. With advantages and drawbacks of SG/PW in mind, I want to continue on and document the results of the last group, SG 5.

#### 4.2.4 Small Group 5: Character of Participation and Video Taped Interaction Results

Small group 5 represents the group with the highest level of negotiation in this study. The group was made up of TJ and Ho both from South Korea, as well as Jane from Spain and Tanaka from Japan (focus group participant). Their transcribed interaction resulted in twelve negotiated routines for non-understanding. The results of the routines created 27 IR's and 3 NR's in the discourse. Table 4.6 below provides the breakdown of the turns and the descriptors for the non-understanding routines.

Table 4.6 SG 5 Overall Results

	Conversational Turns	Triggers	Indicators	Responses/ Reaction to Response
TJ	16	3	8	7
Ho	27	8	11	13
Jane	23	10	5	13
Tanaka	25	6	5	10

As Table 4.6 shows every learner in this group immersed themselves into this activity and as a result all took part in negotiated interaction to reach comprehension. In terms of conversational turns, Ho led the group with 27. It is also important to note that he had the largest number of indicators which are often questions for clarification. Tanaka followed with 25 turns and a number of triggers were also created by his discourse. Jane was next in line with 23 turns and the greatest number of triggers. TJ had fewer turns in addition to fewer of the descriptors in the non-understanding routine. These learners completed the activity slowly and meticulously, and as a result they used up part of their stimulated recall time finishing the activity.

This limited their time available for the recall session and caused them to make comments of a more general nature in regard to SG/PW. Below is one of the non-understanding routines from their dialog:

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Interactional Routine</b>	<b>Moves</b>	<b>Result</b>
Tanaka	So, she earn about...she earn about 700..700 dollars a month.	Trigger (3a)	
Ho	700 dollars?	Indicator (a)	
Tanaka	Yea, a month, so how much does that cost? A month?	Response (a), Trigger (3b)	IR
TJ	Per month?	Indicator (b)	

Tanaka	Yea.	Response (b),	
Ho	We have for apartment from one hundred to one hundred fifty dollars.	Reaction to Response (b), Trigger (3c)	IR
Tanaka	One hundred to fifty?	Indicator (c)	
TJ	No, from one hundred to one hundred fifty dollars.	Response (c), Trigger (3d)	NR
Tanaka	Ahh. 100 to 150 till? 150 dollars is the lowest price?	Indicator (d)	
Ho	Yea.	Response (d)	
TJ	Yea. The highest price is 150 dollars and another house...a fee is 160 dollars per month. This is rent fee.	Reaction to Response (d)	IR

This dialog took place with consistent turns between Tanaka, Ho, and TJ. Tanaka took 5 turns, in addition, Ho and TJ each took 3 turns. Throughout the activity Ho and TJ teamed up to answer any questions and often gave clarification for the other if needed. They are both from South Korea so did not have difficulty with their own pronunciation but with that of learners from other nations. Ho alludes to this in his recall session:

This small group is very good but that group has one problem. That problem is bad pronunciation. But nobody fix that pronunciation, I think we need [to] correct and correct pronunciation.

(audio recording, 11/29/06)

Even with the pronunciation difficulties, the group managed to complete the routine with only one NR in the middle of the segment and three IR's total. Tanaka responded

to the challenges they faced during the negotiation by pointing out that it is still a positive way to increase English skills:

I think this is a very beneficial activity. Because the important thing is trying to explain something in English even though it is very difficult, but its very good trial.

(Tanaka, audio recording, 11/29/06)

This group was willing to negotiate consistently to move through the sequence of the activity. A substantial amount of negotiation took place as well as the resulting comprehensible input.

Another example of their negotiation below exemplifies their choice to negotiate even through simpler items such as name, address, etc.:

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Interactional Routine</b>	<b>Moves</b>	<b>Result</b>
Jane	Marden	Trigger (10a)	
Ho	Mardenee?	Indicator (a)	
TJ	Marden?	Response (a)	
Jane	M-a-d-eh-e-n (Uses Spanish letters)	Reaction to Response (a), Trigger (10b)	IR
TJ	First Name?	Indicator (b)	
Jane	Harry	Response (b), Trigger (10c)	IR
TJ	Ahh Middle..ahh last name?	Indicator (c)	
Tanaka	Harry	Response (c)	
Jane	The name is Harry and the last name is Marden	Reaction to Response (c), Trigger (10d)	IR
Ho	Harry Marden....	Indicator (d)	
Tanaka	M-a-r-d-e-n	Response (d)	IR



This interaction enters into confusion because Jane begins to use Spanish alphabet letters when spelling the name for the other group. This goes back to what Ho shared in his recall that the other group had problems with their pronunciation. The interesting aspect was that it wasn't so much pronunciation as it was Jane reverting back to her L1 alphabet to spell for them. It is doubtful that the Korean L1 learners knew the Spanish alphabet because they saw this as a pronunciation issue.

Throughout the activity there were instances of breakdown that were resolved simply by spelling the word instead of trying to pronounce it but in the instance above the Korean learners needed more clarification. Eventually, Tanaka spelled it correctly and confirmed it for Ho and TJ. Tanaka related in his recall that he felt pronunciation was a hindrance for this group:

In my opinion the problem is pronunciation because in this activity there is some areas or persons name so we need to ask to spell from the beginning. Yea, but I think for trying to explain something English this is very good activity.

(audio recording, 11/29/06)

Jane created all four triggers in the non-understanding routine. Ho and TJ provided all of the indicators and Tanaka came in toward the end of the negotiation to provide confirmation through his response to the indicators. Jane shared her insights during her recall about the challenges of the interaction:

I think it is difficult to understand they [them] because they speak a little different because they are from other country, from Korea or Chinese. For that [it] is a little difficult for me. But its ok, they speak very good.

(audio recording, 11/29/06)

This interaction resulted in 4 IR's in the sequence and also the comprehensible input needed for them to move onto the next item in the activity.

Their activity, although longer in length and number of routines, stayed within close range to the others in terms of no resolution outcomes with a total of 3. With those results in mind, I would like to go to the learners' stimulated recall data in relation to their general perceptions of SG/PW in ESL class. Below are examples from each learner in this small group as they share their perceptions on group work:

I think group study is very well, very good because through the group study we give challenge another person.

(TJ, audio recording, 11/29/06)

I think group study is better than own [individual] study because we can speak a lot more than own study so I like that.

(Ho, audio recording, 11/29/06)

I think this activity is positive for practice English, for improve the conversation. I think it is good to work in a group because you work more fast. If you have other person, he can help you and tell you how to say that.

(Jane, audio recording, 11/29/06)

I think group activity is very useful because to improve English we need to have the courage to speak in front of people in public. I think this is most important thing. I think we need to try to get used to it. I think its very good.

(Tanaka, audio recording, 11/29/06)

As each statement indicates every learner in this group had positive perceptions of SG/PW in terms of its usefulness to their language learning. They felt it was good because of the opportunities it gave them for challenges, speaking practice, efficiency, pronunciation, and confidence for public speaking.

#### 4.3 Summary of Results Section

In summary, this chapter presented several of the learner's perceptions during SG/PW activities. The data analysis provided insight to the learner's perceptions through their participation in a focus group survey, a SG/PW activity and the stimulated recall process. The findings suggest that the majority of learners' involved in this study perceived SG/PW to be useful and felt that it carried many benefits for their language learning process. Two words to summarize most learner perceptions would be: positive challenge. The challenge in the task was the communicative breakdown and the negotiation that ensued. The learners saw that through the negotiation benefits were revealed. These included comprehensible input and ultimately clearer communication between group members. In light of the challenge and the resulting benefits learners carried a positive outlook on this learning environment.

The character of their participation confirmed that they were motivated to participate in light of the consistent turns that all of the learners', except one, took during their negotiated routines. Through the stimulated recall, the learners' shared their perceptions which largely indicate the SG/PW setting facilitates an opportunity-rich environment for SLA. Communicative breakdown, negotiation, "noticing the gap" (Schmidt, 1990), and reformulating interlanguage rules all work together to create an environment for language growth. The results seem to set up the optimal conditions for SLA because learners perceived SG/PW positively, their consistent turns indicated their participation, and finally their negotiation for form and meaning mostly resulted in comprehension. These results confirm and add to what scholars have indicated in past studies about our assumptions as instructors and researchers. In order to elaborate further on the relevance of these results, I will move to the discussion section.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter will address the question that engaged me in this exploration of learner perceptions in the SG/PW setting of the ESL classroom. Further, I will discuss insights from the literature review as well as research gaps addressed by the current study and future possibilities for this research area. Finally, I offer conclusions regarding the findings of the study.

#### 5.1 Restatement of Research Question

The question that has directed this study is the following: To what extent do learner perceptions of their participation in SG/PW (e.g. with regard to the usefulness of activities, their own motivation to participate during activities, and comprehension during activities) and the actual character of their participation facilitate or constrain the conditions necessary for SLA?

#### 5.2 Interpretations of Results

The purpose of the results section was to document what came forth from the study. In order to see how the results are relevant to the scope of the study I will breakdown the three parts of the study (focus group surveys, video-taped interaction, and stimulated recall) and share which specific parts (e.g. usefulness of activities,

motivation to participate, comprehension and character of participation) of the research question were resolved by each area of the study. I will begin by exploring the relevance of the focus group surveys, followed by the video taped SG/PW activity and then the stimulated recall.

### 5.2.1 Interpretations of Focus Group Survey Results

The focus group segment of the study confirmed that SG/PW was found to be useful to the learners involved. The discussion was a round table format in which the learners responded to pre-selected questions on a survey about SG/PW. The learners were being audio taped in order that I might transcribe their discussions for closer examination later. The benefits they shared in terms of the usefulness of the activities included increased confidence in speaking English, assistance with learning grammar/rules, learning when and where to use the language, and word meaning. A few of the learners noted that it was useful because they had access to learners who were learning with them. To reiterate what Stanley shared in his focus group: “It was a time I got to practice what I had learned, increased confidence, I really only knew I could use English by using small group and pair work” (Stanley, audio recording, 11/20/06). There were learners from six nations represented in the focus groups and many of their perceptions were similar in terms of the usefulness of SG/PW. See Table 4.1 in Chapter 4 for a recap of results.

Perceptions of motivation in participation were also touched on during the focus group discussions. Tanaka from Japan explained that in his country learners can be very shy and sometimes choose not to speak English. He connected SG/PW

activities as being helpful because they can increase the learner's confidence which is a vital part of being motivated to participate. So he felt that SG/PW increased confidence which yielded a greater desire to participate and to speak English openly. He noted during the focus group that "if we have a some motivation it's gonna be great working" (Tanaka, audio recording, 11/20/06). A number of the other learners noted that their speaking confidence was increased as a result of their SG/PW time. Perceptions of motivation will be further expanded upon during discussion of the stimulated recall.

The learner's thoughts about comprehension and its role in SG/PW were brought forth during the focus group discussion with many facets of comprehension being addressed. For example, Jay and Meeza felt that the SG/PW setting was a great place to gain further understanding of when and where to use the language, while many others thought the environment was helpful for increasing their ability to understand what words mean. The fact that SG/PW granted assistance with learning grammar and rules was also agreed upon by many of the learners. So in this sense, the word "comprehension" has multiple options for its definition because in any language learning experience there are so many different aspects of language that need to be understood. Perhaps that focus question could have been narrowed somewhat to provide more specific area aspects of comprehension.

For the purposes of this study a few different factors were being looked at in terms of SG/PW so these factors (usefulness, motivation to participate, and

comprehension) were left loosely defined in order for the learners' to bring their perceptions freely to the discussion.

In summary, the focus group segment of the study confirmed that learners perceived SG/PW to be useful, that motivation to participate was an important aspect of a functioning group, and lastly, that they perceived comprehension skills in the language to be available to them in SG/PW and noted this as a benefit. The focus groups did not clarify the aspect of the research question that relates to the character of participation because those results could only be obtained by the actual "doing" of the SG/PW activity and as a result will be discussed in the upcoming section.

#### 5.2.2 Interpretations of Character of Participation and Video Taped Interaction Results

The character of the learners' participation was explored by documenting the number of non-understanding routines in each video-taped activity of each small group or pair. Within these non-understanding routines the descriptors of trigger, indicator and response were used to breakdown the negotiation in terms of the learner who created the routine, the learner who made the non-understanding known and the learner who clarified the non-understanding. The outcome of each of these routines was noted with either the IR code (inclusive response) or NR code (no resolution) in order to point out if the routine resulted in comprehensible input or not.

Another aspect was counting the number of conversational turns each learner took in order to see if those learners who perceived SG/PW as beneficial also took frequent turns during the activity. These methods provided a way to see the character of learners' participation within the small group or pair in a concise manner. In



looking at the turns, most learners took consistent turns during the negotiation. The small groups had a wider range of turn difference than the pairs with a 7 turn difference being the largest gap. The exception is the learner who did not participate orally, so therefore, took no conversational turns. The overall results for the negotiated interaction are provided in Table 4.1. The overall results show that in the 2 pair work dyads and the 6 small groups there were a total of 42 non-understanding routines that required negotiation. Within the routines there were a total of 75 IR responses recorded and 11 NR responses recorded. The numbers show clear indication that in this study negotiation worked to provide the comprehensible input needed with 7 IR results to every NR result. I want to discuss briefly what relevance these results have to prior research.

In the arena of SLA, negotiation is looked upon by many researchers (Long, 1996; Varonis & Gass, 1985, Pica & Doughty, 1985) as a means to provide comprehensible input. Further, that NNS-NNS discussion may provide a better platform for negotiation than NNS-NS talk. (Gass & Varonis, 1985, p. 71) The reasons why SG/PW provide this platform could be due to the shared learning experience. In other words the learners' are in the same struggle together and are learning new things together so there is less chance of feeling intimidated. Pica, et al. (1996) looked at negotiated interaction and noted that small group learners' showed "greater motivation, more initiative, and less anxiety regarding their learning" (Pica, et al., 1996, p. 60). With these connections in mind I want to further discuss the results of the groups during the stimulated recall activity in this study.

### 5.2.3 Interpretations of PW Recall and Perceptions

Two pairs (PW 1 & PW 2) of learners took part in this study but to remain somewhat brief in this paper I will only examine PW 1 in a more detailed fashion. PW 1 moved through considerable challenges during their dialog and yet the learners' perceptions were positive. At times challenges in language learning can be perceived as negative but in this case they were thought of as a necessary part of the learning process. Silvia and Isaac moved through 7 negotiated routines which resulted in 15 IRs and 2 NRs. Their conversational turns were fairly even with Silvia at 23 and Isaac at 20 turns. These learners' were motivated and did not pause or slow down throughout the activity. In the midst of frustration and challenge they seemed to gain momentum and become more efficient in their negotiation as time went on. Isaac shared in his recall that repetition was good for him because it assisted with bringing comprehension. He acknowledged that English was not his first language so communication would likely be more cumbersome. Isaac triggered the majority of the negotiation with 13 of the 17 total triggers. He felt pronunciation was a probable cause for some of the non-understanding but was willing to repeat himself for Silvia so they could reach an understanding. Silvia felt the repetition in terms of listening and speaking being helpful as well.

While I watched the video and transcribed the dialog I noticed that Silvia's frustration gave birth to determination and pushed her to indicate more frequently. She felt the exercise was useful for many reasons. First, she desired to understand other accents. Second, she liked the exercise because she could practice listening and

speaking. Finally, she saw SG/PW as positive for learning conversation and trying to understand the other person. Her perception at the end of the recall session when asked about SG/PW was simply: “I think it is the best way to learn English” (Silvia, audio recording, 11/27/06). When I read through the transcripts I thought that she would have a negative perception about SG/PW and then it occurred to me that the challenge was also a motivating factor for this pair. When looking at the number of negotiated routines as well as the results of those routines it is apparent that the opportunities available to them for negotiation enabled them to gain comprehension skills. In this pair, the results show that the learner perceptions of SG/PW and the character of their participation coincide in a positive relationship that facilitates a learning environment conducive to SLA.

#### 5.2.4 Interpretations of SG Recall and Perceptions

A total of six small groups took part in this study yet for time and brevity this paper discusses three of those groups. Table 4.2 provides in bold type the pair and groups that were discussed in detail in this study and provides general results for all pairs and groups in the study. With that in mind I will begin by discussing small group 2, followed by small group 3, and finally small group 5.

Small group 2 (SG 2) was composed of 4 different language backgrounds and still blended well and had a fun time in the process. The group had a total of six negotiated routines with 10 resulting IRs and 5 resulting NRs.

Jay from Brazil participated in the focus group survey, the video-taped interaction and the stimulated recall. His perceptions in the focus group survey

showed that he felt SG/PW was beneficial for increasing confidence, learning when and where to use the language and increasing understanding of a variety of word meanings. He also noted that SG/PW setting allowed him to learn expressions that were practical for everyday use. In the video-taped interaction he led the group with 14 turns and also the majority of the triggers at 6. He displayed a high level of fluency for a level three learner and in many ways helped to push the communication forward. He did not show any signs of frustration with the repetition and negotiation involved in reaching comprehension. During the stimulated recall he stated that there weren't any problems during the dialog and they were able to accomplish what they had set out to do. This could mean that he didn't perceive negotiation to be a "problem" as we might think it is at times. He felt SG/PW was useful when group members are outgoing and willing to participate. He did note that a shy person may not receive the benefit that a more outspoken learner may receive. He said that his group was mostly outgoing so they were able to function well and complete their task efficiently. The reasons he gave for the utility of SG/PW were the opportunity it gave learners' to help each other and clarify tasks for one another. I will now continue on by further expanding the discussion to include the other learners in the group.

Debbie also took part in all three segments of the study. In the focus group survey her perceptions were founded in her common experience with SG/PW in her home country of Argentina. It was a normal part of her initial learning there so she came into the study with a beneficial outlook on group work due to her previous positive experience. She noted grammar and use benefits as well as word meaning

skills as helpful aspects of SG/PW. In the video-taped interaction she took the least conversational turns at 8 but was regularly responding to the indicators in an attempt to resolve the negotiation. She mentioned that the accents of Herry from Indonesia and Shin from South Korea were somewhat difficult to follow and did pose a challenge to their communication at times. When non-understanding occurred she remained calm and continued speaking through it until a resolution was reached. In the stimulated recall she mentioned a disadvantage to SG/PW. She believed that if one person in the group didn't want to participate or if that person was "passive," he or she may not get much out of it. She felt that if all of the participants liked the activity and were willing to work, then opportunities for learning a variety of English skills would be available.

Herry participated consistently in the SG dialog and took a total of 11 turns during the negotiation. Herry indicated non-understanding more than anyone else, with a total of 7 indicators. It seemed that he needed clarification and would ask for repetition of the previous utterance to be absolutely certain he understood. He really enjoyed the topic and shared in his recall that it was useful to do this because it was a real life scenario. His perception reflects Bejarano's (1987) findings which stated that when the activities the learners' are involved in are "meaningful" the learners were more likely to desire to work through communication to move forward with the group activity. Overall, Herry thought the SG was a good way to learn English.

The last learner in the group was Shin from South Korea. Shin took 8 turns, created 4 triggers, 3 indicators, and 4 responses. He also was a part of the majority of

the NR codes in the dialog. He mentioned in his recall that the vocabulary was difficult at times. Overall he felt that small group is a better option than individual work because there is opportunity to talk about things that are familiar to them.

In summary, SG 2 agreed that SG/PW was useful and that it was important for all learners to participate in the activities. This group had the largest number of no resolution codes of all of the groups involved and yet they maintained in their recalls that the experience was helpful to them in a number of ways. Within this group no one seemed to get frustrated during the process of negotiation. Even with the NR responses the learners' just continued to move consistently forward through the activity gaining ground as they went. At this point I will transition to small group 3 and discuss their interaction and perceptions on SG/PW.

Small group 3 (SG 3) offers an interesting perspective on SG/PW in terms of group composition. The group, who self selected, was made up of three learners' whose L1 is Spanish and one native Korean speaker. So the variables of familiarity and Spanish L1 seem to apply here in terms of the overall results. The results were the low extreme of the study showing only one negotiated routine between Sarai from Mexico and Beka from Spain. This routine resulted in an IR result. Sarai maintained it was simply a pronunciation difference. All three of the Spanish speakers participated consistently yet Daniel, the Korean L1 speaker, did not participate orally during the activity even with prompts from Sarai who was his partner. Overall, Daniel was not involved in communication. He expressed fear of participating in his recall because his skill level was lower in his opinion. This could relate to the study Hwang

(1993) did that addressed Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese learners' resistance to participating in ESL classrooms. She found that the learner's culture and background had a high level relationship to their participation (Hwang, 1993, p. 7).

I believe that the presence of the other learners with the same L1 may have played a part in Daniel's reticence. Sarai was a natural leader of higher proficiency than Daniel, and due to those factors he felt at ease letting her "take the wheel." In my experience it is generally common that Asian learners may hesitate more often in group type activities as their learning background is more teacher-fronted than other cultures such as those in his group who had Spanish as their L1. Cultural factors as well as personality type may be some of the variables that influenced his perception and further his participation. He was one of two total learners' in the study that expressed a preference to work individually rather than in group work. The difference between Daniel and the other learner Ivan (from SG 4) who also preferred individual work, was that Daniel did not participate, whereas Ivan participated consistently in spite of his preference to work on his own. Daniel did share in his recall that he learned a new vocabulary word and had the desire to participate but was afraid. Ultimately Daniel's perceptions of SG/PW shaped his participation and may have constrained conditions necessary for him to acquire language skills in that setting. He did not perceive SG/PW to be an optimal environment for his language learning and the outgrowth of this perception was no participation in the task given. It would be interesting to see if placing him in a pair rather than a small group would change his perception, participation, or both. In addition, to place Daniel in a homogenous group

of Korean L1 learners may prove to be a more beneficial learning environment. Many variables came into play with this learner so a number of studies could come forth from his perceptions on SG/PW. I feel that as instructors it is important to know your learners and this situation inspired me to look for more creative ways to integrate the reticent learners in SG/PW.

Overall, the learners' who participated in the activity enjoyed it. They felt comfortable and that it was a good environment to participate in and learn. There was a lot of laughter and fun during their dialog; in addition, they completed the task in an accurate and timely fashion. This group frames SG/PW in a different light because it points to the need for careful composition of the groups to reduce variables that might hinder participation or progress. I will now move to small group 5 and discuss their interaction and perceptions of group activity.

Small group 5 (SG 5) was very motivated in this activity. They were detail oriented and covered every aspect of the activity with the utmost care. This shows in the fact that three of the four group members had over 20 turns during the negotiation. The group overall had twelve non-understanding routines, and this was the only group that went into the double digits for this study. The group had 27 total IRs and only 3 NRs, which indicates that negotiation was effective in their dialog.

Ho from South Korea led the group with 27 turns and also 11 indicators. He worked beyond what most learners would do to make sure he understood all of the interaction, not just that of him and another learner in the group. Ho stated in his recall that the pronunciation of the other group was a problem. This may account for



the high number of indicators that he created. Tanaka from Japan and Jane from Spain also shared that pronunciation was a challenge in the group. In the end, Ho remarked positively about group work due to the opportunities it afforded him to practice the language.

Tanaka participated in the focus group survey, the video-taped interaction and the stimulated recall. His thoughts during the survey were that SG/PW had advantages and disadvantages. Some advantages he noted were increased confidence for public speaking and grammar help. He did note that sometimes there is not instructor help available for SG/PW tasks so he may just remain quiet. He finished by saying that motivation is important in achieving a goal in this setting. During the video-taped interaction he followed Ho in the number of turns with 25 total. Tanaka shared that although the activity had its challenges, it was a very good trial because he could learn to explain things. He also spoke of the importance of motivation in SG/PW and that it was a necessary aspect for the success of the group. Tanaka was the learner in the group who implemented spelling as a way to negotiate for comprehensible input. He knew the pronunciation variance was wide for the group, so he opted to try another method for working through non-understanding. In general, he felt that “group activity is very useful because to improve English we need to have the courage to speak in front of people in public” (Tanaka, audio recording, 11/29/07). This reaffirms what Pica, et al. (1996) saw in their study, in which they documented learners having a lower level of anxiety in their language learning as a result of group work (Pica, et al., 1996, p. 60).

Jane created the largest number of triggers at 10. She is from Spain and probably had the strongest accent of the group. She also had a tendency to use her L1 mixed with English at times which was perceived as a pronunciation problem by the others in the group. Jane led the group with Tanaka in terms of motivation by keeping the conversation going and asking more questions when necessary. Jane saw the group as a benefit because it speeds up the work process when a group takes on the task together. In addition, she felt it was a great way to improve her conversation skills in English.

Lastly I will discuss TJ who is from South Korea. He had the fewest turns of the group at 16. This was in part due to him thoroughly studying the activity sheets during every lull in the conversation and before involving himself in the dialog. I did note that many of the Korean learners in the study were very reliant on the task paper, and one learner (Pam, SG 6) even commented in her recall that the activity was uncomfortable to a small degree because she did not have a thorough knowledge of what was on the paper before she began the dialog. TJ and Ho were partners and really helped each other out a lot. I thought this was a great example of how SG/PW increases the confidence of the learners as they use their strengths to assist each other and accomplish a task. In the end TJ shared in his recall that SG is very good in light of the challenge for learning it offers the participants.

In conclusion, SG 5 was a prime example of a functioning SG. They worked well as a team, overcame obstacles due to their accents and pronunciation, and managed to get IRs for 27 of their 30 non-understanding routines. This group enjoyed

their opportunity in that when breakdown occurred, as it does when learning a language, they took it in a light-hearted manner and laughed together. One example was when they were calling a son by the name daughter. This went on for a little while and then, upon asking a question, it seemed they all realized their error at once and had a good laugh about it. I think being able to enjoy learning is a key to the whole process and this group took advantage of that opportunity as well.

#### 5.2.5 Summary of Interpretation of Results

The relevance this study has to the field of SLA is in the confirmation that learner perceptions do play a vital role in their participation in SG/PW activities. The extent of the relationship between learner perceptions of SG/PW and participation is evidenced in this research and needs to be expanded upon. When learner perceptions are positive there is a motivation to participate and this results in the increase confidence and fluency of the learner. These perceptions confirm what the interactional results show in that there are benefits to working in SG/PW in terms of group work creating conditions conducive to SLA.

#### 5.3 Conclusions and Future Research

There was an immense amount of data available from this study due to its qualitative nature. While reviewing all of the data, a common thread that emerged from learner perceptions was that SG/PW was a useful aspect of the ESL classroom learning experience. The main benefits shared were these: learning new vocabulary and word meaning, ability to work with other NNS learners (which was comfortable for many), increasing listening, speaking/pronunciation skills, and not to mention the

simple presence of more opportunities to speak. Many of the reasons listed line up with Pica & Doughty's (1985) findings about input and interaction within the ESL classroom and the possibilities for increased competency building.

Negotiation was a part of the majority of the dialogs and this was perceived by the learners as a normal part of the process. The number of negotiations that resulted in an inclusive response (IR) was close to 7 times higher (75 IRs to 11 NRs) than the no resolution response (NR) which indicates that negotiation was successful in the dialogs. None of the groups became "stuck" or gave up on the task but through participation and negotiation were able to complete the tasks in a reasonable timeframe. The learner perceptions of SG/PW in the ESL classroom in this study have been found to be widely positive in nature. In terms of their perceptions the response was positive in regard to its usefulness, their motivation to participate, and their comprehension of the interactions. In addition to their perceptions, their actual character of participation showed they were motivated to participate because their turn taking was consistent between most of the learners and the results show many more IR responses. This means that comprehensible input is being obtained. When comprehensible input is obtained through negotiation, the environment is optimal for SLA.

### 5.3.1 Limitations

Just as there are benefits to a study of this type there are also possible limitations due to the depth of the field of ESL and Linguistics as a whole. Possible

limits to this study include but are not limited to: size of sample, one sample location, learner/teacher involvement with the study and proficiency level studied.

The sample size was 29 learners. If the sample size was expanded the results may display further variation and provide a more comprehensive look at the aspects of the study. In addition only one institute and one proficiency level were studied. Adding other institutes both in both the public and private sector and multi-level classrooms would add breadth to the research. Finally, both learner and teacher involvement could be looked at as a possible limitation. The learners took part in a small group activity and were asked their perceptions following that activity. Due to their participation the results may differ than if they had been asked without just finishing a small group activity. I was both the teacher and the primary researcher in this study and while the learners were reassured this study had no bearing on their regular coursework or grades this factor must be considered as a possible limitation.

If these limits were taken care of we as instructors and researchers may have a more comprehensive picture of what optimal conditions for SLA may look like particularly in terms of the relationship between perception and participation. As with any exploratory research project there are unlimited opportunities for future research of which I will discuss next.

### 5.3.2 Implications for Future Research

Just as I have based my research on ideas from previous scholars (e.g. Long, 1985, 1996; Gass & Varonis, 1985, Gass, 1997, Gass & Mackey, 2000, etc.), I believe this research offers a springboard for many future studies as well. As with most

exploratory research there are always options for future study. The idea of SG/PW is not new to the ESL field but the idea of SG/PW used in conjunction with sound theory and perceptions from actual learners has much room for expansion in the future. If the learners could be taught that sharing their perceptions on learning is an important part of creating useful methodology for the classroom they may be more willing to do so because in return they receive benefits in their language learning. In addition, if learners are taught why SG/PW is beneficial for their language growth the motivation of the learners may increase in manifold proportion.

Another future research possibility would be to consider the extent to which learners perceive that they can learn from another NNS in the ESL class. The field of learner perception is limitless in many ways. Further research could be done within the current study's realm but with different L1 language backgrounds in homogenous groupings. It may be beneficial to find if one language background is more likely to participate than another and why this is the case. Further, the learner sample could be expanded beyond one institution to get a greater measure of the perceptions and participation. A multi-level classroom would also be another direction to take a study such as this to see if a similar level of negotiation and turn taking took place in a setting where more than one proficiency was represented. In light of the one learner who did not perceive SG/PW to be a benefit there remain open doors to look further at learners who may share his perception. It may be enlightening to see if a sample of learners who do not perceive benefits in SG/PW would change their perceptions if exposed to a variety of SG/PW activities.

Because the field of ESL is ever-expanding, there are many opportunities for future research to explore the ways learners function in SG/PW and how this setting contributes to their acquisition of the language. If learners, instructors, and researchers would each examine their own perceptions in light of this study, there would likely be created multiple new paths of discovery in language learning.

### 5.3.3 Conclusion

In summarizing this study I want to share a brief story that may be familiar to some who read it. The relating factor of this story to the study you have just painstakingly read emerges as you proceed.

A man found a cocoon of a butterfly. He sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through that little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it had and it could go no further. Then the man decided to help the butterfly, so he took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon. The butterfly then emerged easily. The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected that, at any moment, the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which would contract in time. Neither happened! In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly. What the man in his kindness and haste did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening were God's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that

it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon.

Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our life. We would not be as strong as what we could have been. And we could never fly.

*(Author Unknown)*

The concurring theme between this story and my study is this: There are struggles in learning a second language and in this study the learners' perceptions of SG/PW were that the challenges were a necessary part of the SLA process. Yet the majority of the learners, like the butterfly were not looking to be freed from the challenge but rather they came to understand that the struggle was a part of the journey and improved English skills could be their destination. The learners went on to share that they enjoyed SG/PW because they were among other NNS who were learning along with them. The learners' actual participation in the activity reflected that those who took part reached comprehension most of the time they engaged in negotiation. As a result of the challenges of interaction and negotiation, an environment was created where many opportunities for language growth were available.

I want to revisit the question proposed in this study one final time: "To what extent do learners' perceptions of their participation in SG/PW and the actual character of their participation facilitate or constrain the conditions necessary for SLA?" The resounding answer for this study would be this: the perceptions of the learners' do affect their participation and facilitate conditions for SLA to a substantial degree. The perceptions of learners' in this study in relation to usefulness of SG/PW activities, motivation to participate, and comprehension of interactions were addressed



in a positive light during the study. These perceptions led to consistent participation in SG/PW activities as described by the participants and provided learning options in many different language skill forms.

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY QUESTIONS

## Focus Group Questions

1. How long have you studied English?
2. Where did your English language training take place? Home country/English-speaking nation: if so where?/ or other location: if so where?
3. During the language training you have received did you work in small groups or pairs?
4. If yes to number 3: How often?
5. What benefits (if any) have you derived from small group or pair work?

(Check all that apply)

- a. Increase confidence in speaking English
  - b. Assistance with learning grammar and rules
  - c. Further understanding about when and where I should use specific language
  - d. Greater understanding of word meaning
  - e. I have not received benefits from working in small groups or pairs.
6. Please discuss your experience with small group/pair work. List positive and negative experiences with it and give examples of what you learned during this group work.

7. How often would you actively participate in the small group and pair work activities? Every time / Most of the time / Some of the time / Rarely / Never
8. Explain why you participated in the amount listed in question 7.

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Elissa Polley was born and raised in northern Minnesota. She graduated from high school in Cromwell, Minnesota and earned her Bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota-Duluth. She worked for a few years in the environmental consulting field for 3M Company and Labno Environmental. When she and her husband transitioned to Dallas she began tutoring internationals in ESL and really enjoyed it. Soon after, she became director of the ESL program at Christ for the Nations Institute in Dallas. She has had the privilege to teach English and interact with students from over 80 nations. She has traveled to a number of nations around the world and through these travels grew in her love for international students and cross-cultural learning. She hopes to teach in an overseas context in the future, and also travel more extensively with her husband and children. She currently resides in Dallas, Texas- although she is a Minnesotan at heart.