Exploring adult EFL learners' language learning potential: a sociocultural approach

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EXPLORING ADULT EFL LEARNERS' LANGUAGE
LEARNING POTENTIAL: A SOCIOCULTURAL APPROACH

by

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When I count my blessings, I count you twice.
   -An Irish Proverb
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ABSTRACT

Close scrutiny of the research on language aptitude reveals that it has been considered a quintessentially cognitive construct. No studies, to the researcher’s knowledge, have examined language learning ability from a sociocultural perspective. Therefore, this study seeks to reconceptualize the cognitively oriented concept of language aptitude by looking at it through a sociocultural lens. This reconceptualization is achieved first, by reframing language aptitude and offering a new term, language learning potential, and second, by analyzing the dialogic interactions between an EFL teacher (i.e., the author of this dissertation) and two adult learners in a foreign language context in Turkey.

Two specific research questions were addressed: 1) What are the verbal tools that reflect adult EFL learners’ reciprocity and transcendence pertaining to their language learning potential? 2) How are these verbal indicators manifested in dialogic interactions between learners and the teacher in an adult EFL classroom?

This study utilized a staged, nested case study design. I selected fourteen participants who volunteered to learn English for twelve weeks in a small university in Turkey. Utilizing Communicative Language Teaching and Dynamic Assessment as pedagogical tools, I offered EFL instruction twice a week during the data collection period. Forty-four videotaped classroom hours, 22 individual interviews, one focus group interview, and my researcher journal constituted the data sources for this study. I analyzed the data using Boyatzis’ thematic approach.

The findings of the rigorous, longitudinal data suggested that language learning potential rests on two mutually constitutive elements: learner reciprocity and
transcendence. Seven themes emerged *vis-à-vis* learner reciprocity: learner agency, using the teacher and peers as a resource, responding to the teacher and peers, affective dimensions of the interactions between the teacher and peers, self-regulating attention, reacting to challenge, and seeking opportunities for improvement. For transcendence, linking current learning to past learning, relating current learning to other contexts, and extending experience beyond “now” were found to be pertinent.

The findings of this study can provide new insights to four communities in the field of second and foreign language studies: researchers, teachers, students, and language teacher educators.

**Keywords:** Language aptitude, language learning potential, learner reciprocity, transcendence, EFL instruction, sociocultural theory
Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Educational Research Problem

Close scrutiny of previous research on language aptitude reveals that language aptitude has been considered a quintessentially cognitive construct. For example, Robinson (2002d) theorized language aptitude “as the sum of lower level abilities, grouped into cognitive factors, which differentially support learning in various learning situations/conditions” (as cited in Dornyei, 2005, p. 59) while Leaver, Ehrman and Shekhtman (2005) defined it as a combination of “relatively stable factors within an individual that promote successful language learners” (p.56). While Carroll and Sapon (1959) claimed that the constituents of language aptitude were phonetic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, rote learning ability and inductive language learning ability, Pimsleur (1966) conceptualized it as a combination of three components: verbal intelligence, motivation and auditory ability. Some of the other components put forward were working memory (Miyaki & Friedman, 1998); linguistic ability (Skehan, 1986), and language analytic capacity (Skehan, 1989). We can readily infer from these conceptualizations that language aptitude was regarded as a composite construct consisting of various distinct constituents. While intrapersonal dimensions of language aptitude have been included in these earlier studies pertaining mostly to its static assessment, interpersonal, interactional, contextual, collaborative, historical, and cultural aspects, namely the sociocultural aspects of it, have been taken for granted.

Purpose of the Study

Despite my fundamental appreciation of the work of cognitive psychologists, I still have difficulties with their mode of discussing language aptitude. Specifically, I am
disturbed by the ways in which they regard the human mind as if it is a hard drive in a computer and language as a mysterious computer program to be deciphered. Driven by this motive, I examined the construct of ‘language aptitude’ from a sociocultural perspective. In so doing, I wanted to demonstrate why the earlier conceptualizations present problems for foreign/second language education. Prior to this, however, I accomplished two tasks in order to contextualize my research. First, I explain in Chapter One and Two why I was not satisfied with the earlier conceptualizations of language aptitude and, second, I offered a new term, language learning potential, and a fresh and up-to-date framework for language learning potential. Based on the reasons mentioned above, the purpose of this study was to reconceptualize the cognitively oriented construct of language aptitude through a sociocultural lens.

One of the noticeable characteristics of language aptitude research is that regardless of the time and conditions under which these studies were carried out, they always reflect the trends in the second language acquisition (SLA) research. For instance, when one of the most commonly used language aptitude tests, the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), was developed by Carroll and Sapon in 1959, the audio-lingual method based on behaviorist tenets was the norm; consequently, the researchers were under the influence of this approach. Even though there has been a shift in the focus of SLA research from more cognitively-based approaches toward more socioculturally-oriented ones since the 1990s (Johnson, 2006; Mitchell & Myles, 2004), conceptualization and assessment of language aptitude have failed to reflect these theoretical developments. No research studies, within my awareness, had examined the construct from a sociocultural perspective, which warranted a closer look at the
contextual and interpersonal factors surrounding language learning potential, and which called for research that would address the aims and nature of how second language education changed considerably in the last three decades.

The phenomenon that I aimed to understand in this study, language learning potential, was filtered through sociocultural theory (hereafter SCT), which is not only interested in what we currently “have”; but also interested in what we can “develop”. According to this theoretical framework, learning does not occur through direct exposure to stimuli; it is mediated. Other human beings around people, their culture, and history serve as catalysts for learning. This is what made Lantolf and Poehner say that “real life is dialectically organized” (2007, p.5). The social interactions people engage in function both socially and cognitively. We first learn through social and cultural means, and then these experiences are internalized, adding up to our cognition. Therefore, we do not have unchangeable, fixed traits that we are granted at birth, and second, “attempts to ground explanations of mental development in the isolated individual are inadequate” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 14), which speaks to the fact that SCT is against the positivist approach to understanding natural phenomena.

Ironically, what the previous studies on language aptitude did is precisely this. They treated cognition as if it were the Tower of Leandros and aptitude as if it were the priestess living in this tower, isolated from other people. They separated language into its constituent pieces and designed aptitude tests that would measure each piece. However, “reducing complex phenomena to basic elements and constructing schema to explain its object of study” (Dunn & Lantolf, 1998, p. 428) is not a premise SCT supports. SCT rather, views phenomena in unity; it does not separate the individual from the social.
Another framework I extensively utilized in this study was van Lier’s ecological perspective to language learning. Adhering to the SCT principles at the macro level, this framework emphasizes three main premises: (a) phenomena cannot be explained with a reductionist stance; every single layer in the emergence of phenomena is inextricably embedded into the preceding or following layers, (b) trying to explain cognition and learning *vis-à-vis* distinct processes which are believed to be occurring exclusively inside the brain would be a narrow perspective, and finally (c) “perceptual and social activity of the learner, and particularly the verbal and nonverbal interaction in which the learner engages, are central to understanding of learning” (van Lier, 2000, p. 246). Thus, in this study, I aimed to understand language learning potential (not aptitude) through interactional means. I achieved this by examining the long-term interactions in which the learners engaged, in and outside the language classroom. I examined their interactional patterns between the teacher (i.e., the author of this dissertation) and learners, as well as among the learners, which provided me with ample opportunities to observe this phenomenon, and to study the verbal indicators reflecting learners’ transcendence and reciprocity. I used Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Dynamic Assessment (DA) as my pedagogical tools while teaching. CLT helped me create abundant opportunities to evoke interactions and DA was instrumental in understanding the learners’ actual and proximal levels of development to provide scaffolding appropriate for their zones of proximal development (ZPD), which refers to the distance between what a learner can do on his/her own and what s/he can accomplish with the help of a more able peer or adult (Vygotsky, 1978).
Research Questions

**Overarching question.** The overarching question underpinning this study was “How can language aptitude be reconceptualized through sociocultural theory?” With this question, I examined the contextual, social and cultural concepts that played a role in language learning potential. Unlike previous research that focused on the cognitive and linguistic aspects of language aptitude, my inquiry aimed to explore the sociocultural aspects ingrained in language learning, and was guided by the following sub-questions:

**Sub-question 1:** What are the verbal indicators that reflect adult EFL learners’ reciprocity and transcendence pertaining to their language learning potential?

**Sub-question 2:** How are these verbal indicators manifested in dialogic interactions between learners and the teacher in an adult EFL classroom?

These research questions not only guided my investigation for the central phenomenon under scrutiny, but also helped me provide an illuminating definition for it. I collected extensive data about the learners’ verbal indicators vis-à-vis their reciprocity and transcendence, which equipped me with the necessary tools to cast light on the nature of language learning potential. The rigor of my data came from the triangulation of long-term participant observations, a series of three individual interviews, focus group interview and my researcher journal.

Organization of the Study

Using a nested approach, this exploratory case study focused on fourteen graduate students enrolled in a Turkish university. These fourteen participants were offered English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction by the researcher (i.e., the teacher) twice a week during twelve weeks at no cost. During this twelve-week period, I taught English
using CLT and DA as pedagogical tools. Forty-four videotaped classroom hours, 22 individual interviews, one focus group interview and the researcher journal constituted the data sources for this study. Three rounds of interviews were held at approximately one-week intervals during the second and third months of the data collection period. I conducted a first round of interviews with all the participants. The next two rounds of interviews were conducted with four participants. The focus group interview was held at the end of the study with the same four participants. Finally, I analyzed the data using Boyatzis’ (1998) thematic approach, and focusing on two case studies selected from the four participants of the last two rounds of interviews and of the focus group interview.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study comes from the fact that it is, to the best of my knowledge, the first study which examined language learning potential based on the premises of sociocultural theory.

Another significant feature of the study was its longitudinal methodology. Long-term participant observations in a foreign language context provided me with a strong interpretive power to understand what kinds of verbal indicators the learners employed to reciprocate with the teacher and peers, and to transcend their experience.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Language learning potential.**

*Pre-study definition.* The main purpose of this exploratory study was to understand a complex phenomenon: language learning potential. The pre-study definition I proposed for this phenomenon was: one’s disposition to take action in order to improve his or her learning of a language in a foreign/second language context. Prior to the data
analysis, I knew more about what language learning potential “was not” than what it “was”. For example, I thought that it was not an innate, static attribute that was bestowed upon us at birth. Thus, it was “improvable”. Secondly, based on the available literature, I hypothesized that it rested on two major elements: reciprocity and transcendence, which are explained below.

**Post-study definition.** Language learning potential is a dynamic complex of dispositions that include learner reciprocity and transcendence. It is not a dichotomous notion; every learner ontologically has some level of potential. This potential develops through active participation in classroom interactions as well as through the extension of classroom learning to all aspects of life, achieved in the course of investment (Norton Peirce, 1995). Furthermore, language learning potential is dynamic; that is, learners may invest more or less in the development of their potential at any given time. Besides, “different learners invest selectively in different skills” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 297). Finally, drawing on van Lier’s work on agency (2002; 2008), we can claim that language learning potential is not a fixed, irremediable “individual possession” but rather reflects one’s remediable “action potential.”

**Verbal indicators.** In this study, verbal indicators were any spoken, meaningful words, phrases or sentences that were used to regulate one’s intentions during social interactions in the classroom setting. Examples of verbal indicators for a word, phrase and sentence, respectively, are: ‘really’ as an expression of surprise, ‘the woman on the picture’, and ‘Is this correct?’ or ‘That’s not what I meant’. Metalinguistic comments (Mitchell & Myles, 2004) such as “I am not sure how to say this” were considered verbal indicators as well. Examples like these were what I sought during the dialogic
interactions that took place between me and the learners. It is important to note that any wordless messages communicated through gestures, body language, posture, facial expressions and eye contact were kept outside the scope of the thematic analyses in this study.

**Reciprocity.** For Feuerstein, Feuerstein, Falik, and Rand (2002), reciprocity refers to the “readiness produced in the mediatee to respond to the mediator’s intentionality” (p. 76). Learners may demonstrate reciprocity in various ways such as by showing openness for the teacher’s mediations, by using the teacher as a resource (van der Aalsvoort & Lidz, 2002) or by even resisting his/her meditational support (Poehner, 2008) if their ZPDs allow them to carry out the task on their own. For example, a learner manifests reciprocity if s/he requests that the teacher use a newly learned vocabulary item in a sentence; if s/he asks the teacher to repeat a question for clarification or if s/he cautions the teacher against a misunderstanding. Poehner (2008) claims that learner reciprocity encompasses “not only how learners respond to mediation that has been offered, but also their requests for additional support or specific kind of support as well as their refusal to accept mediation” (p. 40, emphasis added). Reciprocity, to put it differently, is not limited to responding to the teacher. The interactional patterns that take place in the classroom in terms of reciprocity can take various forms such as ‘teacher to learner’, ‘learner to teacher’ or ‘learner to learner’. That is, it is not always initiated by the teacher. A learner reciprocates by, for instance, requesting clarification or asking for approval as well (Poehner, 2008) because when the learner produces such verbal indicators, s/he, in fact, reciprocates to the teacher’s instructional moves in the broader sense.
Transcendence. Feuerstein et al. (2002) define transcendence as “the widening of the interaction beyond its immediate goals to other goals that are more remote in time and space” (p. 76). In other words, it is the act of connecting the current experience with past learning, and relating events in the present to probable future contexts (Lidz, 1991). A learner’s comment such as “Oh, the same word was in last week’s reading passage, too” would signify that the learner is engaged in transcendence. Relying on Feuerstein, Rand and Hoffman’s work (1979), Poehner (2007) relates transcendence to learners’ “ability to recontextualize their learning and apply it to new, more demanding problems” (p. 325). By, for instance, constructing “if-then”, “what if” sentences and engaging in “cause and effect thinking about the task or experience”, learners can “move [themselves] mentally beyond the concreteness of the immediate experience” (Lidz, 1991, p. 14).

Limitations

Johnson (2004) claims that “to understand human behavior outside or inside the classroom, whether L1 or L2, one needs to examine the sociocultural contexts to which the individual has been exposed in the course of his or her life” (p. 148). However, in this study, only the classroom context was used to put language learning potential under scrutiny with a sociocultural framework. I did not observe the learners outside the classroom setting. However, I conducted individual and focus group interviews to shed light on their individual histories (i.e., their early experiences with respect to learning English) and perspectives as well as to understand their meaning-making processes regarding their reciprocity and transcendence.

Mitchell and Myles (2004) put forward criticisms about sociocultural research by saying that “Studies to date have typically been small scale, and have generally employed
qualitative and interpretive research procedures, concentrating on the recording and analysis of classroom activity” (p. 219). This study follows a parallel pattern with the bulk of the previous studies in terms of research context, data collection and analysis. This loyalty to qualitative, small scale classroom research within SCT, though, comes mainly from the fact that each interaction has distinctive characteristics which can only be understood with close and relatively extended observations.

**Summary**

This chapter portrayed the educational research problem with regard to the cognitively oriented concept of language aptitude. The overarching research question and two sub-questions derived from the overarching question were presented. A general introduction was made for the theoretical frameworks through which the investigation of the researched phenomenon was filtered. Some key terms were defined in order to facilitate readers’ understanding for the theories and concepts that are further discussed in Chapter Two.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The following review of the literature begins with empirical and theoretical work conducted about language aptitude and continues with a discussion of the theoretical framework that has affected my thought processes as a scholar; that is, the sociocultural theory of mind. The chapter ends with a discussion on my growing definition of language learning potential, with particular emphasis on the available literature pertaining to learner reciprocity and transcendence.

Language Aptitude

The bulk of the previous research on language aptitude pertains to its measurement, which can be traced back to the 1920s (e.g., Iowa Foreign Language Aptitude Examination, Stoddard & VanderBeke, 1925; Foreign Language Prognosis Test, Form B, Symonds, 1930, both as cited in Gardner, 1985). Even though there were some attempts to measure language aptitude during the 1960s, little effort was spent to explore the theoretical underpinnings of the concept until the 1980s.

In 1959, Carroll and Sapon developed the most widely used language aptitude test so far, the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT). This battery was developed to predict how fast a person can learn a foreign language given certain conditions. In other words, it intends to measure a person’s future success in learning a language by gauging his/her current capabilities, rather than telling us whether a person has a genetic obstacle to learn another language or not. It was the result of a five-year project carried out from 1953 to 1958 at Harvard University. During this time, researchers administered experimental tests to five thousand people, and obtained acceptable results for the
predictive power of the MLAT’s subtests for high school and college-aged learners, as well as adults. Even though the MLAT was obviously influenced by the positivist, reductionist learning theory of its time, Carroll and Sapon did not explicitly talk about a theory on which they based their definition of language aptitude and test.

According to Carroll and Sapon (1959), language aptitude was made up of four components: (a) phonetic coding ability, (b) grammatical sensitivity, (c) rote learning ability for foreign language materials and (d) inductive learning ability, and these components were measured by the following constituent sections in the MLAT: (1) Number Learning, (2) Phonetic Script, (3) Spelling Clues, (4) Words in Sentences, and (5) Paired Associates. These sections measure skills and abilities related to auditory memory, making inferences, cognitive restructuring of information, sensitivity to grammatical structure and effective rote learning (Leaver, Ehrman & Shekhtman, 2005).

There have been several subsequent initiatives to produce alternative or complementary batteries to the MLAT. The most widely used of these was Pimsleur’s Language Aptitude Battery (PLAB) (Pimsleur, 1966) which is composed of six parts: (1) Grade Point Average, (2) Interest in Foreign Language Learning, (3) Vocabulary, (4) Language Analysis, (5) Sound Discrimination, and (6) Sound-Symbol Association. Pimsleur (1966) conceptualized the aptitude for learning a modern language in terms of three factors: (a) verbal intelligence, (b) motivation, and (c) auditory ability. Verbal intelligence refers to “the knowledge of words and the ability to reason analytically in using verbal materials”; motivation to “an expression of interest in studying a modern foreign language”, and auditory ability to “the ability to receive and process information through the ear” (Pimsleur, 1966, p. 14). Unlike the MLAT, the PLAB incorporated an
affective factor in its positivist definition of language aptitude, yet the cognitivist stance of treating aptitude as the priestess locked in the Tower of Leandros is still there. Akin to Carroll and Sapon (1959), Pimsleur (1966) did not discuss the theory behind his test. However, it is plausible to claim that both the MLAT and the PLAB followed the fundamental tenet of positivism, which is “If something exists, it exists in a quantity and we can measure it” (Eichelberger, 1989, p. 4). This is deduced by the fact that both tests tried to define aptitude by reducing it to certain measurable components as discussed above.

Aptitude includes some prerequisites, such as the ability to discriminate sounds and to reason grammatical rules which mature inside human beings’ brains naturally as they grow older. Yet, the roles of the people around human beings, the role of their cultures, and the nature of the conversations they engage in are missing from the current conceptualizations of language aptitude. It is hard to believe that the words “social”, “interaction” and “culture” were not used even once in the entire MLAT or the PLAB manuals. As these two most influential aptitude tests show, language aptitude was regarded as a phenomenon consisting of certain components that were measured through decontextualized sub-tests. Therefore, the measured language learning ability indicated how adept a learner was at handling decontextualized language material. This fact, surprisingly, seems to have been embraced positively by cognitive psychologists who engaged in research on language aptitude in the late 1980s (Skehan, 1989).

I now turn to some other tests of language aptitude to show how the theoretical underpinnings of language aptitude have evolved since the 1960s. Prior to that, however,
visiting the theories which influenced aptitude research in every decade from the 1960s until today might be helpful.

In the early 1960s, behaviorist theories were influential in the SLA research, as I also pointed out in the section on the MLAT and the PLAB. Toward the late 1970s, aptitude as a concept was regarded as “anti-egalitarian” (Skehan, 2002, p. 72) and it became outmoded as a research area. What was found popular was researching “the universal characteristics of language learning across languages and learners; similarities in the acquisition process…between L1 and L2 learners, between child and adult L2 learners, and between learners from different L1 backgrounds” (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982 as cited in Sawyer & Ranta, 2001, p. 343). In the 1980s, aptitude research adopted cognitively-based approaches, and information processing models (e.g., memory component) were incorporated into the research. In the 1990s, recent findings in cognitive psychology and the relationship between aptitude and psycholinguistic processes were the central concerns, and lastly in the 2000s, researching aptitude increasingly became unpopular. According to Mitchell and Myles (2004), there has been a shift in the focus of SLA research from more cognitively-based approaches toward more socioculturally-oriented ones since the 1990s. However, this paradigm shift has not been applied to the research on language aptitude yet.

I stated above that aptitude research was almost abandoned during the 1970s; however, VORD, another language aptitude test, created by Parry and Child in 1973 is an exception to this generalization. In this test, Parry and Child drew attention to the possible difference between “linguistic” and “language” aptitude, claiming that even though most of the aptitude tests attempt to measure language aptitude, they seem to deal
with “analytical skills required for establishing formal paradigms at word, phrase, and sentence levels (in other words linguistic skills)” (1990, p. 52, emphasis original). They asserted that one of the four subtests (i.e., cloze) of the VORD is “a step toward testing language aptitude in a contextual framework, because general rules must be applied to particular segments of text” (Parry & Child, 1990, p. 53). The other three subtests were noun morphology, verb morphology and sentence syntax. Unlike the previous tests, VORD (which means “word” in the artificial Turkic language used in the test) did not address auditory ability at all, and focused “largely on grammatical analysis” (Grigorenko, Sternberg & Ehrman, 2000, p. 391) but, at least, raised attention with regard to the importance of contextual factors in conceptualization (thus assessment) of language aptitude.

In the 1970s, research integrating social psychology and language learning gained popularity. This research was not directly about language aptitude but discussions mainly centered on the question of why some people are believed to have a “knack” for learning new languages. Thus, individual factors that might affect one’s language learning were brought under scrutiny. The ultimate aim was to distinguish between successful and unsuccessful language learners. During this time, Gardner and Lambert (1972) developed their sociopsychological theory of second/foreign language learning. This theory hosts the essential idea that “the successful learner of a second language must be psychologically prepared to adopt various aspects of behavior which characterize members of another linguistic-cultural group” (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 3). Consequently, learners’ attitudes toward the culture in which the target language is used are believed to be important in their acquisition of the new language. Furthermore, these
Attitudes are claimed to determine the level of motivation learners will have toward the language learning task.

In light of this theory and using factor analysis, Gardner and Lambert (1972) investigated the effects of language aptitude, intelligence, personality, type of motivational orientation (i.e., integrative vs. instrumental) on proficiency in learning French in Canadian and American contexts. Although Gardner and Lambert’s research was promising with regard to the incorporation of affective factors in language learning at that time, it does not differ much from the reductionist paradigm because Gardner and Lambert drew a line between the effects of teaching and the effects of affective factors, ignoring the dynamic relationships between the teacher and learners. Moreover, they viewed these factors as peripheral, not central in language learning. Earlier studies on affective factors (e.g., Dornyei, 2005; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985) will definitely shed light on the findings of the current study; however, it is crucial to emphasize that this study looks at language learning as a holistic process since every single factor is believed to have penetrated into learning. In other words, individual factors are deemed inseparable from the dynamism of the learning and teaching context.

Subsequent to the comparatively declining interest during the 1970s, research on language aptitude flourished again in the 1980s. Skehan (1982; 1986; 1989), representing the cognitive paradigm, theorized remarkably on aptitude. He based his research on Carroll’s aptitude construct and “adapted Carroll’s model to an information-processing model of language acquisition, in line with recent research in cognitive psychology” (Erlam, 2005, p. 148). The components of language aptitude as proposed by Skehan (1998) included: (a) phonetic coding ability, (b) language analytic ability and (c)
memory. What Skehan basically did was to combine grammatical sensitivity and inductive language ability into a single component: language analytic ability, and to add a memory component.

In 1986, Guthke, Heinrich and Caruso conducted aptitude-related research in order to make a ‘psychodiagnosis’ of the foreign students’ language learning ability in a required German course (Guthke et al., 1986). Their aim in diagnosing participants’ language learning ability was to provide individualized support rather than using the results for selection purposes. What is striking about this research study is that the researchers devised a test “requiring minimal verbal communication and comprehension” (Guthke et al., 1986, p. 904) due to the fact that the participants came from 128 different countries and they “greatly [varied] in their mastery of mediator languages” (Guthke et al., 1986, p. 904). Hence, they assessed the participants’ language learning ability (in fact their grammatical rule competence) based on an artificial language they created.

More recently, Grigorenko, Sternberg and Ehrman (2000) designed a language aptitude test called the CANAL F Test (Cognitive Ability for Novelty in Acquisition of Language, Foreign), including the construct of intelligence (i.e., the ability to tackle novelty and ambiguity) in their conceptualization of language aptitude. They claimed that the CANAL F differed from the previous language aptitude tests with respect to several aspects. For example, it was not static but dynamic since it allowed for learning at the time of the test, and it was naturalistic because of the way foreign language learning occurs during testing (Grigorenko, Sternberg & Ehrman, 2000). According to Skehan (2002), CANAL F Test “incorporates cumulative learning into the aptitude materials” (p. 92). Indeed, this test is distinct from others because of its psychometric approach to
measuring foreign language learning ability rather than focusing on already acquired knowledge. Nevertheless, as the name of the test also indicates, it measures dualistically defined cognitive abilities pertaining to language aptitude.

As demonstrated by this review of the literature, earlier research on language aptitude viewed this concept as a fairly stable entity and a construct which can be measured through subtests corresponding to its cognitively or linguistically oriented constituents. In most cases, the tests aimed to determine learners’ level of language learning ability by isolated, decontextualized bits of linguistic knowledge. While some researchers conducting studies using similar research designs found consistent correlations between variables, some directed criticisms questioning the construct validity of these tests. Moreover, as instructional methodologies became more communication oriented, earlier approaches received noticeable criticisms for adopting a reductionist approach to aptitude (Gardner, 1985; Krashen, 1981; Parry & Stansfield, 1990). Since the 1980s, researchers have begun inquiring about whether language aptitude research has kept up with the developments in recent SLA research or not. Even though Sternberg (2002) and Robinson (2002) are supporters of the cognitivist paradigm of aptitude research, they arrived at a consensus in that we need more investigation to look into other factors so that we can come up with a more representative, broader definition of language aptitude. Finally, Sawyer and Ranta (2001) claimed that “The most fundamental research need in this area is a fresh look at the nature and measurement of language aptitude, both in an absolute sense and in relation to progress in language pedagogy” (p. 351).

In sum, despite repeated calls for research that would take the contextual and communicative aspects in language learning, there had been little work done to document
and analyze the social nature of one’s language learning abilities. The need for such work was particularly pressing considering the rapid change in the second language education world. Research on language aptitude needed to be reframed in line with recent developments in language learning and teaching. Furthermore, new methodologies other than regression or factor analyses needed to be sought in light of extended definitions of language aptitude to broaden our understanding of what language aptitude actually encompasses.

**Sociocultural Theory**

Adhering to the sociocultural approaches to second language learning, this study aimed to open new avenues in conceptualization of language learning ability. Vygotsky (1978), who is considered the father of sociocultural theory (SCT), strongly believed that language develops by means of the social interactions human beings get engaged in; it gradually becomes internalized and finally turns inward, taking on an intrapersonal (cognitive) function. In other words, language is learned on a social basis and cognition is built up as a result of these social experiences (Langer, 1991). That’s why SCT “clearly rejects the notion that thinking and speaking are one and the same thing” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 7). The same doctrines apply to learning of a second or foreign language as well. SCT does not split language into parts since it views L2 learning as a holistic process. That is, for SCT, linguistic input does not grow inside the head like a wild mushroom; there must be a source, an owner of this knowledge. Lantolf and Poehner (2007) provide a vivid example of this premise:

Consider the status of an object such as a wooden table. At first glance it may seem to be another physical object in a world comprised of objects.
However, the table is not merely a physical object but it has a particular shape, and perhaps color and size imparted to it by the intentional activity of a human being. And above all it serves a particular function or purpose assigned to it by the person who made it (e.g., used for eating, studying, or working). The table is thus simultaneously a natural object and a social object. It has not only physical attributes but it also has human significance. In many respects, human language is similar to the wooden table (p. 2).

Those who are not familiar with the doctrines of SCT might ask, “If SCT claims that learning emerges through the dynamic interplay among social, cultural and historical factors, what is the role of the biological factors in learning?” Vygotsky certainly acknowledged the constraining power of biological factors in mental activities, yet claimed that biology is not the only factor controlling our mental activities (Lantolf, 2003). As cited in Lantolf (ibid.), Yaroshevsky (1989, p. 230) stated that “man controls his brain and not the brain the man.” Furthermore, SCT argues that “while human neurobiology is a necessary condition for higher order thinking, the most important forms of human cognitive activity develop through interaction within…social and material environments (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 201).

In keeping with the sociocultural view, I hypothesized, in this study, that no matter how lucky language learners were in terms of the biological factors they possessed as constituents of ‘language aptitude’ in the traditional sense, unless they developed a disposition to use them, existence of these “giftedness” would not contribute much to their language learning potential.
Language Learning Potential

One of the main purposes of this study was to reframe the cognitively oriented notion of language aptitude with a sociocultural lens. To achieve this end, I offered a new term, *language learning potential*, to deconstruct any associations that can be made with the traditional concept of language aptitude, which is viewed as a relatively stable trait.

I stated above that the MLAT reveals high correlations between the variables that are thought to be related to language aptitude; however, there was something inherent in the MLAT and the cognitivist paradigm, which was untenable. On page 14 of the MLAT manual, Carroll and Sapon (1959) claimed that “A student with a somewhat low aptitude score will need to work harder in an academic language course than a student with a high aptitude test score. If the score is very low, the student may not succeed in any event.” One can advocate this claim based on the time it was made; however, even in 2001, Cook could propose the following classroom tip to the language teachers: “*Select students who are likely to succeed in the classroom* and bar those who are likely to fail. This would, however, be unthinkable in most settings with open access to education” (Cook, 2001, p. 125, emphasis original). Classification or labeling of learners as unsuccessful, in other words, leaving the learners alone with their so-called weaknesses, is not acceptable and is out-dated. The issue of concern nowadays is how we can teach learners who have varying capacities to become independent learners at their own paces. As Feuerstein et al. also stated, “it is deleterious if the child is told of his failure, without helping him and permitting him to correct himself in a meaningful way” (Feuerstein et al., 1979, p. 103). This is one of the fundamental differences between the traditional understandings of
language aptitude and the notion of language learning potential that I sketched in this study.

The pre-study definition I proposed for language learning potential was: “one’s disposition to take action in order to improve his or her learning of a language in a foreign/second language context.” One of the most distinctive characteristics of language learning potential I assumed prior to the data collection was that it was not an innate, static attribute. Unlike aptitude, it was not a genetic endowment granted to us at birth. I hypothesized that language learning potential would develop as long as the language teacher created awareness, and as long as the learners were willing to reciprocate the teacher’s efforts. I also thought that one’s language learning potential would not have limits, which might offer insights contradictory to the notion of “fossilization” (Selinker, 1972).

According to van der Aalsvoort and Lidz (2002), learning potential is defined as “the amount of progress a child makes after training, the inverse of the amount of help a child needs, the child’s responsiveness to instruction within the school as a context, or the degree of autonomy that the child reaches during instruction” (p. 112). This definition suggested that responsiveness to instruction might be one of the building blocks of one’s learning potential. Furthermore, Feuerstein et al. (2002) asserted that “All meditational interactions are characterized by three parameters: intentionality-reciprocity, transcendence, and mediation of meaning. Other parameters are situation-specific and are implemented by the mediator as a function of special needs of the individual or as dictated by the situation which may differ from culture to culture and the specific conditions of life” (p. 76). Even though Feuerstein handled intentionality and reciprocity
as one parameter, I prioritized reciprocity in this study because intentionality centers on the mediator’s actions and my focus here was on the learner. I also left mediation of meaning outside the scope of this study since it was the “emotional, affective, energetic component of the interaction” (Feuerstein et al., 2002, p. 77) and necessitated studying non-verbal indicators in addition to the verbal indicators.

In light of van der Vaalvoort and Lidz (2002) and Feuerstein et al. (2002), I hypothesized that language learning potential would rest on two major elements: transcendence and reciprocity. I was also open to other potential elements that might have emerged in the data. However, the data in this study did not reveal other elements. Figure 1 shows my initial expectations regarding the characteristics of language learning potential.

*Figure 1.* Characteristics of language learning potential as conceived for L2 study
Learner Reciprocity

Until now, few scholars have dealt with the notion of reciprocity. Among these are Feuerstein and his colleagues, van der Aalsvoort and Lidz, and Poehner. For Feuerstein et al. (2002), reciprocity refers to the “readiness produced in the mediatee to respond to the mediator’s intentionality” (p. 76). As I stated above, Feuerstein considered intentionality and reciprocity inseparable parameters, consequently, he and his colleagues incorporated intentionality even into the definition of reciprocity. However, Lidz (1991) discussed reciprocity separately along with the other twelve themes in the Mediated Learning Experience Rating Scale. Since the purpose of this scale was to determine whether the mediator has enough “behavioral repertory” (Lidz, 1991, p. 69) to provide the best MLE for the child’s cognitive development, the reciprocity component did not correlate with the other subscales, and distorted the internal consistency scores of the MLE Rating Scale, thus, Lidz treated reciprocity separately. Later on, van der Aalsvoort and Lidz (2002) conducted a study to fulfill the need to further conceptualize reciprocity. Lately, Poehner (2008) discussed the concept, declaring that it does not receive the attention it deserves from the SLA research community.

In basic terms, reciprocity means being ready to respond to the teacher’s comments during interactions. If any effort by the mediator is not reciprocated by the learner, the experience may fail to stretch the learner’s potential and would probably carry less meaning. It is unrealistic to expect that one’s reciprocity patterns remain the same no matter what. As stated by Poehner (2008), learner reciprocity is apt to change as the learner becomes more self-sufficient. Figure 2 provides a list of possible actions of reciprocity I expected to observe during dialogic interactions between the teacher and
learners in a language classroom. These actions regarding reciprocity were instrumental in my sensitizing concepts approach (Patton, 2002), which I further discuss in data analysis section.

It is important to note that even though verbal indicators as signs of learner reciprocity and transcendence did not occur independently from the teacher’s verbal indicators, this study focused on learners’ interactions only. This was one of the limitations of the study, which is also mentioned in Chapter Five.

Figure 2. Actions of transcendence and reciprocity expected to be revealed during DA

According to SCT, learners actively construct their own learning environment. In this sense, language learners either expand their potential by reciprocating to the teacher or the people who speak the target language or limit their opportunities by doing the reverse. Since “it is widely accepted that language development thrives on, and indeed
requires meaningful and purposeful interaction with other users of the language, particularly users who are willing to pursue joint meaning making” (Atkinson, 2002 as cited in Meskill, 2009), negotiating meaning in the joint problem solving interactions is considered relevant to one’s potential as a language learner. Thus, learner reciprocity plays a crucial role in monitoring one’s own language learning. In other words, it symbolizes the learner’s agency in learning.

Poehner (2008) claims that learner reciprocity encompasses “not only how learners respond to mediation that has been offered but also their requests for additional support or specific kind of support as well as their refusal to accept mediation” (p. 40). Reciprocity, to put it differently, is not limited to answering the teacher’s comments. The interactional patterns that take place in the classroom in terms of reciprocity can take various forms such as ‘teacher to learner’, ‘learner to teacher’ and/or ‘learner to learner’. That is, it is not always initiated by the teacher. A learner reciprocates by, for instance, requesting for clarification or initiating a question as well because when the learner produces such verbal indicators, s/he, in fact, reciprocates to the teacher’s instructional moves in the broader sense. The five forms of reciprocity Poehner (2008) used in his study were negotiating mediation, use of mediator as a resource, creating opportunities to develop, seeking mediator and rejecting mediation.

Van der Aalsvoort and Lidz (2002) talked about an instrument which was designed by Lidz in 1997. Originally this instrument, the Response to Mediation Rating Scale, consisted of ten subscales representing a child’s behaviors in an MLE. However, van der Aalsvoort (1998, as cited in van der Aalsvoort and Lidz, 2002) eliminated two of the subscales since she could not obtain an acceptable amount of reliability with them.
Thus, the final version of this scale consisted of eight subscales, which are: (1) responsiveness of interaction with mediator, (2) self-regulation of attention and impulses, (3) affective quality of interaction with mediator, (4) communication related to shared activity, (5) comprehension of activity demands, (6) use of mediator as resource, (7) reaction to challenge, and (8) modifiability in response to interaction. Unfortunately, van der Aalsvoort and Lidz (2002) did not describe these themes; they only differentiated them as ‘pedagogical’ and ‘psychological’ elements of reciprocity. The former element included reciprocal behaviors such as sharing, eliciting competence from the adult, responsiveness, affective quality during interaction with the adult, while the latter referred to processes such as eliciting competence by challenging the child, use of adult, reaction to challenge by the child during the task. The labels of these themes were self-explanatory; however, they surely needed to be described in detail by means of sample behaviors for each theme. Thus, providing rich descriptions and illustrative examples for the themes that emerged with regards to learner reciprocity was one of the objectives I pursued in this study.

**Transcendence**

Feuerstein et al. (2002) define transcendence as “the widening of the interaction beyond its immediate goals to other goals that are more remote in time and space” (p. 76). They further explain that “[t]ranscendence creates a propensity in the mediatee to consistently enlarge his or her cognitive and emotional repertoire and need system” (p.77). As learners continue to apply their new learning to new contexts, and bridge their current learning to past learning situations, they build their own history. It is this growing historical path that leads them to being autonomous language learners. Thus, I assumed
that learners’ language learning potential would expand so long as they were given opportunities by the mediators to transcend their learning to past or future contexts, and as long as they, themselves, strived to obtain greater independence as L2 users.

Transcendence is not only about extension of learning to new contexts and tasks, but also about “identification of the underlying principle” (Kozulin & Presseisen, 1995, p. 70) of a subject in an interaction, as well as creating new connections within this same subject.

Another prominent characteristic of transcendence is that it involves “communication regarding past events either within or beyond the child’s [in this case, adult learner’s] own experiences, as well as encouragement of projection into the future” (Lidz, 1991, p. 77). Therefore, it is critical for learners to venture beyond the “here and now, in space and time” (Feuerstein, Rand, Hoffman & Miller, 1980, p. 20). What is meant by venturing beyond the here and now is that learners are supposed to make connections between their current and past learning as well as between their current learning and circumstances that might take place in the future. By conceptualizing “events that cannot be seen” in the immediacy of learning (Lidz, 1991, p. 77) or by actually transferring their current learning into novel situations (Summers, 2008), learners create opportunities for themselves to make their learning long-lasting.

The essence of this notion is to “move [oneself] mentally beyond the concreteness of the immediate experience” (Lidz, 1991, p. 14). Feuerstein, Rand and Rynders (1988) provide a great example which helps the visualization of such experience. Consider a situation where a young child is about to touch something dangerous. His worried mother cries out loudly, “No, don’t touch!” This warning might stop the child from touching the
object, but it may not help him determine when and where touching is dangerous. Thus, this mediation bears little meditational value. Feuerstein et al. evaluate this experience as it pertains to transcendence:

The emotion-laden “no” the mother shouted toward her child when he was on the point of touching something hot was meant to fulfill an urgent immediate need: to save the child from harm. However, since nothing in this message goes beyond (transcends) the immediate need to save the child, no meaningful long-term effects will likely be produced by it. Will the child to whom this “no” was addressed know when and where he should not put his hand the next time danger occurs? Has the child who had responded to the loud admonition become modified in some way by doing so? Has his repertoire of knowledge-necessary for making his own future decisions-been enriched by this order? Has his need system become modified or expanded by it? (Feuerstein et al., 1988, p.65).

As this example shows clearly, if the prime concern of an interaction is to “save the moment,” there is little chance for transcendence to occur. Therefore, what is important is to create a state of awareness that will transcend this situation. According to Feuerstein et al.’s and Lidz’s research on mediators’ actions during the Mediated Learning Experience (MLE), creation of this awareness and ensuring that learners engage in transcendence-related behaviors are expected from the mediator because their work is focused on children who are not developmentally ready to take responsibility for their learning. However, this study examined adult EFL learners’ verbal indicators vis-à-vis their reciprocity and transcendence. Unlike young children, adult learners can be held responsible for their own learning. In other words, adult learners of a second/foreign
language have the capability to self-regulate their learning by engaging or not engaging in such behaviors. Hence, this study was concerned with finding out how learners transcended their learning, rather than evaluating the teacher’s behavior during interactions. The initial themes derived from the existing literature, which guided me throughout the participant observations and data analysis are depicted in Figure 2.

Summary

This literature review examined the concept of language aptitude with respect to its earlier definitions, conceptualizations and underlying theoretical frameworks. It reframed language aptitude taking the tenets of the sociocultural theory into consideration, and offered a fresh term, language learning potential in place of language aptitude. Finally, it drew attention to a significant gap in research on language aptitude and current SLA research.
Chapter Three: Methodology

I begin this chapter by explaining why I adopted a case study approach in this study. Then, I introduce the context of the study, participants, the role of the researcher followed by a discussion on ethical considerations. Subsequently, I explain the data collection procedures and data analysis. The chapter ends with a discussion on how I achieved trustworthiness in this study.

Case Study Approach

The research design utilized in this qualitative study was a staged, nested case study (see Figure 3). Case studies are well-suited to take into account the contextual and interpersonal nature of complex issues (Yin, 2009) and to illustrate the different perspectives regarding the issue under investigation (Creswell, 2007). Case study design allowed me to (a) explore and describe the nature of mediator/learner interactions in an adult EFL classroom with respect to their language learning potential, and (b) document and describe the sociocultural dimensions (i.e., reciprocity and transcendence) surrounding language learning potential. Furthermore, case study is an appropriate approach when the researcher is trying to understand complex social phenomena by asking “how” and “why” questions (Yin, 2009). In this study, I explored how verbal indicators reflecting adult EFL learners’ language learning potential are manifested in dialogic interactions between an instructor and learners, aiming to reconceptualize the concept of language aptitude through a sociocultural lens. Thus, a case study approach matched well with the purposes of this study.

Initially, the unit of analysis in this study was a single-case of a small group including 14 participants. Later on (see the interviews section), a nested approach was
employed to select two case studies since, in qualitative inquiry, “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 2002, p.230). I selected one case study as the “negative case” (Patton, 2002, p. 554) since I expected that she would provide me with rich data as well, by not displaying the verbal indicators for which I was looking. According to Peshkin, “Seeing something from the “viewpoint of its antithesis (…) we become more aware of what that thing is” (Brown, 1989, p. 172 as cited in Peshkin, 2001, p. 248). Thus, my case selection criterion was displaying vs. not displaying the verbal indicators with respect to learner reciprocity and transcendence. I describe my case selection procedures in detail in the participants and data analysis sections.

*Figure 3.* The case study design

**Context of the Study**

The study took place in a small city located in the Aegean Region of Turkey. The population of this city is 172,709 according to the 2007 census. Its distance to the Aegean Sea and the region's principal metropolitan center is approximately 130 miles. Although the city is a small one, it has a strong industrial base. One of the first factories of the country, a sugar refinery, was set up here.

The university in which this study took place was founded in March, 2006. It is a small state university with 8,500 students and 184 academic staff. The university has two
campuses and several vocational colleges in nearby towns. The administration building and schools of education, engineering and arts and sciences are located on the main, uptown campus which is 4.3 miles away from the city’s center. The college of health and the school of economics are located on the downtown campus.

I gained access to the research site via my own initiative. I contacted the president of the university via phone and explained my research plans. The president received the idea of hosting a researcher who was pursuing doctoral education in the U.S. quite positively. A friend of mine who was a graduate student in the School of Education at this university helped me in carrying out certain procedural tasks and reaching out to the participants.

The classroom used during the data collection phase of this study was 700 sq. ft., had white-painted walls and pretty new individual chairs to accommodate 50 students as well as two wooden desks, one for the teacher and one for additional needs. I used the additional desk to place the video camera before each class on one side of the classroom. There was also a whiteboard, and an advanced lighting and multimedia system. On one side of the classroom were six windows, which allowed plenty of sunlight during the day. I organized fourteen of the chairs in the shape of a crescent before starting each class, so the students usually faced each other during classes.

The majority of the interviews were held in one of the meeting rooms in the school of economics building. The meeting room door was lockable, which permitted the privacy required to conduct interviews in sound conditions. The remaining interviews, including the focus group, were held either in faculty members’ offices or in the chair’s office in the school of health (at the times when the chair was not there). In brief, all
interviews were held in decent, quiet and lockable rooms; the researcher and the
participants were not distracted at all except for a few insignificant instances.

Participants

Participants of this study were purposefully selected from the students (both
undergraduate and graduate level), faculty and staff. At the beginning of the 2009-2010
academic year (late-September), fliers which explained the study in basic terms were put
around the university campuses with the permission of the university administration. The
university community was informed that volunteers who would like to participate in this
study for three months were to learn English as a foreign language at no cost. I waited for
two weeks to hear from the university community. In total, 32 volunteers applied. Using
the New York State’s Placement Test for English as a Second Language Adult Students, I
conducted informal interviews at the beginning of October, 2009 with these volunteers to
determine their proficiency levels. The fact that this study was exploratory in nature gave
me the latitude to observe any adult EFL learners as long as their proficiency levels were
appropriate for the formation of a homogenous classroom in terms of their actual levels
of development. Based on this reason, the criteria I paid attention to during the
elimination of the volunteers were their (a) proficiency level in English (pre-intermediate
and/or intermediate); and (b) availability to attend classes twice a week during the
twelve-week data collection period. I recruited pre-intermediate or intermediate learners
because teaching beginner level students might have prevented me from eliciting
sufficient verbal indicators (especially in English) required for in-depth analysis.

Secondly, there were only 2 upper-intermediate-level volunteers, which was certainly not
enough to form a dynamic classroom environment.
After having five classes, I faced the difficulty of working with busy graduate students and university personnel. I realized that their schedules were not going to be flexible enough to attend classes regularly. For this reason, I pro-actively recruited eight more undergraduate students (among the previous 32 volunteers) whose proficiency levels were pre-intermediate. Following the seventh class on November 10, 2009, five of the earlier participants dropped out of the study due to their busy schedules, as I expected. I had a stable participant body in the subsequent 15 classes, although one of the eight late-joining undergraduate students left the study as well. Consequently, I had 14 participants when I conducted the first round of interviews in the first week of December.

My selection criteria to determine the case studies were (a) the range of verbal indicators, (b) the quality of the verbal indicators which would facilitate my theorizing about language learning potential, and (c) the frequency of verbal indicators that the learners produced. I carried out my case selection in two phases based on the same criteria I stated earlier. The first phase was selecting four learners out of the fourteen participants. I conducted the second and third individual interviews as well as the focus group interview with these four participants. I developed my data catalog (Appendix I) based on the verbal indicators of these four learners. Then, the second phase of my case selection took place among these four learners. After I developed the data catalog, I was able to see the (a) range, (b) quality, (c) frequency of the verbal indicators that the four learners produced. In order to conduct further in-depth analyses, I decided on my two case studies that produced the richest information as compared to the other two learners in terms of the range, quality and occurrences of verbal indicators. For descriptions of two cases in this study (Ayla and Leyla), please refer to the beginning of Chapter Four.
For descriptions of the two participants whose verbal indicators were additionally used in the data catalog (Elif and Oner), please refer to the end of the data catalog in Appendix I.

**Role of the Researcher**

According to Patton (2002), the researcher serves as the “the primary instrument in qualitative inquiry” (p. 109) because the investigation of natural phenomena is filtered through his or her lens. That’s why the researcher cannot be separated from the research in qualitative studies. Likewise, Smagorinsky draws attention to the understanding that “data are social constructs developed through the relationship of researcher, research participants, research context (including its historical antecedents), and the means of data collection” (Smagorinsky, 1995, p. 192), following a Vygotskian approach to research.

Since the researcher is at the center of qualitative research, educational background, experience and perspectives that the researcher brings to the field need to be revealed for credibility purposes (Patton, 2002), which is provided below in the *Who am I as a researcher?* section.

Among the prominent advantages of my role as a participant observer was that I was able to interpret the interactional data without missing their important sociocultural (i.e. contextual) implications, since I was involved in the co-construction of these interactions. Otherwise, just seeing the videos of the interactional data would have been ambiguous and incomplete.

All of the participant observation sessions were videotaped in this study. The participants knew that the classes were being recorded for research purposes. Prior to each class, I arrived at the research site early enough to set up the video camera before students arrived. Thus, I had to only press the record button when I began teaching.
During class time, I did not draw students’ attention to the camera at all in order to protect the authenticity of the classes. The learners voiced their opinions several times after classes that they had forgotten the fact that they were being recorded during classes.

In the focus group interview, there were four participants. One of them was an assistant professor and three of them were undergraduate students at the university. Although the undergraduate students were not students of the assistant professor participant, I still needed to provide a safe and stress-free environment to eliminate unequal power relations which Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2007) talked about. For this reason, I explicitly stated in my introductory speech before the focus group interview that everybody’s opinion in the group was equally important to me and that they should feel comfortable sharing their ideas freely.

One of the commonly stated disadvantages of participant observations is that the observer might experience culture shock in the research site which usually is in a foreign country (Flick, 2006). In the current study, the research took place in a foreign country as well (i.e., Turkey); however, the fact that I was raised and lived in this country for 25 years, provided me with the background knowledge I needed to understand and interpret the participants’ meaning-making processes shaped by the cultural norms of this research setting.

**Who am I as a Researcher?**

During the course of this study, I was a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction, Department of Educational Theory and Practice at University at Albany, SUNY. I received my BA degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language from Bogazici University, the most prestigious university in Turkey. I had a well-grounded
educational experience thanks to the comprehensive teacher education curriculum at Bogazici University which utilizes an English medium education system. In my senior year, I conducted my year-long student teaching at Uskudar American Academy which is a high-profile private high school in Istanbul, Turkey. I observed selected classes of English teachers from the U.S. and did qualified presentations under their supervision. In my BA, I was mainly trained according to the principles of Communicative Language Teaching, which was one of my pedagogical tools in this study.

My teaching experience began in 2003 in a public school in Istanbul, Turkey. After teaching English to 4th, 5th, 7th and 8th graders for one year, I moved to the U.S. to begin my graduate education in the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages program at University at Albany, SUNY. After two years, I started the Ph.D. program in Curriculum and Instruction. I am a native speaker of Turkish, and fluent in English.

Discovering the dialogical approach has been the turning point of my doctoral education. With a nod to Vygotsky (1978), Bakhtin (1986), and Wertsch (1991), I became intrigued with the social origin of the human mind. The dialogic approach which takes “the dynamic role of social contexts, individuality, intentionality, and the sociocultural, historical and institutional backgrounds” (Johnson, 2004, p. 16) into consideration when explaining cognitive growth has not only influenced my perspective on second language teaching, but also changed the positivist research paradigm that I had been planning to follow for my dissertation research. As Johnson put it, “the dialogic approach focuses on particularities rather than on our ability to generalize findings to a population at large” (2004, p. 16, emphasis original). While I was going through this shift in perspectives and paradigms, I was also observing my sister who was in the United
States to visit me and improve her English. Despite all of her efforts, she did not show the progress I expected during her 6-month stay. This experience led me to look into the construct of language aptitude more closely. As I read the relevant literature, I began to realize that it had always been studied by cognitive psychologists and assessed via cognitive measures. Nobody (within the range of the resources to which I had access at that time) had studied language aptitude from a sociocultural perspective. Therefore, I decided to fill this gap in the literature by developing this dissertation study to investigate language aptitude through a sociocultural lens.

**Ethical Considerations**

I obtained the Institutional Review Board approval from the University at Albany, SUNY both for the pilot study and the present study prior to data collection. I kept participants’ and names of the people involved anonymous throughout this dissertation. All of the names used for the two cases and other learners are pseudonyms. I paid meticulous attention to ensure the confidentiality of the participants at all times. I kept the video-recordings of the classes and audio-recordings of the interviews in a computer and an external drive, both of which were password-protected.

I followed the informed consent guidelines provided at the end of each TESOL Quarterly journal and the guidelines required by the IRB at University at Albany, SUNY. Participants were informed that they were going to be involved in a research project by volunteering to learn English. I explained clearly that the purpose of this study was to explore the concept of language learning potential. They were informed that participation was voluntary and that they preserved the right to withdraw from the study any time without penalty. Finally, I obtained a signed consent form from each participant before
they began attending the classes. For the participants who joined the study at the beginning, I used our first meeting on October 12, 2009 in order to inform them about the study and obtain their informed consents. I obtained the late-joining participants’ informed consent in their first class on November 9, 2009.

In this study, the EFL instruction was given on a voluntary basis; students were not graded on their performances during classes. In this regard, teacher-as-the researcher paradigm did not pose an ethical threat. This paradigm also eliminated the observer effect (Patton, 2002) which might have adversely affected the naturalness of participants’ behaviors if there were a fieldwork observer in the classroom setting.

Lastly, this research does not address any controversial or sensitive issues; in this sense, bias of the researcher was not an ethical concern in the current study.

**Data Collection**

In this study, data came from participant observations, individual and focus group interviews and field notes as reflected in the researcher’s journal (see Table 1).

Table 1  

**Data Collection Tools and Research Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection tools</th>
<th>Research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Participant observations</td>
<td>How can language aptitude be re-conceptualized through sociocultural theory?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Videotaped classroom sessions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Individual interviews</td>
<td>What are the verbal indicators that reflect adult EFL learners’ reciprocity and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Focus group interview</td>
<td>transcendence pertaining to their language learning potential?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Researcher journal</td>
<td>How are these verbal indicators manifested in dialogic interactions between learners and the teacher in an adult EFL classroom?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant observations (Videotaped classroom sessions). Flick (2006) talks about two main advantages of participant observations. First, the researcher stays a longer period in the research site, which gives way to the application of sound research methods such as theoretical sampling. Second, “if it becomes evident that a specific dimension, a particular group of persons, concrete activities, and so on is needed for completing the data and for developing the theory, the researchers are able to direct their attention to them in the next observational sequence” (Flick, 2006, p. 225). Since I utilized a nested case study approach in this study, participant observations were very instrumental in both the exploration of language learning potential in general and in focusing on a particular group of learners during the observations.

A total of 44 hours of instruction (Two classes per week, each consisting of two hours) took place during the 12-week data collection period. During this time, I both taught EFL and collected data as the primary researcher. I offered the EFL instruction on a voluntary basis and it was not a credit-bearing course. Classes were held in a classroom which I selected among several options the university administration offered (for details see the context of the study section). I videotaped all of the 22 classes using a camcorder with a built-in hard drive.

I adopted the sensitizing concepts approach throughout the participant observations. As Patton (2002) writes, “the notion of sensitizing concepts reminds us that observers do not enter the field with a completely blank slate. While the inductive nature of qualitative inquiry emphasizes the importance of being open to whatever one can learn, some way of organizing the complexity of experience is virtually a prerequisite for perception itself” (p. 279). As Boyatzis (1998) also points out, “codes used by other
researchers and their findings provide the most direct help in developing a code from prior data or prior research” (p. 37). For the stated reasons, Feuerstein, Rand and Rynders’s conceptualization of transcendence (1988), transcendence as one of the subscales in Lidz’s (1991) Mediated Learning Experience Rating Scale\(^1\), Poehner’s (2008) study on learner reciprocity, and reciprocal behavior inventory in Response to Mediation Rating Scale (see Table 3) developed by Lidz in 1997 and modified by van der Aalsvoort (1998) as cited in van der Aalsvoort & Lidz, 2002 were utilized as starting points in the observations and data analysis.

**The Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) Rating Scale.** In 1991, Lidz developed a rating scale consisting of thirteen sub scales to “describe the child’s behaviors during the course of an interaction more fully” (van der Aalsvoort & Lidz, 2002, p. 121). Thus, the items in the scale were intended to evaluate the mediator’s (particularly the parent’s) behaviors during interactions with the child. Even though this scale was developed for parent and child relationships, principles underlying behaviors can be adapted and applied to adult interactions, too. Moreover, Lidz’s discussion on transcendence provided me with satisfactory scaffolding and raised awareness for the type of verbal indicators learners could be using during interactions. In this study, I utilized one of the thirteen sub scales (i.e., transcendence\(^2\)) in the initial stages of data analysis. For reciprocity, I benefited from the eight subscales in Response to Mediation Rating Scale. The rationale behind this decision was that Patton (2002) suggests having a

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\(^1\) Lidz’s (1991) MLE Rating Scale includes thirteen subscales. Transcendence, which is presented in Chapters One and Two is only one of these subscales. Please refer to Appendix A for a complete version of the subscales.

\(^2\) MLE Rating Scale included reciprocity as one of the thirteen subscales, too; however, since the Scale focused on evaluating the mediator’s behaviors and reciprocity referred to child’s behaviors, it did not correlate well with other subscales. Thus, the reciprocity of the child was measured separately than the other twelve subscales and not much emphasis was given to the discussion of reciprocity in general.
list of sensitizing concepts that will “help organize and guide the fieldwork, at least initially” (p. 279).

Table 2

Transcendence as Adapted from the MLE Rating Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Working Description</th>
<th>Hypothetical Indicators for Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Transcendence | -Relating events in the current situation to those in the past or anticipated in the future  
                  - Widening of the interaction beyond its immediate goals | Statements such as “I remember hearing this word in one of the Seinfeld episodes”  
                                                                                     “if-then”, “what-if” sentences and verbal indicators indicating cause-effect thinking  
                                                                                     Questions such as “Can we say that when talking to a friend, too?” |

Table 3

Reciprocal Behavior Repertory in Response to Mediation Rating Scale

- Responsiveness of interaction with learner
- Self-regulation of attention and impulses
- Affective quality of interaction with mediator
- Communication related to shared activity
- Comprehension of activity demands
- Use of mediator as resource
- Reaction to challenge
- Modifiability in response to interaction

Teaching.

Curriculum materials. I used Expressions 3 published by Heinle as the primary teaching source during classes. I selected Expressions 3 because I believed that its integrated four-skill syllabus would provide the learners with abundant opportunities for communicative and meaningful language practice. Pair and group work incorporated into the lessons through the use of Communicative Language Teaching also created ample

3 Please refer to Chapter Two for a discussion of this scale.
opportunities for interaction. The learners obtained individual copies both of the student book and the workbook for themselves by means of the original books I had. I benefited both from *Expressions 3* teacher’s annotated edition for the instructional suggestions and the audio CDs during English lessons. In addition to the textbook, I used extra materials such as reading texts, dialogues for vocabulary study, songs, discussion materials, episodes from an American TV show, and so on.

**Pedagogical Tools**

*Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).* The major language teaching approach I used in this study was the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emerged in the late 1960s as a reaction to situational language teaching and audio lingual methods since it was believed that they neglected the functional and communicative potential of language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

One of the central perspectives in CLT is that language is primarily used for interaction and communication; thus, language learning entails learning to communicate. According to Johnson (1982), activities that involve real communication and meaningful tasks promote learning and for Hymes (1972), the goal of language teaching is to develop learners’ communicative competence. In CLT, a functional syllabus is used. Language functions (e.g., agreeing, talking about jobs, describing people, asking about leisure) are emphasized over forms (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Students are encouraged to work on all four skills (i.e., listening, speaking, writing and reading) from the beginning of instruction. Authenticity is the keyword for classroom activities (Littlewood, 1981), which refers to the quality of teaching materials in terms of reflecting real life situations which can be found in the target culture. Pair work or small groups are used to simulate
authentic situations and to engage learners in social interactions among themselves. CLT emphasizes the processes of communication rather than the mastery of forms. As instructional materials, the use of text-based and task-based materials as well as realia is suggested (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Text-based activities refer to activities carried out using printed materials such as text books or worksheets; task-based activities include games, role plays, simulations, problem-solving tasks; and finally, realia consists of sings, ads, newspapers and visual sources such as graphs, charts, symbols and pictures (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

For all the stated reasons above, I found CLT to be an instrumental approach in promoting social interactions in class. It helped me prompt communication between and among learners as well as between myself and learners which I needed to investigate the verbal indicators that occurred during these interactions. Although some researchers view CLT as an inadequate approach in teaching intercultural competence (Sieloff Magnan, 2008) or criticize CLT for representing an Anglocentric view (Sullivan, 2000), I utilized this approach after filtering its tenets through critical thinking to find appropriate principles for the EFL context in my study. For instance, while CLT suggests that the language teacher use and model the target language as much as possible in the classroom, DA supports the use of mother tongue in a foreign language classroom to “focus on meaning” (Sieloff Magnan, 2008, p. 373). I followed what DA suggests in my teaching because conveying the underlying cultural reasons behind certain language functions in English (using the shared mother tongue with the learners) was more important for me than using English religiously at the expense of skipping these culturally oriented interpersonal exchanges.
For my training in CLT, please refer to the “who am I as a researcher?” section above.

**Dynamic Assessment (DA).** Dynamic assessment (DA) is a dialogic approach to assessment and instruction derived from Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of mind (1978). It emerged as a reaction to the traditional tests of learning ability (or potential) which emphasized performance stability.

In DA, learning takes place within a learner’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). A teacher (or mediator) who is involved in DA tries not only to identify learners’ actual level of development (i.e., what the learner can do on his/her own) but also their potential, in other words, their proximal level of development (i.e., what the learner can do with the help of a more capable adult) for learning more complex tasks while creating ongoing opportunities to support their future development (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004). These are carried out through dialogic interactions which resemble the Socratic method (i.e., interactions initiated by the assessor, usually in interrogative form).

As Lidz and Elliott (2000) stated, “[t]he most defining characteristic of a dynamic assessment is the interactive nature of the relationship between the assessor and the assessee(s)” (p. 6). Thus, Dynamic Assessment (DA) was particularly germane to the exploration of the sociocultural aspects of language learning potential due to its emphasis on the process of learning and on the interactions between teacher and students.

The mediations in DA are supposed to start with the most implicit and move toward the most explicit depending on learners’ readiness. To exemplify, an implicit prompt would be ‘Do you think everything is OK in this sentence?’ and an explicit prompt would be ‘That word is not appropriate to use in this context’. Secondly,
mediations that are offered later depend on the previous ones, and the involvement of the mediator should diminish as the learner shows autonomous performance and rejects support (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). As argued by Poehner, “the challenge faced by mediators [in DA] is to provide support [for the learner] that is neither too implicit and therefore ineffective, nor too explicit such that it threatens learner agency and self-regulation” (Poehner, 2008, p. 35). To elucidate what a DA session looks like, two examples from Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) are provided below. It is important to note that these examples are taken from the context of an adult ESL writing class; that is, Aljaafreh and Lantolf did not specifically label them as DA sessions at the time they published their study; yet, they followed fundamental DA principles.

(1) Learner who requires more mediation

(T)utor: ... There’s also something wrong with the article here. Do you know articles?
N: Articles, yes.
T: Yeah, so what’s ...
N: Eeh on my trip to ...
T: What is the correct article to use here?
N: Isn’t to is ... no ... eeh ... article?
T: What is the article that we should ...
N: It.
T: No. Article ... You know the articles like the or a or an
N: The trip ... my, is not my? No ... the trip?
T: My ... yeah it’s okay, you say my trip.
N: My trip.
T: Okay.
N: To United States
T: Yeah, USA, what article we need to use with USA?
N: A, an, the
T: The, which one?
N: But the?
T: Okay, do we use the ... preparing my trip to ... the USA?
N: Aaah ah (utters something in Spanish) ah, okay when I use when I use USA use with article
T: okay.

(Aljaafreh and Lantolf, 1994: 473)

Poehner and Lantolf (2005) also used these examples when talking about the mediation in the ZPD.
2) Learner who requires less mediation

T: ‘In the same day I mailed them ... to ...’ okay alright. What about also ... is there something else still in this sentence?
F: to the.
T: Hum?
F: the
T: okay, ‘to the’ ... yeah, ‘to the US.’

(Aljaafreh and Lantolf, 1994: 474)

As these examples illustrate, the first learner required more mediation. At first, s/he responded to the mediator’s question by saying that s/he knows what ‘articles’ are; however, later on it becomes clear that s/he is not quite sure what they are. The mediator makes several attempts to implicitly guide the learner, but to no avail. He, then offers a more explicit mediation (a, an, the) but this doesn’t work either. Eventually, he ends up telling the correct article to the learner: the USA. On the other hand, the second learner’s ZPD allowed him/her to come up with the correct article subsequent to the mediator’s first implicit attempt.

In sum, owing to the essential characteristics of DA which are being interactive, encouraging open-ended dialogues, and generating information about the responsiveness of the learner to intervention (Lidz & Elliott, 2000), DA served as an instrumental pedagogical tool for me in identifying the verbal indicators utilized by the adult EFL learners during the collaborative (or sometimes not collaborative) interactions between the learners and myself.

Training of the researcher for Dynamic Assessment. So far, little past research has talked about the training of mediators for DA (Meyers, 1987; Summers, 2008). One reason could be that DA allows flexibility with regards to the mediations, and it is hard to
standardize a process for teaching how mediators should initiate help and respond to learners’ growing needs.

One of the studies that could be located on DA training is Meyers (1987), which mainly talks about what professional DA training programs should provide, and what kind of challenges they might face when teaching the implementation of interventionist DA. Meyers suggested four stages for training of professional skills: (a) detailed instructions, (b) modeling, (c) behavioral rehearsal, and (d) in vivo practice. Detailed instructions are needed by dynamic assessors when implementing any specific technique (e.g., ‘think-aloud’ procedure) for any specific occasion. Modeling, as the name already implies, is the modeling of DA procedures for the trainee. One method of modeling could be showing a videotape of a DA session to the trainee followed by a discussion of the model’s appropriateness. Behavioral rehearsals occur through role-plays of DA process with the trainer and other trainees and through simulations conducted with a client who is an outsider but not “referred for help with a real problem” (Meyers, 1987, p. 413). Finally, in vivo practice involves the actual practice sessions with learners who have real problems.

Summers (2008) is another study that talked about the training of dynamic assessors. He examined the training process of four DA teacher trainees and analyzed their conceptual development with regard to DA. Summers (2008) used a workshop format in training the participants. Through four phases including pre-training mediation with a practice student; classroom-based DA training, post-training mediation with a practice student; and reflection on post-training mediation, the theoretical and practical tenets of DA were conveyed to the participants.
In the present study, I combined and adapted Meyers’ stages and Summers’ workshop method for DA training. The first step was the training in the theoretical underpinnings of DA. I believe that I completed the first step thanks to the extensive literature review I conducted on DA. The second step was watching classroom videos (of both DA and non-DA environments) and analyzing them in terms of DA characteristics. I completed this step by watching various classroom videos of ESL classes, and watching the DA sessions in Lantolf and Poehner (2007), *Dynamic Assessment in the Foreign Language Classroom: A Teachers' Guide*. Lastly, I practiced my pedagogical tool in the pilot study I conducted with two adult learners of Turkish as a foreign language in the U.S. The pilot study lasted four days, including one and a half hour lessons every day. I videotaped the classes and analyzed my application of DA in addition to analyzing learners’ verbal indicators and drew conclusions which were helpful for my data collection process in the actual study.

**Interviews**

**Individual interviews.** I followed Seidman’s (2006) guidelines for the three interview series for the individual interviews. According to Seidman, the first interview is carried out to help the participants contextualize their experiences by giving them a chance to explore and connect their lived experiences to the present context. I conducted the first round of interviews in order to both help the learners contextualize their early experiences with respect to learning English and to help myself to better understand the learners in the study prior to case selection. I also utilized the first round of interviews to develop a rapport with the learners (see Appendix B). The second interview tries to elicit “the concrete details of the participant’s present lived experience in the topic area of the
study” (p. 18). Thus, I formulated questions specifically to elicit concrete examples from the learners in relation to reciprocity and transcendence (see Appendix C). Finally, the third interview focuses on understanding the sense and meaning-making practices of participants with regard to the topic under investigation. I used the third round of interviews to shed light on the learners’ meaning-making processes and perceived reasons for the presence and absence of their verbal indicators vis-à-vis the emerging categories. In addition, I utilized the third interviews for member checking (Merriam, 1998) to increase the credibility of my interpretations from the first and second interviews. For this reason, I customized the questions in the third interviews for each of the four participants (see Appendices D and E). The first interviews were structured and conducted with all 14 participants in the eighth week of data collection (i.e., the first week of December, 2009). The duration of the interviews fluctuated between 30 minutes and 1 hour (see Table 4 below). The reason behind conducting the first interviews with all of the participants was to use those data in the selection of information-rich cases that would be examined more closely in the rest of the study. Before conducting the second and third round of interviews as well as the focus group interview, I selected four learners based on the criteria stated in the participants section above. Following this method gave me more opportunities and provided me with more latitude to select the best information-rich cases to focus on in my analyses.

I designed the second interviews in a structured manner as well in order to elicit learners’ examples consistently for the same type of verbal indicators. As for the third interviews, they were structured too, but I asked different questions to each of the four participants depending on their answers in the first and second interviews. As I stated
above, I used the third round of interviews for member checks in addition to using them to understand the learners’ emic perspectives.

Seidman (2006) suggests that “the three-interview structure works best (…) when the researcher can space each interview from three days to a week apart.” (p. 21) Hence, I tried to schedule interviews with one-week intervals between them (see Table 4 below). All interviews took place during the time frame from the eighth week to twelfth week of the study in December, 2009. The focus group interview was held in January 4, 2010 after the classes ended on December 30, 2009. In total, I conducted 22 individual interviews and one focus group interview during the course of the data collection.

Table 4

*Data Collection Schedule*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Duration of Meeting</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct 19 - Dec 30, 2009</td>
<td>Participant observations (all videotaped)</td>
<td>Twice a week, 2 hrs each (in total 44 hrs)</td>
<td>9 students on average (Ayla 40; Leyla 32 hrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2, 2009</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>32 min.</td>
<td>Ayla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 3, 2009</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>34 min.</td>
<td>Leyla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 15, 2009</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>51 min.</td>
<td>Ayla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 18, 2009</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>42 min.</td>
<td>Leyla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 21, 2009</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>30 min.</td>
<td>Ayla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 30, 2009</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>55 min.</td>
<td>Leyla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 4, 2010</td>
<td>Focus group interview</td>
<td>1 hr. 13 min.</td>
<td>Ayla, Leyla, Elif, Oner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Focus group interview.** In addition to the individual interviews, a focus group interview was conducted with 4 learners (two being the case studies) after the classes ended in order to elicit diverse perspectives that participants may not have expressed
during the individual interviews. In particular, I asked learners questions with respect to their understanding of what language learning ability encompassed (see Appendix F).

Stewart et al. (2007) indicate that focus group interviews are generally used in the early stages of exploratory research when not much is known about the phenomenon under scrutiny. One reason for this is to utilize the focus group data to determine the direction of the research and to formulate the subsequent data collection techniques. In this study, I conducted the focus group interview at the end of the study because, rather than identifying the salient issues about language learning potential, I aimed to benefit from the focus group interview to “increase confidence in whatever patterns emerge” (Patton, 2002, p. 385) by asking follow-up questions regarding the phenomenon under scrutiny. Since a synergy was created among the participants during the interview, more ‘out of the blue’ comments were made, increasing both my understanding of the participants’ emic perspectives and the richness of the data. As Patton (2002) claims, “in a focus group, participants get to hear each other’s responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say” (p. 386) unlike individual interviews.

Typical focus group size suggested by the literature varies from 5 to 10 people (Patton, 2002; Stewart et al., 2007). When the group is too small, fewer responses are generated and when the group is too large, some participants do not get much chance to share their feelings. In this case study research, the focus group was conducted as a supplemental data collection technique to elicit data about the cases’ perceived reasons behind the themes emerged pertaining to reciprocity and transcendence, so the size of the group was reduced to the size of the learners in the second and third interviews (i.e., 4).
The four participants had known each other for about two months by the time I conducted the focus group interview; thus, the size of the group did not pose any threats for a safe, relaxed environment where participants could share opinions without hesitation. The introductory talk I did before starting the interview (see Appendix F) helped immensely in preventing interruptions and any possible diversions from the actual topic under discussion.

Krueger (1994) recommends that a focus group interview should be led by two people. One person should serve as the facilitator or moderator to skillfully lead the interview and to keep the participants focused, while the other person should deal with the mechanics (such as recording), take notes, and pay attention to non-verbal interactions which will supplement the audiotaped data. However, in the case of this research, documentation of non-verbal interactions for analyses was not vital since the focus was only on the verbal indicators. In addition, the size of the focus group was small enough to allow me as the moderator to orchestrate the group without much trouble. That is, I was the only moderator who conducted the focus group interview. It is also important to state that the medium language of the focus group interview was Turkish. Controlling the group dynamics was not problematic for me at all given that I used my native language during the interview.

Researcher journal. I kept a journal from the beginning until the end of this dissertation study. Janesick (2004) views the researcher journal as a strong triangulation technique and “a powerful heuristic tool” (p.144) in qualitative research and adds that “…journal writing is a way of getting in touch with yourself in terms of reflection, catharsis, remembrance, creation, exploration, problem solving, problem posing, and...
personal growth” (p. 146). Indeed, by regularly documenting any ideas, concerns, feelings, problems that came up during the study, I was able to understand my role as a researcher more profoundly. I also used the researcher journal to keep track of numerical information such as the number of students who were present and absent in each class and dates of the individual interviews, which facilitated my analyses later on.

Data Analysis

Videotapes of participant observations. I found Boyatzis’ (1998) thematic analysis to be the most appropriate data analysis method to encode the interactions in this study since the thematic analysis can be used as “a way of systematically observing a person, an interaction, a group, a situation, an organization, or a culture” (p. 5, emphasis original). According to Boyatzis, researchers can generate themes using three approaches: theory-driven, prior-research driven and data-driven (1998). In theory-driven approach, “the researcher begins with his or her theory of what occurs and then formulates the signals or indicators, of evidence that would support this theory” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 33). In this study, my theoretical framework was SCT, so my analyses were filtered through this theory. In prior-research-driven approach, “Codes used by other researchers and their findings provide the most direct help in developing a code from prior data or prior research “(Boyatzis, 1998, p. 37). Since this was an exploratory study, I had to rely on any relevant existing literature pertaining to language learning potential, learner reciprocity and transcendence. I utilized these in a hybrid approach in my analyses. I used the prior-research-driven and theory-driven approaches simultaneously in my analyses in order to both “sensitize concepts” (Patton, 2002) as discussed above and to inductively discover newly emerging themes and categories through SCT. I adapted the steps
outlined by Boyatzis for inductive code development and followed a similar fashion in my analyses. The five steps Boyatzis suggested were:

1) Reducing the raw information
2) Identifying themes within subsamples
3) Comparing themes across subsamples
4) Creating the code
5) Determining the reliability of the code

Boyatzis’ steps were very helpful tools in my analyses; however, the purpose of this study was not to develop a “code” for language learning potential but rather to explore and understand this notion. Thus, particularly the last step, determining the reliability of the code, was irrelevant for the purposes of this study. In order to reduce the raw information, I noted down every single verbal indicator that the four learners (Ayla, Leyla, Oner and Elif) produced by watching the video-recordings of the classes. I used separate Word documents for each class. While transcribing the verbal indicators, I noted down (a) the date of each class on top of the document, (b) the hour, minute and second of the verbal indicators, (c) the context in which the verbal indicator occurred, (d) the verbal indicator itself, (e) my comments about the verbal indicator (e.g., good example, first time (meaning that this verbal indicator has not occurred before) and take this example for the data catalog). Noting down all this information was very instrumental in the later stages in terms of locating the verbal indicators when I wanted to go back to the context for my in-depth analyses. After transcribing three or four videos, I began to identify the themes and categories of verbal indicators. So, I took notes for the possible categories and themes next to the verbal indicators (i.e., as my comments). I used colored
highlighting to differentiate among my personal notes which I took both in English and
Turkish interchangeably. Appendix H illustrates a small portion of my video transcripts.

This process corresponded to the second step in Boyatzis’ list. Then, I began to
compare the emerging categories as I continued to transcribe the videos (i.e., the third
step in Boyatzis’ list). After I finished data transcription, I organized the categories and
subcategories as well as the selected examples using Excel sheets. Following this process,
I began to meticulously develop the data catalog presented in Appendix I. I selected the
examples I used in the data catalog among the initially selected examples. Thus, the
examples used in the data catalog were determined in two stages. While creating the
themes, categories and subcategories (see Tables 5 and 6), I employed a constant
comparative method (Merriam, 1998) as similarities and dissimilarities emerged between
my initial notes for possible themes and categories and the new ones. Finally, Boyatzis’
fourth step, creating the code, gave me insights during the development of the data
catalog. I closely followed the guidelines Boyatzis laid out regarding what a good
thematic code should contain:

a) a label (i.e., a name)

b) a definition of what the theme concerns (i.e., the characteristic or issue
constituting the theme)

c) a description of how to know when the theme occurs (i.e., indicators on how
to “flag” the theme

d) a description of any qualifications or exclusions to the identification of the
theme
e) examples, both positive and negative, to eliminate possible confusion when looking for the theme (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 31).

Table 5

*Descriptions of Themes and Categories regarding Learner Reciprocity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>R1</strong> Learner agency</td>
<td>Self-initiated verbal behaviors which lead to the enrichment of classroom interactions in favor of more efficient learning</td>
<td>R1.1 Commenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R1.2 Repeating on one’s own initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R1.3 Suggesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R1.4 Giving examples on one’s own initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R1.5 Guessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R1.6 Explaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R1.7 Being persistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R1.8 Translating into English/Turkish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R1.9 Telling the meaning of a vocabulary item on the spot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R1.10 Negotiating with teacher/peers on shared activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R1.11 Communicating with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R2</strong> Using the teacher/peers as a resource</td>
<td>Utilizing the teacher's or peers' knowledge and/or experiences to meet the needs which stem from lack of knowledge or guidance</td>
<td>R2.1 Asking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R3</strong> Responding to the teacher/peers</td>
<td>Encompasses verbal indicators carried out in order to respond to a question, a comment, in short, a verbal indicator initiated by the teacher or a peer</td>
<td>R3.1 Answering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R3.2 Agreeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R3.3 Repeating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R3.4 Indicating comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R3.5 Remembering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R3.6 Giving examples when asked by the teacher or peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R4</strong> Affective dimensions</td>
<td>Refer to remarks which are used to ease communication with the teacher and peers, and to add an emotional aspect to this communication</td>
<td>R4.1 Facilitating the communication with the teacher and peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R4.2 Making jokes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

**Descriptions of Themes regarding Transcendence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcendence</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>T1</strong> Linking current learning with past learning</td>
<td>Refers to verbal indicators which reflect any connections the learners make with their current learning and anything they learned in the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T2</strong> Relating current learning to other contexts</td>
<td>Refers to verbal indicators carried out by learners to connect their current learning with different contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T3</strong> Extending experience beyond ‘now’</td>
<td>Engaging in out-of-class activities to use the acquired language items (e.g., concepts) in various authentic activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews and the researcher journal.** After I developed the data catalog, I was able to see the type and frequencies of the verbal indicators that the four learners produced. In order to conduct further in-depth analyses, I decided on my two case studies.
who produced richer information as compared to the other two learners in terms of the range, quality and occurrences of verbal indicators. Subsequently, I transcribed six individual interviews of my two case studies (Ayla and Leyla) on whom I based my analyses in Chapter Four. The interview transcripts were in Turkish. Instead of translating the entire interviews into English, I only translated the sections that, I thought, would enrich my interpretations in the analyses in Chapter Four. The transcript of the focus group interview was in Turkish as well and followed the same method that I used for the individual interviews in terms of translating it into English. Finally, the medium language I used in my researcher journal was mainly English, so I did not need to translate my field notes in the researcher journal.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to a study’s ability to ascertain reliable and valid results (Janesick, 2004). Conducting qualitative research entails providing the “reader[s] with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author’s conclusion makes sense” (Firestone, 1987, p. 19, as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 199, emphasis added). I believe that, especially by means of the comprehensive data catalog and the explication of the research procedures, I portrayed a sound conceptualization for my research and presented thick descriptions to turn my raw data into trustworthy findings.

In this study, trustworthiness was achieved through triangulation, member checking, long-term observations, and disclosure of researcher’s biases (Merriam, 1998) as well as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, negative case analysis and referential adequacy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Data triangulation included three data sources: participant observations, interviews (both individual and focus group), and the researcher journal. One of my purposes in the third round of interviews was to obtain the case studies’ approvals (i.e., member checking), whether my interpretations reflected what they actually meant in the first and second interviews. Participant observations in this study took place for twelve weeks, increasing the credibility of the findings because the phenomenon under scrutiny, language learning potential, was observed over a prolonged period of time (Flick, 2006).

As for the disclosure of researcher’s biases, I attempted to clarify, in previous chapters, my pre-conceived ideas about the sociocultural factors, which I believed, played a role in one’s language learning ability. Under the role of the researcher section, I disclosed my theoretical orientation with which I identify myself as a researcher. I believe that all of these efforts contributed to the trustworthiness of the results.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 304), “the purpose of persistent observation is to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail”. They also add that while prolonged engagement with the participants and research context provide “scope”, persistent observation provide “depth” (ibid., p. 304). In this study, I spent approximately three months with the participants in my native culture; I created many opportunities to build rapport and trust with them. Thanks to this prolonged engagement, I observed what was most salient regarding their language learning potential.

In this study, I focused on two case studies, one of whom was a negative case study. This provided me with countless opportunities to observe both the positive and the negative case studies comparatively to “[revise] my hypotheses with hindsight” (Lincoln
& Guba, 1985, p. 309). Lastly, all of the classroom instruction (i.e., 44 hours) was videotaped, increasing “referential adequacy” that Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 313) talked about. That is, recorded classroom materials allowed me to go back to each classroom session to constantly compare emerging categories and subcategories at leisure and with greater dependability.

**Summary**

In Chapter Three, I explained why I adopted a case study approach in this study. Then, I informed the readers regarding the context of the study, participants, case selection criteria, and the role of the researcher followed by a discussion on ethical considerations. Subsequently, I explained the data collection procedures in detail and elucidated how I conducted the data analysis to process the findings. This chapter ended with a discussion on how I achieved trustworthiness in this study. The following chapter presents detailed case descriptions and sheds light on the themes, categories and subcategories emerged with regard to learner reciprocity and transcendence, filtering them through the principles of sociocultural theory.
Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

The main purpose of this exploratory case study was to understand a complex phenomenon: language learning potential. In Chapter Two, I identified various problems regarding the earlier conceptualizations of language aptitude and offered a new term, *language learning potential*, to deconstruct any associations that can be made with the traditional concept of language aptitude, which is viewed as a relatively stable trait. Among the problems with earlier conceptualizations of aptitude is a lack of emphasis on interpersonal, interactional, contextual, collaborative, and cultural features, namely the sociocultural aspects of language learning potential. Thus, this study aims to reconceptualize and reframe the cognitively oriented concept of language aptitude through a sociocultural lens by examining the contextual and social aspects that might play a role in language learning potential. To achieve this end, the following research questions were formulated:

**Overarching question:** How can language aptitude be reconceptualized through sociocultural theory?

**Sub-question 1:** What are the verbal indicators that reflect adult EFL learners’ reciprocity and transcendence pertaining to their language learning potential?

**Sub-question 2:** How are these verbal indicators manifested in dialogic interactions between learners and the teacher in an adult EFL classroom?

Data were collected over two-and-a-half months in a small Anatolian university in Turkey during an adult EFL course I specifically designed to seek answers for the above research questions. The classes were held twice a week from October 12, 2009, until
December 30, 2009. Forty-four hours of classroom instruction were video-taped, and 22 individual interviews and one focus group were conducted and audio-taped. In addition, the findings of the participant observations and interviews were complemented by a researcher journal kept during the study.

**Results of the First Round of Interviews: Participants’ Early Experiences with Learning English as a Foreign Language**

Before selecting participants for case studies, I conducted a first round of interviews with all the participants. In these interviews, I tried to identify the participants’ previous experiences pertaining to learning English as a foreign language, and gave them a chance to explore, contextualize, and connect these lived experiences to the present instructional context (Seidman, 2006). I also asked their opinions (a) about the best ways a foreign language can be learned and (b) about the characteristics that a language learner would ideally have. Specifically, I asked the participants to tell me about their first experiences learning English and how they viewed these early experiences; that is, were they successful or unsuccessful, practical or impractical. I then tried to get a sense of how they viewed language learning, what they thought the ideal characteristics of a language learner were, and where they saw themselves along this continuum (Appendix I).

Below are the descriptions of the case study participants, Ayla and Leyla, which I compiled from the first interviews.

**Positive Case Study: Ayla.** Ayla was the only participant who attended all but one class from the beginning until the end of the study. She missed only the day we studied the tenses in English. Since she was already knowledgeable in this subject, she preferred not to attend that particular class, which was held on December 9, 2009. Thus,
Ayla attended 21 of the 22 classes, which allowed for 42 hours of videotaped data. Ayla not only was my positive case (i.e., she showed greater language learning potential compared to other students in the class), but she also had the largest number of verbal indicators due to her superior attendance.

Thirty-seven-year-old Ayla is an assistant professor in the School of Education, specializing in Guidance and Counseling. She is married and has a 6-year-old son. My knowing that she had a son was important since some of her utterances were related to him or to parenthood. Classes lasted from 5:30 pm until 7:30 or 8 pm, which indicated the sacrifice she had to make to attend them. Once she commented that “I stopped offering evening classes\(^5\) this semester, so my son was expecting to see me at home every night, but now he keeps asking ‘Mum, weren’t you going to be home all the time this year? Why are you coming home late?’” She said that her husband was very supportive of her joining the classes and had agreed to take care of their son twice a week.

Ayla began learning English when she was in middle school.\(^6\) She also attended a private course on weekends to strengthen what she learned at school. Ayla loved her English teacher in middle school and vividly remembered that she used to get dressed very nicely. In high school,\(^7\) English was an elective, so she took English only in 9\(^{th}\) grade. She was sure that she hadn’t taken English in 10\(^{th}\) grade, admitting that she had

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\(^5\) Some universities in Turkey offer evening education programs, which accept participants with lower university entrance exam scores. The tuition rates for these participants are higher (even though college education is free in Turkey, participants pay a small amount of tuition every semester). Most faculty members consider evening education programs advantageous, since they earn extra money for teaching in them.

\(^6\) Until 1998, compulsory elementary education in Turkey consisted of only five years. In 1998, Turkey adopted the eight-year continuous compulsory education system, so the notion of middle school isn’t used any more. “Primary education, second stage” is now the term used for 6\(^{th}\), 7\(^{th}\), and 8\(^{th}\) grades.

\(^7\) Ayla attended a regular high school, which included 3 years of education and did not offer one-year intensive language preparation in English before the 9\(^{th}\) grade. The schools in the latter category, called “foreign language-focused high schools,” have a more language-focused curriculum compared to the regular high schools. The public often refers to these schools as “super high schools.”
been influenced not to by her peers, but couldn’t remember if she had taken English in 11th grade. In college, she took English only in her freshman year as a compulsory course. She did not attend hazırlık, the one-year intensive language preparation course in English that is now the common practice in many Turkish universities. However, Ayla did attend hazırlık as a doctoral student. With regard to her experience at hazırlık, Ayla told me that she had worked as a counselor in a public high school, and attended English classes in the afternoon. She elaborated, “In order to fulfill the required working hours at school, I had to wake up at dawn. I used to go to the English classes in the afternoon being wiped out and would be sleepy during the classes, which wasn’t very productive for me.” Yet, later during the interview, she mentioned that the dynamics of this hazırlık class were great because there was a mixture of people from engineering students to cello players, and she added that “that year was one of the most enjoyable times in my whole student life, despite my tiredness.”

In response to my question about the types of activities she engaged in while learning English, Ayla said that she hadn’t had any different activities until our class. What she meant by “different activity” was something focusing on listening and speaking, as well as something enriched by the use of media. In brief, she was taught using only one language teaching method, grammar translation. This was even true of the hazırlık she attended before beginning her doctorate. That program had three teachers, one being a native-speaking writing teacher, but she thought that even the writing classes were not very effective. “One of our English teachers,” Ayla said, “was very self-sacrificing. She used to distribute colorful worksheets to us, but the other one never left her seat.” On the other hand, Ayla considered the hazırlık experience fruitful in the sense
that it provided her with the foundations of English grammar. According to Ayla, another significant contribution was getting her accustomed to using a monolingual English dictionary. “Most of my vocabulary knowledge is based on the hazırlık year, even though it has been a very long time since then,” she stated.

Finally, I provide below a short sample of Ayla’s speech, which I obtained at the end of the first interview, using the picture frames from New York State’s Placement Test for English as a Second Language Adult Students to elicit utterances. These excerpts offer an idea of the case studies’ speaking proficiency levels at the beginning of the course. Due to space constraints, I provide here only the descriptions for the first story, depicted in a series of four frames (see Appendix G). Before narrating the stories, Ayla stated, “I think I should just start talking without making any preparations, you know, as much as my English allows,” and then immediately began her description of the story, which lasted 2 minutes and 10 seconds:

Ayla: The man is Umut. It’s sunny day and he is running the bus but it’s too late. And the dog is bitten Umut ya da [or] Umut is bitten by dog and he is nervous and anxiety because he must be in class 8 o’clock but it’s late, so he is in the class 10 o’clock. He is excuse the teacher. The class person is in the exam. The teacher says sit down Umut and this paper exam.

Cagri: Ok, thank you, güzel [nice].

By looking at the type, quality and frequencies of the verbal indicators that the participants produced, I selected Ayla as my positive case study. Based on the
same criteria, I also selected a negative case study, Leyla, whose detailed
description is provided below.

**Negative Case Study: Leyla.** Leyla is 21 years old and a junior nursing
student. She started the classes on November 9, 2009, and attended through
December 30, 2009. She missed only one class and was once 14 minutes late. In
total, Leyla attended 16 classes, which allowed for 32 hours of videotaped data.

As a 4th grader, Leyla began learning English with two hours of
instruction per week. In her second stage of primary school, her studies continued
with four hours per week. She did not, however, have a teacher who specialized in
teaching English. Her instructor was her mainstream teacher, who Leyla quickly
learned was not cut out for the job. In the first interview, Leyla said, “When I
began 6th grade, I realized that my friends knew much more English than me; this
thought has always stayed with me and I started to fall behind in English starting
from those times.” She went to a language-focused high school (see note 3
above). At the beginning, she had positive experiences, since she was familiar
with the initial topics, but later on, there were too many subjects for her to handle,
and she started to fall behind. The English teacher at hazirlik was a very
discouraging person. He used to scold them by saying that “there are only three
people in this class who are going to make it through college,” and Leyla knew
that he didn’t include her among those students. As time went by, hazirlik began
to feel like torture. Leyla believes she experienced hair loss at this time as a result
of the stress. However, things got better in grade 9, because they had a different
teacher, from Australia. In the summer between grades 9 and 10, she took private lessons (from a college student who was preparing to be an EFL teacher) three times a week, each consisting of three to four hours. By grade 10, her English had improved. In grade 11, she stopped paying attention to school subjects in order to prepare for the university entrance exams, as most 11th graders do.

Leyla specifically preferred colleges where there was no hazirlik year. In her freshman year, she passed the exemption test for English. Finally, in her sophomore year, Leyla took vocational English as an elective, which she didn’t find very effective because of the teacher’s loosely planned lessons. She commented, “All we learned was a few phrasal verbs concerning health issues.” She hadn’t had any other experience until starting my classes. Leyla was well aware that she had to improve her English by allotting specific time for it since she planned to go to graduate school for an academic career.

Leyla’s early experiences in the primary school were typical of those of a public elementary school student: learning basic grammar rules and simple lexical items. However, at hazirlik, she had some interesting experiences. For example, students had to make short movies in English after writing the screenplays themselves. They also had weekly writing assignments. And as was common practice among all hazirlik students, Leyla and her friends wrote vocabulary items on small flash cards (on one side in English, on the other side in Turkish) to memorize their meanings.

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8 In Turkey, it is not common to see native-speaking English teachers in public high schools. In that sense, Leyla was lucky.
9 A score of 50 out of 100 on a national exam (called ÜDS) is required in order to become a research/teaching assistant in Turkey.
Lastly, I present Leyla’s description for the pictures in the New York State’s Placement Test for English as a Second Language Adult Students, which lasted 3 minutes and 5 seconds.

Leyla: Mesela hocam çok basit, mesela fiiller aklıma gelmiyor benim, o çok kötü. Şu anda o duyguyu, şey mesela ‘otobüse binmek?’ [For example, *hocam*,\(^ {10}\) it is very simple. For example, I can’t remember the verbs, that is very bad. I have that feeling right now. For example, ‘to take the bus?’]

Cagri: Get on

Leyla: Get on

Cagri: Hı hı, get on the bus. Ya da [or] yakalamak, catch the bus. Otabüsü yakalamak catch, kaçırmak miss. Catch the bus, miss the bus. Stres yapma hani anlatabildiğin kadar. [Don’t get stressed, tell as much as you can].

Leyla: Yakalamaya çalışırken otobüs gitti diyeceğim. Çok kompleks düşünüyorum aslında. [I am going to say, ‘the bus was gone when he was trying to catch it. I think in very complex terms, in fact’].

Cagri: Basitleştirmeye çalış hani, şu resimde ne var? Ne görüyorun? [Try to make it simple. For example, what is in this picture? What do you see?]

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\(^ {10}\) “Hocam” [pronounced as *hodjam*] is a quintessential form of address used by participants when talking to their teachers in Turkey. In grades 1 to 5, participants are encouraged to say “öğretmenim,” meaning “my teacher”; however, as they move to higher grades, they start to use “hocam” when addressing their teachers. Even at college and graduate school, participants address their professors using this word. In this dissertation, I will be using *hodjam* wherever necessary in order to preserve its connotations.
Leyla: Otobüse yetişmeye çalışıyor [He is trying to catch the bus].

Cagri: Hı hı. [Uh-huh]. Bir otobüs var. [There is a bus]. İşte, çocuk otobüse yetişmeye çalışıyor. [Like, the boy is trying to catch the bus]. Cümlelerini böyle, hani dediğin gibi bileşik cümle, uzun bir cümle halinde anlatmaktansa kısa kısa cümleler halinde anlatmaya çalış. There is a bus diyebilirsin...? [Try to express yourself by using short sentences rather than using combined, long ones. You can say ‘There is a bus...?’]

Leyla: There is a bus. Ha sadece öyle anıatacak mıyım, toplamıyacak mıyım cümleyi? [Oh, am I going to tell just like that, am I not going to bring them together?]

Cagri: Sıra sıra hani ne mesela bu resimle ilgili ne görüyorysun? [One by one, like, what do you see about this picture?]

Leyla: There is a bus on the road. He is catch the bus and the dog...İşirmak? [to bite?]

Cagri: Bit, bite, bit.

Leyla: Bit on the leg. Then, he is put...düşürmek neydi? [what did ‘to drop’ mean?]

Cagri: Drop.

Leyla: ...dropped the book, books and he is sad, üzüldü, he was sad...

Cagri: Ya da ‘He is sad’ diyebilirsin [or you can say ‘He is sad], hı- hı, he was sad.
Leyla: He was sad, then he was late in the school. Then, the teacher with angry, yok [no], with, sinirlendi? [got angry?] with...

Cagri: got angry.

Leyla: got angry with, with him.

Having described my two participant case studies, I discuss the findings of the study filtered through sociocultural perspectives in the following section.

Results

Boyatzis (1998) outlines three major methods of conducting thematic analysis: (a) the inductive method, (b) the theory-driven method, and (c) the prior-research-driven method. In this analysis, I used a mixture of theory-driven and prior-research-driven methods. My theoretical sensitivity (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) in favor of the sociocultural theory, monitored the identification of the emerging themes and categories in the interactions. Likewise, previous literature discussed in Chapter Three on learner reciprocity and transcendence sheds light on the themes I developed, which are elucidated in the data catalog presented in Appendix I. In this chapter, only the most relevant examples from the data catalog are examined. Please refer to this catalog for an exhaustive list of all themes, categories, and subcategories pertaining to learner reciprocity and transcendence, in addition to their descriptions, accompanied by selected examples.

Data from this study indicate that adult EFL learners manifest their language learning potential through two broad concepts: learner reciprocity and transcendence (see Figure 4).
Seven major themes regarding learner reciprocity emerged:

- Learner agency
- Using the teacher and peers as a resource
- Responding to the teacher and peers
- Affective dimensions of interactions with the teacher and peers
- Self-regulating attention
- Reacting to challenge
- Seeking opportunities for improvement

*Figure 4. Dimensions of language learning potential*

Three major themes regarding transcendence emerged:

- Linking current learning and past learning
- Relating current learning to other contexts
- Extending experience beyond “now”
Agency is one of the most ubiquitous notions discussed and researched within the realm of the sociocultural theory (hereafter SCT). Ahearn (2001) defines agency as “the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act” (p.112). What is inferred from this basic definition is that learners need to show agency by involving themselves in interactions with others in order to mediate’ their learning, in other words, they need to create “mediational means” (Wertsch, Tulviste & Hagstrom, 1993, p. 352). That is, they can’t afford to wait for the teacher or a textbook to simply transmit the inputs (van Lier, 2008) into their brains. In particular, the language learners need to create “more tools and new ways of learning, through collaborative activity with other users of the target second language” (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p. 200). Each initiative taken during language learning lends support to a “pedagogical moment, a teaching opportunity and a learning promise” for the learners as van Lier summarized concisely (2008, p. 174).

The extracts below (1, 2) provide strong evidence for Ayla’s agency leading to her reciprocity. The context for the first extract was a unit on “giving opinions, agreeing and disagreeing” during our last class on December 30, 2009. I instructed the students in English for the speaking activity. They were supposed to think of a big decision that they needed to make in the near future and write down the pros and cons of that decision to exchange opinions with each other when they were ready. Thus it was a combined
activity on the productive skills of English (writing and speaking). After working on their own for ten minutes and asking me individual questions, they formed groups to start talking. Ayla was the first student to take the initiative to speak up in English in her group:

*Extract 1.*

1. **Ayla:** My decision is about my son’s school. I think he should go to public school. I think public school is near our house, so he has extra time. He will not go to school with school bus. I think that he grows up in society. What do you think?  
2. **Elif:** I agree with you because…near your house. It is good thing because school bus is bad for your children. That’s all.  
3. **Leyla:** I think time is necessary for your children. So, she…she doesn’t get up early.  
4. **Melis:** What about public school’s teachers, are they good?  
5. **Elif:** Education…  
6. **Ayla:** Yes, yes, but public schools’ class are crowded and it could be an issue about cleaning and supplying educational materials. What do you think?  
7. **Elif:** Crowded…bad thing, I think.

In this group interaction, Ayla not only created a new way to practice English by initiating the conversation with her peers, but also fostered the continuation of the

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11 In lengthy dialogues, I use boldface to draw readers’ attention to the portion or portions of the text that I am specifically explicating.
interaction by asking “What do you think?” in line (1). Since SCT views learning as “a shift from collaborative inter-mental activity to autonomous intra-mental activity” (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p. 195), it is crucial for the learner to be continuously engaged in such inter-mental activities. When this view is applied to the foreign/second language learning context, it is plausible to argue that the more a language learner engages in social interactions with others who speak the same target language, the quicker the emergent concepts in this language will be internalized.

The context of extract (2) was my explanation of what “all over” means and in which contexts it is used. I gave two examples of my own: “all over the place” and “all over the country.” Then, Ayla voluntarily shared her own example despite the fact that I did not ask the students if they could think of other contexts for the use of the phrase.

Extract 2.

Ayla: All over the world.

By voluntarily sharing her own example, Ayla immediately turned this moment into a collaborative effort because she reminded me of the fact that maybe other students had examples in their minds, too. So, I asked the class for other examples, which resulted in the participation of two more students in this collaborative learning process.

According to SCT, learning takes place in two dimensions: the first dimension is the learner’s actual level of development, that is, what the learner can achieve alone; and the second dimension is the learner’s zone of proximal development (ZPD), namely, what the learner can achieve with the support of a more capable adult. Thus, the teacher is responsible for gauging his/her students’ ZPDs. This, however, cannot be achieved without both the learners’ and the teacher’s efforts. Unless learners are willing to
cooperate with the teacher, in other words, to show what their potential is, the teacher will most likely fail in seeing the learners’ abilities as a whole. The positive case in this study, Ayla, was quite willing to cooperate with the teacher in this sense. She was constantly commenting on class activities, giving clues about her progress, in brief, reciprocating in many different aspects. In the third interview, she revealed,

Participating in and commenting on the class activities increase my motivation in class because they are functional in both letting the teacher know where I stand and admitting myself loudly where I stand. -Ayla

Extract (3) and (4) below provide examples of such comments. In extract (3), she comments about her progress with regard to the listening activities we had been covering in class, and in extract (4), she gives clues about the ups and downs of her abilities in English, which helped me to gauge her actual and proximal levels of development over time.

Extract 3.

Ayla: İlk hafta yaptığımızda ben hiçbir şey anlayamadım, baktım öyle. Ama bugün daha çok anladım. [When we did it in the first week, I didn’t understand a thing. But today I’ve understood more].

Extract 4.

Ayla: Çok basit şeyleri bile bazen, hani, bilmediğini farkедiyorum. Bir üst bilgiye sahip oluyorsun ama bir asagıdaki bilgiye sahip değilsin. [I realize that I don’t know very simple things sometimes, you know. You possess upper-level knowledge but lack knowledge at a lower level].
Among the things Ayla accomplished by sharing these thoughts were: a) indirectly giving me feedback about the effectiveness of the listening activities we did in class, and b) letting me realize that she monitors her language progress; that is, she is aware that she is advanced in some skills, yet needs development in others. So, in the upcoming classes, I began to watch Ayla’s skills more closely, as well as tailor my scaffolding based on her revelations. She was, indeed, fairly advanced in her vocabulary skills yet needed development, for instance, in more accurate inferencing, in understanding complex sentence structures or daily expressions in English. The extract below (5) provides another example in which Ayla gives clues about her actual level of development. The context for this extract was a pre-reading vocabulary exercise prior to reading a passage about shopping and supermarkets. Students were introduced to some words and asked to place them in the appropriate blanks in the sentences provided (see Figure 6). It is worth mentioning that there were more lexical items (12) than the number of blanks (9).

*Figure 6. Pre-reading vocabulary exercise*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOCABULARY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>candy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pleasant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Do you look in the refrigerator and kitchen ________ and make a list?**
2. The supermarket makes some of the ____________ for you.
3. Specialists in ____________ have studied how to make people buy more food.
4. The simple foods that everybody must buy, like bread, milk, and ________ are spread all over the store.
5. The things that you have to buy____ are usually placed on a higher or lower ________.
6. However, ______ and other things children like are on lower shelves.
7. The store has a comfortable ____________ in summer and winter.
8. If someone stays forty minutes, the supermarket makes an ___________ $5.00.
9. Stores put light green paper around

When we were working with the first question, *Do you look in the refrigerator and kitchen _____ and make a list?*, a student filled in the blank with the word “decision” instead of “cupboards” and explained why she picked “decision” for this sentence. Then, Ayla agreed with her peer and continued:

*Extract 5.*

Ayla:  Hikaye yazdığımız için. Ben de aynı hatayı yaptım, hani ne yaparsin, bakarsın karar verirsin gibi. Hani hiç orada ben, şey, mutfak dolabi olarak düşünmedim. Bir de orada ‘make a list’ var ya, liste yapmadan once karar verirsin. [Because we make up stories. I made the same mistake, too, you know. What you would do, you look at (the refrigerator) and decide. You know what I mean, I did not think at all that it would be ‘kitchen cupboards’ Also, there is ‘make a list’ there (looks at me and laughs), you would decide before you make a list (laughs even more)].

If Ayla hadn’t shared her thought process for this sentence with me, I wouldn’t have realized that she needed development in understanding English syntax. What she did in this sentence was to indeed make up a context in her mind (after seeing the words “refrigerator” and “kitchen”) without focusing on form at all. After this instance, I placed more emphasis on syntactic features in classes. In appropriate situations, I asked them to identify the subject in a complex sentence, relative clauses, referents of pronouns, and so
forth. I then provided detailed explanations if they failed to give the correct answer. In brief, this collaborative interaction allowed me to understand the range of the students’ ZPDs and prompted many instructional activities in the following classes.

Extract (6) is the final example I present for agentive acts that can help the teacher understand the learners’ ZPDs. Ayla’s verbal indicators in extract (6) give clues about her ZPD regarding understanding the subtle differences in the meanings of vocabulary items. Indeed, the word “huzur” in Turkish refers to a broader concept than the English word “peace” conveys. In the context of talking about whether or not there is a direct translation of the Turkish word “huzur” into English, Ayla commented:

Extract 6.

Ayla: Guzel değil mis ama yaa. Ingilizçe’deki bir kelimenin Türkçe’ye…Simdi de peace, huzurun anlamını tam karşılamıyor. [Nah, I don’t really like it, though. Sometimes it doesn’t fit, a word in English to Turkish…This time, ‘peace’ doesn’t match with the exact meaning of ‘huzur’].

In the field of linguistic anthropology, human beings are considered “agentive” as long as (a) they exert “some degree of control over their behavior,” (b) their “actions (…) affect other entities’ [human beings],” and (c) they are open to make their actions “the object of evaluation (e.g., in terms of their responsibility for a given outcome)” (Duranti, 2004, p. 453). These three features of agency are “interconnected” (Duranti, 2004, p. 453) as well. In a second/foreign language context, whenever a learner utters something in the target language, s/he exposes him/herself to the teacher’s and peers’ evaluation. By doing so, the learner, in fact, creates avenues to get feedback, especially from the teacher. The extract below (7) is taken from a context in which I explained in English what the
idiom “to get a second wind” means. Ayla translated my explanations into Turkish according to her own understanding:

Extract 7.

Ayla: Nefes nefese kalip sonra rahatlamak. [Getting out of breath and then relax]

Ayla’s comment on the expression “to get a second wind” is an agentive act, even though her understanding of it is not correct. By speaking up, however, Ayla gave me an opportunity to evaluate her comprehension about the meaning of this idiom. In Duranti’s terms, she made her translation in Turkish an “object of evaluation” by this agentive act. Realizing that she misunderstood me, I further explained its meaning with more examples. In short, not all the reciprocating acts have to be correct; far from it, vague or wrong comments give the teacher a chance to clarify any misunderstandings right on the spot. Such an assessment would not have been possible unless Ayla hadn’t been engaged in this dynamic interaction with me. In this regard, awareness of the importance of opening avenues for evaluation could be raised in language classrooms, especially for adult learners of a foreign/second language.

Finally, I provide extracts (8) and (9) below to show some of Ayla’s other agentive verbal indicators that were objects of evaluation.

Extract 8.

Cagri: Have you ever heard this remark, “Senin ilacin sende”? [“Your cure is in you”12]

Ayla: You should look inside.

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12 Direct translation for “senin ilacin sende,” which is a philosophical remark by Dervish Bedrettin, is “your medicine (your cure) is in you”; however, it means that you are the person who knows yourself better than anybody, so, instead of looking for outside help, you should find the cure inside you.
When Ayla translated this expression into English, I was quite surprised that she did not rely on its literal meaning (your medicine is in you). Rather, she gave the figurative meaning (you should look inside). By doing so, she created an opportunity for me, and for herself, to evaluate her language level from a different perspective (i.e., at the semantic level).

*Extract 9.*

In this extract, too, Ayla revealed her understanding of the sentence to be the object of evaluation. Her translation of “can be used as a polite way to start or continue conversation” was close to its actual translation.

*Cagri:* Surayi, 10.sayfayi okuyorum [I am reading this part on page 10]…Asking about or commenting on someone’s major or occupation can be used as a polite way to start or continue a conversation.

*Ayla:* **Kıbar bir yoludur. Iletişimi devam ettirmenin kıbar bir yoludur…[It is a polite way, is a polite way to continue communication].**

In Duranti’s (2004) definition above, one of the interconnected properties of agency is whether or not somebody’s agentive acts affect others one way or another. Giving feedback about classroom activities and commenting on how the class is going in general are among the reciprocating acts that give (or are supposed to give) directions to the teacher’s decisions about the upcoming classroom activities. Namely, these agentive acts directly influence the teacher’s pedagogical decisions for the appropriate activities and indirectly influence the type of content the learners will be exposed to in class. This surely does not mean that a teacher will change his/her future plans based on a single agentive act displayed by one or two students; however, such acts will give the teacher an
idea about students’ readiness or attitudes towards certain class activities or projects.

Extracts (10) and (11) provide sample contexts for such agentive verbal indicators.

In the activity that elicited extract (10), I had the students listen to a song by Leonard Cohen, “Dance Me to the End of Love.” I first distributed the lyrics of the song, which I had cut up into separate lines and then scrambled. I then asked them to put the lyrics in order while listening to the song. The first student who would arrange them according to the right order would be the winner. We listened to this pleasant song several times. Ayla commented on the activity right before we went on a break:

*Extract 10.*

Ayla: Bu çok keyifli bir aktiviteydi, bu arada. [This was a very cheerful activity, by the way].

Ayla’s comment for this activity informed me about the types of activities she found interesting and fun. This comment was in accordance with the feedback I got from other students in class as well. In the following classes, I tried to incorporate more of these types of activities in my lesson plans as long as they matched my instructional objectives.

*Extract 11.*

Ayla: Ders nasıl geçiyor anlayiyoruz. [We hardly notice how time passes in class].

This extract shows Ayla’s satisfaction with the classes in general, which, in turn, gives the teacher a feeling of success regarding her approach in classes. This outcome also lends support to one of the six features of effective “proximal learning contexts,” “establishing and maintaining mutually rewarding relationships” that van Lier (2000, p.
254-255) writes about referring to Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory of learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993, as cited in van Lier, 2000). These types of agentive acts are essential in helping the teacher tailor classroom materials according to student needs. Furthermore, each time learners carry out agentive acts like these, they improve their language learning potentials.

In keeping with the sociocultural premises, van Lier suggests that “engagement is clearly a central part of agency” (2008, p. 178). Likewise, Mitchell and Myles say that in SCT, “learners are seen as active constructors of their own learning environment, which they shape through their choice of goals and operations” (2004, p. 221). Indeed, learning results from collaborative efforts between the teacher and learners. No matter how insignificant an interaction may seem, it contributes to the ongoing teaching and learning process. As Swain and Lapkin (1998) put it, “Learning does not happen outside performance, it occurs in performance. Furthermore, learning is cumulative, emergent and ongoing…” (p. 321). Thus, a learner whose language learning potential is more developed constantly engages him/herself in interactions between the teacher and him/her. This, of course, should not mean that all actively participating learners are all agentive and that they will benefit from the instruction the most. The quality of the reciprocating acts plays a crucial role in determining the outcomes of learning as well. As cited in van Lier (2008), Allwright’s participant Igor (1980) was a very active student, too, but he did not make much progress after all.

Extracts (12) and (13) below illustrate Ayla’s engagement in these activities. By contributing to the ongoing conversation about the casual pronunciations of “internet”
and “honest,” she gave me the message that “she is with me,” in other words, she is fully engaged.

Extract 12.

Cagri: Internet’e innernet diyorlar. [They say ‘innernet’ for internet].

Ayla: Sanki böyle “iç” dermiş gibi (showing her chest) [It is like saying ‘inner’].

Extract 13.

Cagri: /a:nst/ diye okunuyor, h’siz. [It is pronounced as /a:nst/, without the ‘h’].

Ayla: Kırk yıl düşünsem, öyle söyleneceği akıma gelmezdi! (laughing). [It wouldn’t hit home that it would be pronounced like that even if I thought about it for forty years]!

As cited in Lunt (1993), Campione (1989) discusses three dimensions on which a teacher can focus when conducting assessments based on the sociocultural premises (e.g., dynamic assessment). They are: (a) focus, (b) interaction, (c) target. What I am particularly interested in here is the last dimension, target. It refers to the “kind of skills which are being considered in the assessment. These may be specific skills and processes related to curriculum or domain-specific areas, or more general and global skills” (Lunt, 1993, p. 162). When it is applied to a second/foreign language classroom context, it can be claimed that the more “targets” a learner presents in class, the more s/he gets assessed by the teacher, which means s/he will increase the scope of the contexts for assessment. All of the extracts above can be considered as providing various targets for the teacher. Thus, a learner with a more developed language learning potential would provide the
teacher with as many different targets as possible in the social interactions s/he gets involved in.

The astute reader may have noticed that in this discussion on agency there has been no mention of Leyla (the negative case study) despite the fact that this study employs a cross-case comparison. This is because she was not engaged in many reciprocating acts related to learner agency. The first bar in Figure 7 illustrates the number of verbal indicators employed by Ayla and Leyla regarding the theme of learner agency. Table 7 shows the themes, categories of learner reciprocity, and their occurrences both for Ayla and Leyla. According to this table, Ayla employed 696 verbal indicators pertaining to learner agency while Leyla employed 37 verbal indicators in total. It is worth noting that Leyla attended 16 classes whereas Ayla attended 21. Nevertheless, the occurrences clearly show that Leyla displayed far fewer agentive acts compared to Ayla. This can be interpreted as follows: Ayla was engaged in agentive verbal behaviors almost 700 times. This means that Ayla created new ways of learning so many times for herself by displaying these indicators while Leyla took initiative to engage in inter-mental efforts with the teacher only about 40 times throughout her 32 hours of instruction time.
Extract (14) below demonstrates how Leyla produced agentive verbal behaviors in a class in which we watched a Seinfeld episode with English subtitles.

Extract 14.

After watching one of the Seinfeld episodes, we went over the unknown vocabulary items on which the students have taken notes. According to the video recording, Leyla called out a word that sounded something like “ready clause” but I did not hear her given that her voice was a little low. Shortly after this, she attempted to utter the same word again but she was interrupted by another student. Three minutes after her first attempt, Leyla threw in “ready clause” again, raising her voice a little bit. Even though she mispronounced the word, I assume that she meant “ridiculous” but instead of correcting it directly, I modeled the word with the correct pronunciation as shown in line 2.

1. Leyla:  Ready clause hocam…[Ready clause hodjam]

2. Cagri:  Ridiculous! Evet! Guzel bir kelime. [Yes! That is a nice word].
This is a context in which most of the students (especially Ayla and Elif) have called out unknown vocabulary items from the Seinfeld episode. This example shows that Leyla initiated throwing in an unknown word, “ridiculous,” in a follow-up vocabulary activity. It is also noteworthy that Leyla called out only one item during the activity, and she was even persistent in making sure that I heard her. In order to encourage her participation, I responded by saying that this was a nice word to know. Even though this was a reciprocating act, it did not provide me with many insights about Leyla’s actual or proximal levels of development, except from the fact that she mispronounced “ridiculous” and she could demonstrate persistency on certain occasions. As van Lier puts it, “The main principle involved [in agency] is that learning depends on the activity and the initiative of the learner (…)” (2008, p. 163). Leyla’s considerably low number of agentive verbal indicators as well as their lower qualitative nature suggest that Leyla’s language learning potential is less developed, since taking the initiative to interact with others is central to developing advanced language skills, according to SCT. Furthermore, in SCT, “people are not free agents, but their behavior is enhanced or constrained by the tools they have available to use and the affordances present in (or absent from) their environment (see, e.g., van Lier, 2000, 2004)” (Swain & Deters, 2007, p. 821).

The findings and the discussion of the relevant literature above suggest that learner agency plays a central role in reciprocal behaviors. By engaging in agentive acts, learners not only give the teacher opportunities to evaluate their ZPDs, but also to avail themselves of new and promising affordances.

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13 An affordance is “a particular property of the environment that is relevant–for good or for ill–to an active, perceiving organism in that environment” (van Lier, 2000, p. 252).
Another category in which learners demonstrate agentive acts is the asking of questions. However, when learners ask questions of the teacher or their peers, they need explicit support. In other words, they ask in order to benefit from the knowledge or experience of a more competent adult. For this reason, asking belongs to a separate theme labeled “using the teacher and peers as a resource,” which is discussed below.

Table 7

*Themes, Categories, and Occurrences for Learner Reciprocity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Learner Reciprocity</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ayla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Learner agency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commenting</td>
<td></td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeating on one’s own initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggesting</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving examples on one’s own initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guessing</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being persistent</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translating into English/Turkish</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling the meaning of a vocabulary item</td>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating with teacher/peers on shared activity</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with peers</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>696</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Using the teacher/peers as a resource</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking</td>
<td></td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Responding to teacher/peers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answering</td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeing</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeating when asked by the teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicating comprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving examples when asked by the teacher or peers</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>587</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Affective dimensions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating the communication with the teacher and peers</td>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making jokes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouraging peers</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>98</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong> Self-regulating attention</td>
<td>Sidetracking</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contributing to a sidetracked conversation</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thinking aloud</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiating with a peer about a sidetracked topic</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>75</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong> Reacting to challenge</td>
<td>Positively</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negatively</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7</strong> Seeking opportunities for improvement</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8. Using the teacher and peers as a resource

Learner Reciprocity, Theme 2: Using the Teacher and Peers as a Resource (Figure 8)

Use of the mediator as a resource was one of the five forms of learner reciprocity. Poehner focused on in his analysis of the French L2 learners who were given tasks to orally compose narratives based on video clips from two Hollywood movies: *Nine Months* and *The Pianist*. According to Poehner, autonomous learners know when they need guidance. If they are not capable enough “to provide it [the mediation] for themselves (...) they turn to the mediator as a knowledgeable interlocutor” (Poehner, 2008, p. 44). In the context of the current study, mediator refers mainly to the teacher and

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14 Poehner’s other dimensions of learner reciprocity are: negotiating mediation, creating opportunities to develop, seeking mediator approval, and rejecting mediations.
occasionally to the more capable peer(s). Similar to what Poehner (2008) pointed out, use of the teacher and peers as a resource in the present study occurred whenever learners initiated an interaction with the teacher to meet their needs for guidance or additional knowledge. Only one category pertaining to this theme emerged in the data: asking.

Vygotsky asserted that “social interaction actually produces new, elaborate, advanced psychological processes that are unavailable to the organism working in isolation” (Vygotsky, 1989, p. 61, as cited in Donato, 2000, p. 46). Thus, no single effort can be substituted for a collaborative one in the development of higher-order skills such as remembering. In extract (15), for example, Ayla uses the teacher to check the meaning of a lexical item.

**Extract 15.**

1. Oner: Hocam, envy ne? Düşman miydi hocam? [*Hodjam, what is envy? Was it ‘düşman’ hodjam]?
3. Ayla: ‘Envy’ ne demek peki? [What is ‘envy’, then]?
5. Oner: ‘Envy’ canavar demek değil mi hocam? [Doesn’t envy mean ‘beast’, *hodjam]? Here I answered Oner’s question by telling him that maybe he was confusing “envy” and “enemy”. Meanwhile, Ayla commented on the meaning of “envy” and asked:

6. Ayla: Sinki şeytan gibi bir anlami vardı. Şeytan neydi? [I think it had a meaning something like “devil”. What was “devil”]?  
In this context, Ayla could have easily not raised her concern regarding the meaning of “envy.” For some reason, she associated it with “devil.” By asking a question about its meaning, she created a “learning promise” (van Lier, 2008, p.174) for herself. Perhaps this interaction and all its surrounding ecological factors (van Lier, 2000) would help retain the meaning of “şeytan” in her mind, contributing to the process of internalization.

Occurrences showing Ayla’s verbal indicators for using the teacher/peers as a resource follow an interesting pattern. For instance, as shown in Table 8, Ayla did not ask any questions in the first class. In the second class, she asked for confirmation twice, and in the following classes her occurrences and type of verbal indicators for asking gradually increased. This was confirmed by Ayla in our first interview as well. She reported:

I normally prefer asking questions if there is something I don’t know, or I am not sure of. Since primary school, I’ve always been an active student. You know, I don’t show shyness or something like that; I definitely ask if there is something to ask. So far, I haven’t asked many questions in class because we haven’t covered difficult vocabulary items or subjects. -Ayla

Notice also that the number of the students present in class and Ayla’s number of verbal indicators are negatively correlated for the most part. I attribute this to Ayla’s agency, that is, she is aware that her actions affect others and she has control over her behaviors (Duranti, 2004); hence, she does not dominate in class. To be more specific, if she still displayed an equal number of verbal indicators while there were more students in class, which would most likely show a tendency to dominate in class.
Table 8

*Occurrences of Ayla’s Verbal Indicators for Using the Teacher and Peers as a Resource*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Date</th>
<th># of students in class</th>
<th>Type of verbal indicator for asking</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19-Oct</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>No questions</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-Oct</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Asking for confirmation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-Oct</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Asking for confirmation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Asking a peer silently</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Asking peers in general</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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As for Leyla, Table 8 indicates that she used the teacher or peers as a resource a total of 14 times whereas Ayla produced 191 verbal indicators for this theme. Table 12 in Appendix I also shows that, in total, Leyla asked for information 10 times, asked her peers 3 times, and asked for confirmation once throughout the course. She did not display any verbal indicators for asking in English, nor did she ask about the target culture or cultural differences. What these numbers suggest is that Leyla preferred to be in an isolated sphere while Ayla found ways to interact with the teacher and peers in order to
use them as a resource. For example, in extract (16) below, Ayla asks the teacher for information regarding an informal expression for “a dollar.”

*Extract 16.*

Ayla: Bucks ne? [What is ‘bucks’]?

Extract (16) is taken from a context in which we were going over the students’ answers for a fill-in-the-blanks vocabulary exercise. The sentence in which “bucks” was used was: “I am afraid to ________ but can I borrow a few bucks?” Normally, the vocabulary item the students were supposed to place in the blank here was “broach the subject”; however, by asking what “bucks” meant, Ayla not only created an additional learning opportunity for herself by utilizing my knowledge about the target language but also gave me a chance to explain the daily usage of this word for the whole class (thus created an opportunity for other students in class as well).

In the second interviews, I specifically asked my students whether they use me as a resource in the class, and if their answer was positive, I prompted them to give me some examples. Leyla said that they naturally used me as a resource because I was their “teacher.” When I prompted her to give me some specific examples, she further commented:

Like, you lead us, guide us, say, about the pronunciation of words, writing, vocabulary or grammar, that is to say, you are our ultimate resource.-Leyla

Her point of origin pertaining to using the teacher as a resource was not about initiating questions or interacting with the teacher; rather, she seemed satisfied with the very fact that I was their teacher and I was there to be their resource by definition. One of Leyla’s few self-initiated questions is provided in extract (17), which shows her verbal
attempt to use the teacher as a resource in a context subsequent to watching a Seinfeld episode. Several students are calling out the unknown vocabulary items from the Seinfeld episode. A student is asking the meaning of a word:

*Extract 17.*

1. Elif: ‘Coy’ diye bir şey vardi. [There was something called ‘coy’].
2. Leyla: Hocam nasıl yazılıyor? [*Hodjam, how is it written]?*
3. Melis: Ce- O- Ye (spelling the letters in Turkish phonetics).
4. Elif: Coy (pronouncing ‘coy’ in Turkish phonetics as if she was saying ‘joy’).

Although Leyla did not participate in the interactions going on in the class in general, she was constantly taking notes in her notebook. In the second interview, she revealed that it was a strategy she used to get the most out of our classes. She also said that “I try to write down the words that I hear for the first time. I make fair copies of my notes when I go to the dormitory that day; otherwise I wouldn’t take time to go over them and I would forget.” Leyla might have asked the spelling of “coy” in this context since taking notes was an important strategy for her.

In his chapter on social-interactive learning from an ecological perspective, van Lier (2000) suggests that “negotiation of meaning” signifies a learning process at work. For him, “The reason is that in negotiating meaning a piece of language that was not comprehensible before, now becomes comprehensible as a result of negotiation work and can thus be incorporated into the learner’s target repertoire” (van Lier, 2000, p. 247). As a result of engaging in interactions to better understand something, the language learner gains three benefits: (a) “improved comprehensibility of input, (b) enhanced attention, and (c) the need to produce output” (van Lier, 2000, p. 248, letters added). Thus,
negotiating meaning, requesting clarification or demanding further explanations are all substantially tied to learners’ comprehension of the classroom materials. Below is an extract illustrating negotiation of meaning between Ayla and me. I am explaining what the concept of “Asian” refers to in American English. Subsequently, Ayla is trying to clarify the concept of “Indian” in line (5) by using me as a resource.

Extract 18.

1. Cagri: Japon, Hongkong’lu, Taiwanli tipleri kastediyorlar. [They refer to folks from Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan].

2. Ayla: Uzakdoğulu [Far Eastener]

3. Ayla: Hintlilere ne deniyor? [What are Indians called (meaning people from India)]?


5. Ayla: Indian diye şeye de deniyor mu, Kızılderililere? [Is Indian also used for the Native Americans, too]?

6. Cagri: Deniyor. [Yeah, it is used].

7. Ayla: Ben bugün ona iliskin birşey okumuştum. Allah allah ne alakasi var Amerika yerlilerinin Hintlilerle falan, sonra anladim da anlayasiya kadar bayagi bir zaman geçti. [Today I read something about it. I said, hmm, what do Native Americans have to do with Indians, then I got it but it took me a while].

By initiating the question in line (5), she not only engages in a reciprocating act but also negotiates the meaning of this concept with me, thus improving her comprehension.
Again in extract (19), Ayla negotiates the usages of the present perfect tense and the simple past tense in a context where the students are working individually to get ready for a group role-play activity. I am walking around to answer their individual questions when this dialogue starts:

*Extract 19.*

1. Ayla: Peki surada, ‘did you ask another person’ olur mu? [So, would ‘did you ask another person’ be OK here]?

2. Cagri: Hi-hi [Yeah] ya da present perfect de olur. [Or present perfect would be fine, too]. Bu da olur da, have you asked..[This one would be fine, too, but ‘have you asked’…]

3. Ayla: İşte, öyle yazmıştım, sonra sanki…[In fact, I had first written it like that but then, you know…]

4. Cagri: Olur olur, ‘have you asked another person’ hatta daha iyi. [Uh-huh. ‘have you asked another person’ is even better].

Then, Ayla asks a good question and creates an additional learning opportunity for herself through this negotiation:

5. Ayla: Konuşma dilinde hangisi daha sık kullanılıyor? [Which one is used more often in the spoken language]?

In the current study, one of the subcategories that emerged with respect to “asking” is “asking for confirmation.” In this subcategory, a certain degree of initiation is elicited but the learner is aware that s/he still needs to use the teacher as a resource to get approval. That is, the learner “is not yet able to perform completely independently,” and allows the teacher to play an “evaluative role” (Poehner, 2008, p. 50). When learners ask
for confirmation, they offer an alternative solution for their questions as well, for this reason, there is more agency involved in these reciprocating acts. For instance, two of the questions Ayla asked to get confirmation from the teacher were: “Temel ihtiyaç, basic need mi?” [Is “temel ihtiyaç” basic need]? and “Make a career olur mu?” [Is “make a career” correct]? In these questions, she presented alternative solutions (basic need, make a career). If she had wanted to obtain straightforward information, she would have directly asked: “What is ‘temel ihtiyaç’?” and “Which verb do we use with career?” Instead, she included her alternative answers in the questions. Table 12 in Appendix I shows that Ayla asked for confirmation (96 times) more than she requested information (77 times) whereas Leyla asked for information 10 times and asked for confirmation only once. These findings indicate that Ayla showed more agency than Leyla even when using the teacher as a resource. Finally, lines (1) and (3) in extract (20) below offer two more examples of Ayla’s reciprocating acts she employed to get confirmation. In this context, Ayla is working on a task individually. She asks:

Extract 20.

1. Ayla: ‘Some advice’ olur mu? [Is ‘some advice’ correct]?
2. Cagri: Hi-hi, some advice. [Uh-huh, some advice].
3. Ayla: ‘With you’ mu deriz ondan sonra? [Do we use ‘with you’ after that]?
4. Cagri: Cumleye bakayim. ‘I need some advice from you’ ya da ‘I need your advice’ diyebilirsin. [Let me see the sentence. You can say ‘I need some advice from you’ or ‘I need your advice’].
Ayla: Hmm, ‘I need some advice’ diyeyim. [Hmm, I will use ‘I need some advice’].
Asking questions about target culture is a practical way of using the foreign language teacher as a resource in view of the fact that such information is not written anywhere and is usually learned either by first-hand experience or by asking someone who has had first-hand experience in that culture. In case of an adult EFL classroom, though, the number of questions about target culture would depend heavily on whether the teacher has had such first-hand experience. In the current study, students used the teacher as a resource occasionally by asking about the target culture (i.e., American culture) and how certain things are done in the United States as compared to how they are done in Turkey. The dialogue below illustrates how Ayla used the teacher as a resource to learn culture-specific information about how “treating someone to something” works in the U.S.

*Extract 21.*

1. Ayla: Amerika’da ismarlama kültürü nasıl? [How is the concept of treating someone to something in the U.S.]?

2. Cagri: Var öyle..acayip yok ama var yine de. Karsılıklı; birisi sana birşey yaptiya sen de onu yemeğe goturebiliyosun. [Yes, there is treating..It does not happen very often but it is in the culture. It is reciprocal; if someone did you a favor, you can take him/her to dinner]. İyilik yaptiya birisi sana, para vermek ayip olacaksa ‘let me buy you lunch’ falan diyorsun. [If someone did a favor for you and you can’t offer money directly, you say ‘let me buy you lunch’ or something like that].
3. Ayla: ‘Alman hesabı’ kavramı var ya, hani herkes kendi hesabını kendi odesin gibi…[You know there is this concept of ‘German way of paying the bill’, like, everybody pays for what they order]…

4. Cagri: O da var. Daha rahatlar en azından bize göre. Ama şey de var hani, ismarlama falan, öyle şeyler de var. O anlamda hiç borçlu kalmak istemiyorlar; sen birine bir şeyaldiysan, çok geçmeden hemen onun karşılığında bir şey yapmak istiyorlar. [There is that, too. At least, they are more comfortable (when paying separately) as opposed to us. But, they treat you to something, too. They don’t want to remain indebted to anyone; if you buy something for someone, they want to do something in return before too long].

Using the teacher or peers as a resource is a functional way of triggering collaborative dialogues between the members of a classroom community. By initiating questions, learners show the teacher and their peers when and how they need guidance. In this section, I have discussed the relation of self-initiated questions to learner reciprocity. I now turn to a type of reciprocity that occurs when participants respond to the teacher or their peers.
Learner Reciprocity, Theme 3: Responding to the Teacher and Peers (Figure 9)

Responding to the teacher and peers has the second largest number of categories (i.e., six) as a theme after learner agency in the current study. According to Figure 10, Leyla’s first most frequent category is “answering the teacher or peers,” and as Figure 11 illustrates, among Ayla’s most frequent five categories are “answering the teacher and peers” and “agreeing with the teacher and peers.” The total number of verbal indicators displayed regarding this theme is 587 for Ayla and 77 for Leyla (see Table 7 above).

Figure 10. Leyla’s five most frequent categories

![Leyla's 5 most frequent categories chart]
Based on van Lier’s framework and the findings of this study, it can be asserted that Leyla was “passive and obedient” most of the time while Ayla displayed verbal indicators in all six features of agency. In the first three or four classes, Ayla was
“obedient” and “participatory” as well, which she revealed in our second interview as follows:

In the first classes, I was a little shy, especially about speaking. But after you encouraged and pushed us to speak, I loosened up or to use a better expression, I summoned up my courage, and began to participate more.

Responding to the teacher and peers is a significant aspect of showing reciprocity. A learner could experience a silent period initially; however, remaining on the “passive and obedient” side in general demonstrates that the learner is not autonomous enough to initiate questions and comments regarding the shared activities in class. There is less contribution to inter-mental interactions in class as well as less receptivity to them. As Valsiner & van der Veer put it, “Teaching-learning runs ahead of development not in the literal sense of one process preceding the other in time, but in the sense that at this time (meaning the present) the process of teaching-learning is functionally interdependent with the developmental processes that are emerging but have yet to become established” (1993, p. 46, explanation in parentheses original). Thus, the importance of teacher-learner relationships and interactions are indispensable for emerging developmental processes.

When looked at through a sociocultural framework, learners’ responsiveness is critical for the teacher to provide targeted, appropriate guidance. Following this line of argument, it goes without saying that almost no learning takes place when learners are unresponsive to teacher’s mediations. To reiterate, students increase their learning as they become more responsive to interactions in class. Given the fact that Leyla and Ayla’s recorded instances of verbal indicators for responding to the teacher and peers are 77 and 587, respectively, it is reasonable to claim that Leyla had a much lower reciprocity (thus
language learning potential) than Ayla because she created or was exposed to fewer opportunities for learning. Numbers alone, of course, do not guarantee that all of these verbal indicators were of high quality; yet, they give us a picture of Ayla’s and Leyla’s profiles as to their responsiveness in class. Now, I turn to several extracts depicting the quality of their responses to me and to their peers. In extract (22), for instance, I brought to the attention of the students a common mistake I had noticed in their paired role-play dialogues on hobbies. After explaining the correct usage, I asked the class if they could give other examples for the topic under discussion, as in line (1). Ayla responded to my questions and instructions in lines (3) and (11).

Extract 22.

1. Cagri: Bir de su dikkatimi cektii: Mesela genel anlamda hobi sorarken ‘Do you like reading a book’ yerine, “do you like reading books’ dememiz lazim. Biz “Kitaplar okumayı sever misin” demiyoruz Türkcede ama Ingilizcedede o sekilde soruluyor. Kitap okumayı sever misin derken, genel sormak gerekiyor. ‘Do you like reading book’ da doğru değil, ‘do you like reading a book’ da doğru değil, ‘do you like reading books’ dememiz lazim. Baska neler olabilir, genel bu sekilde? [Also, I’ve noticed this: For instance, when asking a question about hobbies, instead of ‘Do you like reading a book?’ we say ‘Do you like reading books?’ In Turkish, we don’t say ‘Do you like reading books’ but in English, it is asked like that. When asking whether someone likes reading books, you need to ask in general. It is neither ‘Do you like reading a book’ nor ‘reading book’; we need to say ‘reading books.’ What other examples can you give]?
2. Emine: Do you like writing?

3. Ayla: Do you like eating?

4. Cagri: Do you like writing? Hmm, tekil-cogul ayrimina girebilecegimiz birsey olmasi lazim. [Well, it needs to be something we can distinguish as either singular or plural].

5. Belma: Watching film? Movies?

6. Ayla: Hmm, evet, movies. [A-ha, yes, movies].

7. Cagri: Evet, ‘watching movies.’ Do you like drinking a beer degil, do you like drinking beer? Ama mesela, reading books olsaydi, Do you like reading a book degil, reading book da degil; reading books? ‘Novels’ ayni sekilde: ‘reading novels.’ Do you like reading novels? [Yes, watching movies. It is not ‘Do you like drinking a beer; Do you like drinking beer (writing on the board)? But, for example, in the case of ‘reading books’, it is not ‘Do you like reading a book’ or ‘reading book’; reading books (writing on the board)? “Novels’ again, in the same way: ‘reading novels.’ Do you like reading novels]? [Students repeat ‘novels, do you like reading novels’ to themselves.]

8. Cagri: Ickilerde dedigim gibi, ‘beers’ sayilabilen birsey olmadigi icin ‘Do you like drinking beer’ dememiz gerekiyor. Do you like drinking vodka? Vodkas ya da beers diyemeyiz zaten, sayilamayan birsey oldugu icin. Tekil kullanmamiz lazim, su sekilde. What other examples can you give? [For drinks, as I said, we need to say ‘o you like drinking beer’ since ‘beer’ is an uncountable word. Do you like drinking vodka? We cannot
say ‘vodkas’ or ‘beers’ anyway, since they are uncountable. We have to use them in singular forms, like this (writing the sentence on the board).

*What other examples can you give?*

9. Selin: Do you like singing songs?

10. Cagri: Do you like singing songs. Yes. Instead of saying ‘Do you like singing a song,’ we say: Do you like singing songs?

11. Ayla: **Do you like eating foods?**

12. Cagri: Do you like…?


   Food cogu zaman cogul olabilen birşey değil. [‘Food’ needs to be used in the singular form here. It must be something we can distinguish as singular or plural (Ayla indicating comprehension by nodding and saying ‘uh-huh’). Eating food (writing on the board) Food can’t be plural in most contexts].

15. Demet: Playing football…?

16. Ali: Playing sports (but I did not hear his example as the video-recording shows)

17. Cagri: Playing football, we can’t say ‘playing a football.’ ‘Playing footballs’ da olmaz. Var mı baska akliniza gelenler? [‘Playing footballs’ is not possible, either. Are there other things that come to mind]?
This extract provides strong evidence of Ayla’s responsiveness. At first, she tried to give an example of her own (“Do you like eating?”) But it was not evaluated positively by me. Afterwards, several students give other examples, Ayla modifies her example according to my instructions (in other words, after processing the information) and offers it again (“Do you like eating foods?”) Even at her second attempt, she is not able to give a correct example. However, she responds to my feedback positively and nods her head to indicate comprehension. All in all, even though she is not able to give a correct response, she not only shows me that my teaching is not in vain but also creates a learning opportunity for herself (as well as for the whole class) about the usage of “food” as an uncountable word.

Van Lier suggests that “If the language learner is active and engaged, she will perceive linguistic affordances and use them for linguistic action” (2000, p. 252). In the following two extracts (23, 24), Ayla perceives the linguistic affordances in these contexts and makes use of them to carry out linguistic action while responding to the teacher’s questions. It is also worth noting that both verbal indicators are sentences that she utters spontaneously, in other words, she doesn’t copy and modify a sentence written on the board or on the textbook; they are her originally-constructed responses. As van Lier (2008, p. 174) puts it, “a learner who makes some effort, however small and seemingly insignificant, to be original, says something new and different, sets off in an unpredicted direction” manifests agency, thus enhancing the learning process.

During a whole class discussion about decision-making styles, I asked:

*Extract 23.*

Cagri: Can you decide spontaneously?
Melis: Sometimes…when I want to go near my family, I can say ‘I am going.’

Cagri: It depends…I think sometimes it takes me a while to decide about simple things.

Ayla: Yesterday, I changed wedding ring spontaneously.

Cagri: It was a quick decision.

The next example is taken from a class in which we covered material outside the textbook. The topic was money. The discussion questions included: Do you think that your society places too much emphasis on material things? Do you think that societies in the past were different? In what ways were they different? I directed these questions to the whole class. One student began to share her opinions in Turkish. Then, I invited them to express their opinions in English and encouraged them to at least give it a try. After several students shared their opinions in English, Ayla answered my question in English: Extract 24.

Ayla: Trust and honesty more important for marriage, now money.

According to SCT, creating a collaborative environment for learning is critical because only then do the interactions become mutual and inter-mental. My participant observations clearly indicate that Ayla was responsive to her peers as well as to the teacher. Extracts (25) and (26) depict Ayla’s responsiveness towards her peers.

In the first, Ayla responds to her peer’s question directed to the teacher. Extract 25.

Nesrin: Hocam, individually? [Hodjam, individually]?

Ayla: Bireysel. [Individual].
In the next example, in which students are writing dialogues for a pair activity, and Elif asks for confirmation:

*Extract 26.*

Elif: Vakit ayiramamak, ‘I won’t share time’ olur mu? [Would ‘vakit ayiramamak’ be I won’t share time]?

Ayla: O paylasmak oluyor. [That means ‘to share’].

The last illustration of responsiveness to the teacher and peers involves Leyla, as described in extract (27) below.

*Extract 27.*

In this context, the students had to put six sentences in the correct order to make a conversation. The first sentence is already numbered in the book (What does your friend Sally do?), and I provided the second sentence (She is a film director) to get the exercise going. Then, all of the students began to call out their answers one by one (Really, wow, that sounds really exciting [3], Yeah, I think she likes it [4], She must be pretty creative [5], and She is… [6]). There were seven students in this class. Six students called out the sentences audibly; however, Leyla was barely audible. In the video-recording, one can only hear two words of the last sentence (i.e., She is). However, she seems to have followed the answers. As this extract indicates, it can also be argued that Leyla is “mentally active” even though she is “physically unresponsive” (van Lier, 2008, p. 170) in class activities. When looked at from a sociocultural perspective, though, even her intra-mental activities are constrained since she doesn’t engage in inter-mental communication with others.
In this section, I have proposed that learners’ responsiveness to the teacher and peers is a *sina qua non* of collaborative knowledge building. Unless learners respond willingly to the teacher’s initiations for guided participation (Rogoff, 1990), their transition to the next level of development may be delayed or thwarted altogether.

The discussion thus far suggests that these themes of learner agency, initiation of questions, and responsiveness to others in the class are inextricably tied to the reciprocal aspects of teacher-learner relationships. A learner’s language learning potential appears to be highly connected with his or her ability to incorporate these factors in the language learning process. Although these reciprocating acts are necessary for successful teaching and learning, they are not sufficient. The affective dynamics of the joint endeavors contribute to the quality of the interactions between the teacher and learners as well. The next section speaks to such dynamics.

*Figure 12. Affective dimensions of interactions with the teacher and peers*

**Learner Reciprocity, Theme 4: Affective Dimensions of Interactions with the Teacher and Peers (Figure 12)**

According to van Lier’s ecological view of language learning, verbal utterances are not detached from other aspects of the meaning-making process such as gestures; thus “The totality of meaning-making (…) is not merely linguistic; it is semiotic” (van Lier, 2000, p. 252). When the teacher or learners show empathy or facilitate the interaction, they attach semiotic means to this interaction. As van Lier points out, these semiotic
activities play a central role in language learning. A language learning context does not offer only linguistic input; it in fact offers a “semiotic budget” (van Lier, 2000, p. 252). This semiotic budget “does not refer to the amount of ‘input’ available, nor the amount of input that is enhanced for comprehension, but to the opportunities for meaningful action that the situation affords” (van Lier, 2000, p. 252). With his metaphor of a budget, van Lier suggests that the more enriched language learners’ contextual affordances are, the more developed their meaning-making process will be. Thus, affective dimensions embedded into interactions are significant additions to the learners’ semiotic budgets.

In this study, verbal indicators for affective dimensions were categorized into three groups: a) facilitating the communication with the teacher and peers, b) making jokes, and c) encouraging peers’ participation. In total, Ayla displayed 98 while Leyla displayed 5 verbal indicators for these categories (see Table 7). What these numbers possibly suggest is that Ayla’s affective affordances were more enriched than Leyla’s.

Extracts (28) and (29) below exemplify how Leyla and Ayla manifested affective factors in their interactions with the teacher.

The context of these interactions involved teaching adverbs of frequency. I listed the adverbs starting from the most frequent to the least frequent. I asked students’ help for an adverb that might mean “happening more often than sometimes” because I couldn’t think of an adverb myself. Then, Leyla surprisingly made a joke in line (3) since no one could come up with anything.

Extract 28.

1. Cagri: Bazenden daha sik olana ne diyebiliriz? [What can we say for something happening more often than sometimes?]
2. Oner: Bazenden daha sık (thinking aloud)? [More often than sometimes?]

3. Leyla: Aynen öyle deriz: bazenden daha sık (everybody laughs). [We would say exactly that: more often than sometimes].

In this context, Leyla not only added an affective dimension to her interaction with me, but also contributed to the supportive, caring atmosphere of the class.

Next Elif asked in what form we use the verb after “regret.” I answered her question by giving an example. Then, I tried to remember the word “gerund.” Seeing that I was having a hard time remembering, Ayla facilitated my communication with the class by supplying the word I was searching for in line (5).

Extract 29.
1. Elif: Regrettten sonra nasıl kullanacağız? [How are we gonna use (the verb) after regret?]
2. Cagri: I don’t regret coming.
3. Elif: Hah! Coming! [Right! Coming!]
5. Ayla: ‘Gerund’ geliyor [It takes ‘gerund’].

Facilitating communication with the teacher or peers entails being attentive and fully engaged in class. Otherwise, a learner would miss the non-verbal clues that signify the teacher’s or peers’ mild distress during an interaction.

Table 7 indicates that Leyla did not use any verbal indicators for “facilitating the communication with the teacher and peers” and “encouraging peers.” The reason that she failed to display any facilitative or encouraging verbal acts is beyond the scope of this
study; that would require a study that examines these interactions from an activity theory perspective. Observation of Leyla’s types and occurrences of interactions in class, however, reveal that she engaged in so few interactions at all, that it follows that she employed far fewer affective factors than Ayla.

According to Table 12 in Appendix I, 68 of Ayla’s facilitating verbal acts occurred between her and the teacher, while only 9 occurred between her and her peers. The occurrences of facilitating the communication with peers’ may in fact be higher, since there were many pair and group activities, yet not all of the learners’ interactions at those activities were audible in the videos. Thus, these occurrences mostly reflect interactions that took place during whole class activities. Data also show that Ayla displayed 5 verbal indicators to encourage her peers. Extract (30) below depicts one of these.

The context of this extract is an activity in which students listened to a song by Leonard Cohen, “Dance Me to the End of Love.” I first distributed the lyrics of the song which I had cut into separate lines and mixed up in advance. Then students had to put the lyrics in order while listening to the song. The first student who arranged them according to the right order would be the winner. One student in the class happened to be a music instructor at the university. Ayla said to him:

*Extract 30.*

Ayla: Ali, senden performans bekliyoruz. [Ali, we are expecting a performance from you (meaning, we are expecting you to do well in this activity)].
Through this verbal indicator, Ayla added an affective dimension to her communication with a peer. This verbal act made most students laugh right before we started the activity, which contributed to the meaning-making process.

In this section, I have proposed that teacher-learner relationships be complemented by emotional content, in addition to the inter-mental efforts the parties expend during the joint problem-solving processes. This data shows that the learner with a higher language learning potential invested more in emotionally supportive teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions compared to the learner with a lower language learning potential, who invested little or nothing in her semiotic budget (van Lier, 2000).

*Figure 13. Self-regulating attention*

**Learner Reciprocity, Theme 5: Self-regulating Attention (Figure 13)**

In the literature on second language learning, the term *attention* is usually associated with cognitive behaviors such as “noticing” (Schmidt, 2001). Gass, Svetics, and Lemelin (2003) claim that “What is generally agreed upon in the field of SLA is that attention is important in accounting for the ways that learners sort through the large amounts of sometimes incoherent and incomprehensible data to which they are exposed” (p. 498). That is, language learners selectively determine what “input” is going to go to their brains. In social psychology, attention “has been shown to be essential to volition and self-control performance in that [it] is used to control details of a person’s awareness” (Shmueli, 2006, p. 5). In this study, though, attention is used to describe the
state of showing interest in and being attentive to what is going on in the class in general in contrast to the salient understanding of attention in the field of SLA. Self-regulating attention, thus, refers to controlling one’s attention in order to remain engaged throughout the class.

Among the categories that are related to self-regulating attention are sidetracking, contributing to a sidetracked conversation, thinking aloud, and negotiating with a peer on a sidetracked topic. Of these categories, sidetracking, contributing to a sidetracked conversation, and negotiating with a peer on a sidetracked topic negatively influence the learner’s self-regulating attention, while thinking aloud facilitates self-regulation. As shown in Table 7, Ayla displayed 18 positive, 57 negative verbal indicators whereas Leyla displayed no positive indicators, and 15 negative verbal indicators. I also discuss a category of learner agency, repeating words or phrases on one’s own initiative, in this section due to its relevancy to private speech\(^\text{15}\) (Lantolf, 2003). According to Table 7, Ayla “repeated on her own initiative” 36 times while Leyla did not employ this type of verbal indicator at all. All categories considered, Ayla’s number of positive verbal indicators increased to 54 while Leyla’s remained at zero. It is important to clarify that these numbers indicate the occurrences of verbal indicators, not occurrences of categories. That is, the fact that Ayla contributed to a sidetracked conversation 48 times does not mean that she displayed these verbal indicators in 48 different conversations. For example, throughout the class time, she might have participated in 6 sidetracked conversations, each consisting of 8 consecutive verbal indicators.

\(^{15}\) Private speech is one of the theoretical constructs in SCT. It refers to “audible speech to oneself” (Lantolf, 2003, p. 351).
As I have also explained in the data catalog in Appendix I (see R5.1), sidetracking refers to diverting the teacher’s and classmates’ attention away from the shared activity to a less relevant or irrelevant subject by initiating a conversation, by asking a question, or by sharing a personal experience. In total, Ayla employed 57 negative verbal indicators for sidetracking (9 times) and contributing to a sidetracked conversation (48 times). At first glance, Ayla’s high number of verbal indicators for these categories might seem paradoxical for her positive image as a learner with greater language learning potential. After all, sidetracking refers to shifting one’s (or a group’s) attention to an irrelevant topic. I argue, however, that Ayla’s majority of initiations were not complete digressions from the shared activity. To put it differently, Ayla’s sidetracked questions or conversations were rich in content and created affordances (van Lier, 2000) related to the topic under discussion. For example, in extract (31), Ayla provides etymological information for the verb “decide.”

The context for this extract was a reading activity outside the textbook. There was a follow-up vocabulary activity about the various forms (i.e., verb, noun, and adjective) of lexical items selected from the passage. After we discussed the various forms of “decide,” Ayla began to share etymological information about the verb:

*Extract 31.*

1. Ayla: Levenman’ın kitabında çevirmen şey diye not düşmuştur, ‘homicide’ Suarez, adam öldürmek İşte intihar etmek gibi hani karar verirken seçeneklerden bir tanesini seçersiniz, diğerlerini öldürürseniz, İşte o mantıksa kokunun öldürmeye dayandığını not olarak düşmuştur çevirci. [In Levenman’s book, the translator noted that, like in
homicide, suicide, while deciding, you choose one of the options and kill the others, by that reasoning, the root of ‘decide’ is based on killing, the translator noted.

2. Cagri: Hmm. Neyin? [Hmm. Of what (meaning the root of what)?]

3. Ayla: Decision’in…Homicide, suicide…yani orda öldürmek var ya. [Of decision. Homicide, suicide, that is, there is killing there, right.]


5. Ayla: Yani karar vermek neden zordur çünkü bir tane..Yani on kişiyle evlenmezsiniz; bir kişiyle evlenmek zorunulur [That is to say, to make a decision is difficult because only one...Namely, you don’t get married to ten people; you have to get married to one person].

6. Cagri: Decide’da yani, bir şeyi diğerlerinden ayırıp bir şeye karar veriyorsun. Olabilir, Latince’den falan…[So, in decide, you separate one thing from the others and decide on that one. It is possible, from Latin or something…]

7. Ayla: Cunku seçim yapmak zorunulur, bir şeyе karar veriyorsunuz. [Because you have to make a choice, you decide on one thing.]

8. Cagri: Olabilir…cünkü homicide’lar in sonu falan da cide’la bitiyor ya. [It could be true…because homicide and suicide end with ‘cide’, right (writing on the board).]

9. Ayla: Herhalde çevirmen dikkatli bir çevirmendi ya da Leverman’in kendi notu da olabilir. [I guess the translator was meticulous or it could be Leverman’s own note as well.]
Here, even though Ayla digressed from the planned activity, she shared relevant, additional information. That Ayla’s sidetracked conversations were not complete digressions was something I observed early in the study, and noted in the researcher journal on November 10, 2009; however, at that time I did not yet know that these verbal indicators could be categorized as sidetracking.

Another example of Ayla’s informative sidetracking is shown below in extract (32). In this class, we were discussing a reading passage about decision-making styles (see Figure 14 below). By coincidence, Ayla’s dissertation topic was on this very topic. Ayla opened a sidetracked conversation as well as contributed to it while other students worked individually to write dialogues for the following role-play activity.

Extract 32.

1. Ayla: Benim doktora tez konumdu karar verme stilleri. [‘Decision-making styles’ was my dissertation topic.]

2. Cagri: O konu aslinda çok ilginç bir konu. [That topic is, in fact, a very interesting one.]


[Absolutely an interesting topic. Spontaneous decision-making, rational decision-making, intuitive decision-making styles. Dependent.]
As Figure 14 illustrates, the reading text does not provide types of decision-making styles; it just gives information about how people make decisions. In that sense, Ayla’s sharing of types of decision-making styles (spontaneous, rational, intuitive, etc.) added a new dimension to the reading activity because, later on, we read each person’s entry and tried to match the decision-making styles with what they said. Thus Ayla’s sidetracking created “yet more tools and new ways of learning through collaborative activity with other users of the target second language” (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p. 200). Both of the examples I have provided for Ayla are related to the verb “decide” and decision-making styles. She probably opened up these conversations since they were related to her area of expertise. I do not mean to suggest that a language learner with higher language learning potential has to be knowledgeable in certain subjects. What I
understand is that Ayla’s sidetracking is not a result of boredom or inattention, in which case her intention would be to divert the teacher’s and classmates’ attention to other, irrelevant, topics. There were other instances as well in which she sidetracked or contributed to sidetracked conversations about topics outside her area of expertise. Extract (33) below demonstrates such an occurrence.

The context for extract (33) was a discussion about taxi cabs and especially the famous black cabs in London. Oner opened a sidetracked conversation about bicycle taxis in the U.S. Then, several other students began to contribute to this sidetracked conversation.

*Extract 33.*

1. Oner: Bir de hocam bisikletli taksiler vardi sanki. Hani böyle adam geçiyormus one, o Amerikadaydi değil mi? [Also, *hodjam*, I think there are those bicycle taxis. Like a guy sits in the front, it was in the U.S., right?]

2. Cagri: Var, o Work and Travel’la gelenler çalışiyor onlarda. Bisiklet; arkasında bir veya iki kişilik falan oturcek yerler var. [Yes, those guys who come via Work & Travel use them. (Explaining toward others) It’s a bicycle; there is a seat for one or two people in the back.]

3. Pelin: Ben televizyon’da gördüm, çok böyle fakir bir ülkede de vardı onlardan. [I saw it on TV; a very poor country has those as well (bicycle taxis).]

4. Cagri: Hindistan’da da var galiba onlar. [I think you can find them in India, too.]

5. Ayla: Hani Kordon’da bizim at arabaları vardır ya. [Like our horse-drawn carriages in Kordon (a broad seafront promenade in Izmir, Turkey).]
6. Cagri: Hani Central Park var ya New York’da, orda zevk icin, hani bir yerden bir yere goturmekten çok, parkin icinde mesela yurumek istemiyorsun çok, hem zevk icin olabilir hem de...faytonlar falan da var orda gerçki de.[You know, Central Park in New York City, you can find those bicycle taxis there, too. But they are used for pleasure more than for transportation. There are horse-drawn carriages there, too.]

7. Elif: Fayton var mı? [Are there horse-drawn carriages?]

8. Oner: Fayton da var? [There are horse-drawn carriages as well?]

9. Cagri: Hi-hi, var. Türkler falan çalıtırıyor zaten onlarda genelde [Yeah, there are. Usually Turks and such people work using those bicycle taxis (several students laugh).]

(...)

10. Ayla: Amerikalilar o zaman Türklerle bir öğrenci olarak bir de o tur islerde çalışanlar olarak mı karsılasyorlar? [So, do Americans meet two types of Turkish people, one, students, and two, Turks who work in those types of jobs?]

11. Cagri: Evet. [Yeah.]

12. Ayla: Hangi işlerde daha çok çalışiyor Türkler ki? [In what type of jobs do Turkish people work, then?]

In lines (10) and (12), Ayla tries to elicit cultural information about the country in which the target language is used. While contributing to a sidetracked conversation, she also creates affordances (i.e., knowledge about the target culture) for the classroom community rather than engaging in general conversation.
In her dissertation study, Shmueli (2006) concluded that “the focus of others’ attention can influence the focus of an individual’s attention,” which she calls “contagious attention” (p. 30). What is inferred from this conclusion is that the learners’ regulatory behaviors and attitudes for attention affect other learners’ behaviors in the class. This finding strongly relates to the third feature in van Lier’s three “core features of agency” (2008, p. 172), which are:

1. Agency involves initiative or self-regulation by the learner (or group).
2. Agency is interdependent, that is, it mediates and is mediated by the sociocultural context.
3. Agency includes an awareness of the responsibility for one’s own actions *vis-à-vis* the environment, including affected others.

Some of my participant observations of Ayla are related to this third feature as well. For instance, in extract (34), Elvan asks Ayla about an irrelevant subject while I am talking to the students:

*Extract 34.*

**Elvan:** Arzı Hocam, sizin o dedikleriniz Haticeler değil mi? [Arzu Hodjam, those people you talked about are Hatice and her friends, right?]

**Ayla:** *Sonra konuşalım mı?* [Shall we talk later?]

By suggesting that they talk later, Ayla kindly abbreviates her classmate’s distracting comment, especially since the teacher is engaged in a conversation with the whole class. Through such behaviors, Ayla reveals “awareness of the responsibility for one’s own actions *vis-à-vis* the environment, including affected others” (van Lier, 2008, p. 172). Ayla confirmed this awareness in our second interview as well. She said:
I am sensitive about body language. It is not just in your class; I always try to be attentive in classes. **Because I feel uncomfortable when people talk to each other during class or when the person sitting next to me tries to talk to me.** I feel uneasy whether the teacher notices or not. **And I think it affects motivation adversely, too.** - Ayla

When I asked Ayla in our third interview whether she self-regulates her attention or not, her reply was as follows:

There have been times when I had difficulty focusing because I was tired. However, I never left this class with negative feelings. **Personally, what I often do to focus my attention is to dive into the class and immerse myself in the activities, because if you do that, tiredness, in a way, goes away.** - Ayla

In the same interview, she further commented about her attentiveness in classes:

**I believe that attentiveness leads to better learning.** Perhaps what I am listening to [in class] isn’t for the first time, but it is definitely helpful to go over material again and to learn new expressions. Sometimes one realizes that s/he lacks knowledge in a subject s/he thinks s/he knows the best. - Ayla

These comments show that Ayla tries to regulate her attention purposefully as a matter of respect (both for self and others) and because she believes it is a significant factor in becoming a more efficient learner.

Thinking aloud has been the subject of numerous studies in the field of SLA. Ohta (2001) conducted longitudinal case studies of seven adult second language learners of Japanese in two different classroom settings. She found that these learners were engaged
in three major types of private speech: repetition, vicarious responses, and manipulation. According to Ohta, “The most common form was repetition where the learners privately repeated the utterances of the teacher or of the other students. This was common practice with newly introduced lexical items or with sentences that were the focus of class attention” (Ohta, 2001, as cited in Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p. 204). Other notions associated with thinking aloud are “languaging” (Swain & Deters, 2007), and “task engagement” (Platt & Brooks, 2002). Additionally, McCafferty (1994) conducted research in which he compared the use of private speech by learners of lesser or greater proficiency. He concluded that pre-intermediate learners employed almost twice as many private speech forms as the advanced learners. What is common to all of these studies is that thinking aloud and repeating to oneself are considered essential ways to regulate one’s cognitive processes when s/he is faced with complex or challenging tasks. Furthermore, Ohta (2001) argued that repeating new language items aloud to oneself assists learners with phonological control over the items.

In the current study, the learner who showed greater language learning potential (Ayla) displayed 36 verbal indicators for repeating to oneself and 18 verbal indicators for thinking aloud. On the other hand, the learner who revealed a less developed language learning potential displayed zero verbal indicators for both categories. Extract (35) presents an example of Ayla’s repetition to herself, and extract (36) illustrates a situation in which she manifested thinking aloud.

The context for extract (35) is our first class, in which we practiced spelling. In order to model a dialogue in which two interlocutors ask each other questions such as “Hi, what’s your name? How do you spell your family name?” I spelled my last name:
Extract 35.


When Ayla heared that I used the word “dash” between my two last names, she repeated it to herself several times: “dash, dash, dash.” Here Ayla was probably trying to have phonological control (Ohta, 2001) over a newly introduced lexical item.

In the next extract, Ayla was about to ask me something (as shown in the video) but she changed her mind and said:

Extract 36.

Ayla: Haa, tamaaam. [A-ha, OK].

Here, Ayla must have found the answer on her own since she decides not to ask me the question. This behavior, which occurs within seconds, is a reflection of her intrapersonal communication, in other words, her thinking aloud process. According to the findings of numerous studies mentioned above, learners produce more repetitions and private speech when they are less proficient (thus, when they struggle more). Similarly, the native speakers in Frawley and Lantolf’s (1985) study were not engaged in private speech at all when narrating a story depicted in 6 frames since they used their native language and were not faced with a mental challenge while narrating the story. However, the ESL learners in the study made use of various private speech forms, what Mitchell and Myles (2004) call “meta-comments” (p. 202) such as “What do I see? You want me to say what they are doing?” These unconscious strategies of repeating or thinking aloud in class allows the teacher to see where the learner stands and constitute one of many ways to gauge a learner’s ZPD.
As I mentioned earlier, Leyla, the learner who portrayed less developed language learning potential, displayed no verbal indicators for either repeating or thinking aloud. What is interesting about this finding is that she produced no private speech forms even though she was not proficient in English. This may be because she preferred not to put herself in situations where she had to struggle with a highly demanding cognitive task. Otherwise, she would have applied private speech as most of the less proficient learners did in the above studies. This must remain a speculation, however, since this study does not investigate learner intentionality behind verbal indicators.

In the interviews, Leyla revealed to me that she grappled with regulating her attention in class, which is in accordance with her production of no private speech forms. Consider the extract from Leyla’s second interview on December 18, 2009:

When I realize that my attention has begun to wander, I try to re-focus on you one way or another. **There are days when I don’t miss anything in class but there are also days I keep looking at my watch and asking myself: “Is this class going to take forever.” But this is personal. If I am not distracted, I understand 80 or 90% of the activity. Sometimes I am aware that you are explaining something but I am also aware that I am missing it (…) I think I have an attention problem in general.** For example, you give the meaning of a word, I understand it at that moment but while I am taking notes for something else, its meaning is gone; that’s too bad. This is not just in English; in every class there are activities going on but **I can’t really focus on every single activity if I am doing something else at that moment.** -Leyla
Leyla clearly perceives her ability to regulate her attention as problematic. What is paradoxical about her occasional boredom is that this class was not required; all of the students participated voluntarily. It is interesting that she would make the effort to come to class but that she does not fully benefit from the instructions or collaborative activities all the time. This observation accords with the claim by Norton Pierce (1995) that language learners might engage in complex, ambivalent activities while constructing their identities as a learner. They can invest in different affordances and gain different benefits from these affordances, which eventually contribute to their language learning process.

As might happen in any classroom setting, learners in a language classroom can be creative in finding ways to divert their attention to other things when they are bored or not fully engaged. In this study, learners distracted their attention (as well the teacher’s and classmates’) by sidetracking, contributing to sidetracked conversations, and negotiating with a peer on a sidetracked topic. On the other hand, they employed positive strategies such as thinking aloud to regulate their attention. The verbal indicators of the learner with a greater language learning potential both qualitatively and quantitatively differed from those of the learner with a lower potential with regards to self-regulating attention.

The findings of this study lend support to the emergence of another notable characteristic of learner reciprocity, reacting to challenge, which is the topic of next section.
Reacting to challenge encompasses verbal indicators through which learners reflect attitudes about a challenging task. In this study, the learners reacted to challenge in two ways: (a) positively, and (b) negatively. In some situations, the learner spent the required mental effort to accomplish the task (reacting to challenge positively) while in other situations the learner preferred to withdraw from the task (reacting to challenge negatively). In total, 10 instances of reacting to challenge were recorded (see Table 7). Six were positive reactions by Ayla, and four were negative reactions by Leyla. Leyla engaged in no positive reactions to challenge, and Ayla engaged in no negative reactions.

In the Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) Rating Scale developed by Lidz (1991) based on Feuerstein’s theory and research, parent-child, teacher-child, and examiner-child interactions with preschool children are measured *vis-à-vis* 13 subscales, one of which is the “reciprocity of child” (see Appendix). This subscale helps to determine the “receptivity of the child to the meditational intentions of the adult” as well as child’s “willingness to “receive” or cooperate” (Lidz, 1991, p. 110, quotation marks in original) through four Likert items:

- **0** highly resistant; mediation cannot effectively proceed
- **1** minimally receptive; frequent resistance – Leyla
Based on recorded instances of their reactions to learning challenges, Leyla can be considered as “minimally receptive” and Ayla as “consistently receptive and cooperative.” In most classes, Leyla carried out my instructions and therefore was “obedient” (van Lier, 2008); however, she showed frequent resistance as well. Extracts (37) and (38) exemplify how she manifested negative reactions to challenge. The first instance occurred on December 1, and the second on December 30, 2009. This chronology is important because it reveals Leyla’s consistency in her negative reactions to challenge. In other words, it shows that Leyla remained resistant even on the last day of class.

The context for extract (37) is a discussion about three follow-up speaking questions at the end of a reading activity. In order not to “deprive some students of the opportunity to practice the target language” (Tsui, 1996, p.159), I asked all students to answer the questions in English by taking turns. After two students answered, it was Leyla’s turn to speak. She directly asked me if we could skip her but I kindly but firmly turned her request down. Then, she began talking:

Extract 37.

1. Leyla:  **Hocam beni geçsek?** [Hodjam, can we skip me?]
2. Cagri:  Geçmiyoruz. [We are not skipping you (with a smile).]
3. Leyla:  I hope...work in big hospital.
4. Cagri:  Hi-hi. [Uh-huh.]
5. Leyla:  For example, university hospital.
6. Cagri: Hi-hi. [Uh-huh.] How will you prepare for that? What are you going to do?

7. Leyla: I am studying KPSS.¹⁶ (Laughing, since she used Turkish phonetics for this acronym. I gestured that it was OK.)

8. Cagri: How about the other questions?

9. Leyla: I think universities should be mainly to prepare people for jobs.

10. Cagri: Not for general learning. The last question?

11. Oner: (interrupting) Hocam o cumleyi tam anlayamadım, ne demek yani? ‘Insanları yetistirmeye dayalı mı yoksa genel çalışma mı’ diyor?

[Hodjam, I couldn’t understand that sentence exactly. What does it say there? Does it say “Is it based on cultivating people or is it a general study?”]

Four minutes later, I came back to Leyla again, and ask:

12. Cagri: 3. soruyu cevaplams miydik? Ben unutmadım. [Have we answered the third question? I haven’t forgotten (both Leyla and Cagri laughing).] What is more important for you, education, experience or personality?

13. Leyla: I think personality because...one person is not talking...(switching to Turkish) iyi bir iletisim kuramıyorsa [if s/he cannot communicate well.]

14. Cagri: If somebody is not good at effective communication, etkili iletisim kuramıyorsa...[if (somebody) is not good at effective communication.]

¹⁶ KPSS stands for another national exam in Turkey, Kamu Personeli Secme Sinavi (Public Personnel Selection Exam).
After this last interaction, Leyla uses body language to convey that she really wants to end her turn in the activity. I decide not to push her further so as not to undermine her self-esteem and move on to the next student.

In the above situation, Leyla starts talking only at the teacher’s insistence. Initially, she is good at expressing her opinions even in simple sentences, but when I return to her, she makes it explicit using non-verbal clues that she doesn’t want to continue to talk, and I oblige her. In the third interview (see Appendix E), I asked Leyla about her feelings in such situations (e.g., whether she feels uneasy in class because of my occasional impositions); her response was surprisingly positive:

**I am not very active in class.** I know that it is a disadvantage. If you hadn’t urged me to speak up in that activity the other day, I wouldn’t have spoken. I had an answer in my mind, but…for example, the fact that I didn’t construct that sentence publicly was a disadvantage. Yet, I still tried to avoid it at that moment. **I definitely know that it is a disadvantage for me, but I still try to find ways to stay away from speaking.** I try not to make eye contact with you. I do that really. I hope to get by without being unnoticed. –Leyla

Then, I asked her again whether this was related to shyness, anxiety or just merely “not feeling like talking.” She elaborated:

No, it is not at all about “not feeling like it.” **I think, “I am going to construct a sentence in front of everybody, what if I make a mistake?”** something like that. I experience a dilemma: Should I say it or not? Most of the time, it is like 50-50. For example, when

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17 She refers to another activity, not the one in extract (37).
you ask if anyone has an answer, I start thinking about whether I should say it or not. **When you specifically call on me, I speak up, otherwise I don’t.** —Leyla

On another occasion, when it is Leyla’s turn to speak, she asked:

*Extract 38.*

1. Leyla:  *Hocam, ben yapmasam?* [*Hodjam, let me not do it?]*

Elif and Ayla try to encourage her:

2. Elif:  *Konuşursun.* [*You can speak.*]

3. Leyla:  *Konuşana kadar çok zaman geçiyor.* [*It takes me a long time to speak.*]

4. Ayla:  *Ya Leyla, ilk geldiğimde senden farklı degildim, öyle düşün.* [*Come on Leyla, I wasn’t any different than you when I first started (the class), think like that.*]

5. Leyla:  *Yok ya, konuşmayayım.* [*No, no, please, I don’t want to speak.*]

Here Leyla simply refuses to talk even though it is her turn in the activity. It is important to articulate that this was our last class; while other students performed surprisingly well in English, Leyla still put up resistance. It appears that Leyla experienced foreign language classroom anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986); however, notwithstanding the underlying reasons behind her anxiety, the outcome is that she cannot benefit from the plentiful affordances that are available to her in the foreign language classroom. Thus, her language learning potential is adversely affected by her avoidance and reticence (Tsui, 1996) because, as Mitchell and Myles stated, “successful learning involves a shift from collaborative inter-mental activity to autonomous intra-mental activity” (2004, p. 195). By avoiding the use of “mediational means” (Wertsch et
al., 1993, p. 352), Leyla not only misses the opportunity to practice the target language but also deprives the teacher of the opportunity to gauge her readiness for the next level of performance. Indeed, during the entire course of the study, I had almost no way of knowing what Leyla knew and to what extent she was capable of doing something with scaffolding.

Scaffolding is one of the important tenets of the sociocultural theory. According to Donato (1994, p. 41), “scaffolded performance is a dialogically constituted interpsychological mechanism that promotes the novice’s internalization of knowledge co-constructed in shared activity.” That is, the teacher and learners work collaboratively for further cognitive development. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) assert that an ideal scaffolding process requires the teacher to:

a) Engage the learner in the task
b) Tailor the task according to the learner’s abilities
c) Maintain the attention of the learner (as well as “making it worthwhile for the learner to risk a next step” (Wood et al., 1976, p. 98)
d) Point to what is critical and make the learner see the difference between his/her performance and the ideal performance
e) Encourage the learner; make the task less stressful
f) Model the ideal performance for the learner

Contemplating each of these ideal behaviors, it is clear that none can be achieved by the teacher’s ex parte endeavors. Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (Williams & Burden, 1997 as cited in van Lier, 2008) is essential on the learners’ part. To what extent can a teacher tailor the instruction to the learner’s needs, if the learner doesn’t cooperate
with the teacher to reveal where s/he stands in terms of his/her abilities? The teacher’s attempts can only bear fruit as long as the learner demonstrates WTC in language learning.

In the following extract (39), Ayla tries to express her opinion with respect to parenthood and the parents’ readiness to accept that their children become grown-ups. Whenever she hesitates, she switches to Turkish to ask for confirmation. She first uses the word “person” in the meaning of ‘individual” but eventually makes her own determination that “grow up” conveys her message better.

*Extract 39.*

1. Ayla: Being mother and being father, yani anne baba olmak anlamında kullanılır mı? [so, are they used to mean ‘anne baba olmak’?]
2. Cagri: Hi-hi [yeah], being parents.
3. Ayla: ...is difficult, are difficult...but they accept...your chıldrine...their children...another person. Çok güzel anlattım! [I explained perfectly! (laughing and making fun of herself with this sarcastic comment).]
(Then, telling what she wanted to say in Turkish) Anne baba olmak zor ama çocuklarının büyüdüğunu belki kabul etmeleri gerekiyor, o daha güzel oldu. [Being parents is difficult but maybe they should accept that their children grow up, this one is better (she probably refers here to ‘their children grow up’ being preferable to ‘they become another individual’).]
4. Cagri: Being parents is difficult but...kabul etmeleri lazim? [they should accept]?
5. Melis: They have to...
6. Ayla: They, ‘they’ kullanılır? [‘they’ is used]? 

7. Cagri: Hi-hi. [Uh-huh.]

8. Ayla: They should be accept their children grows up...their children grow up. 

9. Cagri: Hi-hi [Yeah], they should accept that their children grow up. Oldu. [Good.]

10. Ayla: (Using body language for “I did it”) Ve çok güzel bir duygusu bu. [And this is a great feeling.]

In this interaction, Ayla did considerable linguistic work to explain her opinions about parenthood, which meant that she positively reacted to challenge by trying to construct a sentence in English (in line 8). She could have asked me as well for the complete sentence; however, she wanted to construct it on her own by asking for confirmation when needed. Her persistence allowed me the opportunity to assess several things at once. For example, I could see her vocabulary range and the fact that she could evaluate which lexical item conveyed her message better. Second, I could observe how close she is to independent performance as a language learner. Fundamental to this form of reciprocity is that the learner (Ayla) was “striving to perform more autonomously and believe[d] that [she] developed sufficiently that [she] can self-regulate” (Poehner, 2008, p. 50). As Mitchell and Myles noted (2004, p. 211), “moving towards more independent and self-regulated performance” signifies “positive evidence of learning.”

Returning to Leyla’s negative reactions to challenge, there is an interesting story. While she avoided speaking in class, she took her time and tried to do her best in the first interview when asked to narrate the stories in the New York State’s Placement Test for
English as a Second Language Adult Students. This suggests that she reacts to challenge positively in the absence of peer pressure. This assumption is also confirmed by her sentence in line (3) in extract (36) (i.e., It takes me a long time to speak) and by her sincere explanations in the third interview (e.g., I think, “I am going to construct a sentence in front of everybody, what if I make a mistake?”).

The findings pertaining to reaction to challenge reveal that the learner whose language learning potential is more developed showed resistance when faced with challenging tasks, whereas the learner who demonstrates less developed language learning potential withdrew from such tasks. Moreover, being consistently receptive and cooperative by reacting to challenge positively appears to be a significant factor in increased language learning potential.

I now turn to the last theme to be discussed with regard to learner reciprocity: seeking opportunities for improvement.

Figure 16. Seeking opportunities for improvement

Learner Reciprocity, Theme 7: Seeking Opportunities for Improvement (Figure 16)

The theme of seeking opportunities for improvement is manifested through verbal indicators that show a learner actively searching for ways of extending learning beyond the classroom. While Ayla sought such opportunities 6 times over the duration of the course, Leyla sought none.
Drawing on Gibson’s (1979, as cited in van Lier, 2000) pioneering work, van Lier (2000) developed his ecological perspective on language learning, which I have already mentioned *vis-à-vis* affective dimensions. According to this perspective, at the center of language learning lies a concept called *affordance*, which is defined as “a particular property of the environment that is relevant–for good or for ill–to an active, perceiving organism in that environment” (van Lier, 2000, p. 252). It follows, then, that language develops as learners make use of available opportunities in their environment, and ideally, as they create them as well. Van Lier also warns the readers that an affordance does not necessarily bring about further action; it is just there for the learner to use it or not. In this study, seeking opportunities for improvement perfectly captures what van Lier means by “an affordance affords further action but does not cause or trigger it” (2000, p. 252, parentheses removed). Learners seek opportunities (or affordances) but the fact that they seek them does not guarantee that they actually use them. Based on this discussion, I consider seeking opportunities for improvement as the first step, which can lead to extending experience beyond *now*, the third category of the second element in this study (i.e., transcendence).

Among the six opportunities Ayla sought for improvement were: requesting copies of the audio CDs I used in class; requesting permission to make copies of the Seinfeld DVDs; asking for additional homework; and requesting scripts projected on the board for listening dialogues. When Ayla used verbal indicators to seek opportunities for improvement, she explicitly said she wanted materials for further practice. Furthermore, these were the verbal indicators Ayla produced in class only. During our interviews, she touched on other affordances, which are discussed in relation to transcendence below.
As for Leyla, she carried out the minimum number of classroom tasks in accordance with my instructions; and there were no instances of her seeking opportunities for improvement. Yet, she exhibited an interesting, non-verbal behavior. Leyla was the only student who brought to class a small bilingual dictionary (albeit Ayla occasionally used her laptop for online dictionaries). Regarding this behavior, it is plausible to claim that Leyla prefers object-regulation to other-regulation (Vygotsky, 1987). That is, she prefers using the dictionary to the teacher for her meditational needs with respect to vocabulary knowledge. Again, the reasons for Leyla’s behavior is beyond the scope of this study, since I am not investigating learner intentions. Nevertheless, I consider this an interesting behavior in terms of learners availing themselves of affordances.

**Extended discussion on Ayla and Leyla.** When one compares the findings of the current study and those of Gillette’s (1994), there are striking similarities between the effective and ineffective language learners in the Gillette study and the two participant case studies here, who are depicted as having language learning potentials at the opposite ends of the continuum. As mentioned before, Gillette conducted a longitudinal study to examine the individual characteristics of six language learners in a required French course. The majority of Gillette’s findings are shown in Table 10 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Effective Learners (EL)</th>
<th>Ineffective Learners (IL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>- view language learning as a means for personal growth</td>
<td>- view language learning as other-imposed requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- internally oriented</td>
<td>- externally oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- get personal satisfaction in learning a foreign language</td>
<td>report frustration and motivational difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach to Language Study</td>
<td>- more holistic and integrative</td>
<td>- more analytical and reductionist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- favor communicative activities in and out of class</td>
<td>- prefer formal tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Usage</td>
<td>- use guessing and inferencing and are more successful at it</td>
<td>- use dictionary very often when reading texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- engage in functional practice</td>
<td>- rely heavily on translation and rote learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Involvement</td>
<td>- usually do more than required</td>
<td>- try to ‘get by’ rather than ‘get better’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- show elaborate and intensive learning efforts</td>
<td>- do the minimum work to get a passing grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards Negative Experiences</td>
<td>- do not let negative experiences change their basic orientations</td>
<td>- their positive experiences do not change their predispositions for L2 learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Drawing mainly on Ayla and Leyla’s individual and focus group interview data, Ayla belongs to the effective learner group whereas Leyla belongs to the ineffective learner group. As Ayla revealed in all of her three individual interviews, she views learning English as a pursuit for personal growth; she is internally oriented, genuinely interested in learning in general, and finds personal satisfaction in learning English. For instance, in the first interview, she enthusiastically reported:
Learning new vocabulary items in English is almost like a hobby for me. I even like it more when people show admiration for my vocabulary knowledge; it gives me more motivation to learn new ones. –Ayla

Ayla also has a more holistic and integrative approach toward learning English, like the effective learners in the Gillette study. She thinks that language should be learned in its entirety with active and simultaneous involvement in all skills because they all relate to each other in some ways. It is important to note that Ayla adopts this approach despite the fact that she needs to get a sufficient score (65/100) from the ÜDS language exam in order to be promoted to associate professor. As for degree of involvement, Ayla was one of the few students in class who completed all of the homework assignments. She often requested additional writing assignments, as shown in example (2), section R1.12 in Appendix I. In contrast, Leyla is more externally oriented; she often articulated in the individual interviews that she was “obliged” to learn English, and there is “no escape” from it since getting a sufficient grade (50/100) in the ÜDS language exam is a requirement for obtaining graduate assistantships. Due to her goal orientation, Leyla is more interested in getting better at grammar, vocabulary, and reading. She does not use a monolingual dictionary, unlike Ayla, who has been using a monolingual dictionary since hazırlık. Leyla said that her teachers at hazırlık made students purchase a monolingual dictionary and suggested that they continue using it even after hazırlık ended, but she admitted that she rarely used it (personal communication, March 18, 2010). Furthermore, Leyla limits her language learning potential by targeting “getting a sufficient score from the ÜDS”
as her ultimate goal, which is corroborated by a statement in the third interview:

“I am not worried about speaking and listening; they wouldn’t constrain me (referring to the language exam).” Paradoxically, though, she acknowledged that language would be learned the best by speaking and using it all the time. In answer to one of my questions, she stated that “vocabulary, grammar, and reading” took priority over “listening, speaking, and writing” for her; however, she also added, “But without speaking English at all, I wouldn’t be able to do any of these.” When I asked Leyla whether she had future plans to improve her English, she said that she had already started to compile her notes and was going to study grammar by means of a supplementary book that prepares students for the ÜDS language exam. All in all, she did not demonstrate a holistic attitude about language learning because of her goal orientation. What these data suggest is that although Leyla explicitly recognizes the importance of social interaction in learning a language, she adopts a reductionist approach to learning English based on her external motive. The argument here is, then, that goal orientation, adopting a reductionist versus holistic approach to language learning, and the degree of involvement in language learning activities both in and out of classroom all affect one’s language learning potential, for better or for worse.

Finally, Leyla expressed a remarkably pessimistic view about herself as a language learner similar to the ineffective learners in the Gillette study. She attributed her failure to previous negative experiences and certain fixed characteristics she believed she didn’t possess. Some of Leyla’s negative utterances were:
Language learning requires aptitude; I don’t have that.

I feel intimidated in class.

I immediately and easily start thinking negatively: “Am I going to be able to do it”? And that affects my motivation negatively.

I don’t think I am an interested learner; English is sort of an obligation for me. I know that making it enjoyable is in my hands; I am also aware of that but…

It is important to “think fast” for language learners. I don’t think I “think fast.” Having a natural sense of musical pitch is also important.

After these questions, I realized that I am not very active in class.

The participants’ verbal indicators in this study were categorized into seven themes: learner agency; using the teacher or peers as a resource; responding to the teacher or peers; affective dimensions of interactions between the teacher and peers; self-regulating attention; reacting to challenge; and seeking opportunities for improvement. All of the themes have been found to have strong inextricable connections to language learning potential.

In this chapter so far, learner reciprocity has been discussed as the first major element of language learning potential. The second major element that emerged in this study regarding language learning potential was transcendence. The following section is devoted to this dimension.
Transcendence, Theme 1: Linking Current Learning and Past Learning (Figure 17)

As discussed by Feuerstein et al. (1979), Lidz (1991), and Poehner (2008), transcendence is one of the most important factors that render one’s learning long-lasting. In the second/foreign language context, the adult language learner who transcends his/her experience beyond immediate interactions avails him/herself of affordances by bridging his/her current learning with past learning, because only then can language learning become integrative and cumulative.

In this study, linking current learning with past learning encompasses verbal indicators that the learners used to make connections with their current learning and anything they learned or were introduced to in the past. Table 11 illustrates that Ayla provided 8 occurrences on this theme while Leyla provided none.

Table 11
Themes, Categories, and Occurrences for Transcendence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcendence</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Ayla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Linking current learning and past learning</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Relating current learning to other contexts</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Extending experience beyond “now”</td>
<td>N/A in class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17. Linking current learning with past learning
Case study participants in this study were not observably engaged in many verbal behaviors regarding linking current learning and past learning. One reason for this could be that focusing on learners’ verbal indicators may not have been the most appropriate method in order to observe transcendence. Furthermore, learners mentioned in the interviews that they

Extract (40) below was taken from a context in which we discussed unknown vocabulary items from a Seinfeld episode watched with English subtitles. One of the students asked about the phrasal verb “drop off” and I explained its meaning as well as providing several contexts in which it could be used. Then another student asked for confirmation regarding the usage of “drop off”:

*Extract 40.*

1. Elif: Eve bırakmak anlamında, mesela, ‘drop you off home’ mu diyeceğiz? [For ‘eve bırakmak’, do we say ‘drop you off home’?]

2. Ayla: Ben bugün bir pasaj okumıştim; orda ‘siz televizyon izlerken komsunuz damladi’ gibi bir şey diyodu. [I read a passage today; there it said something like ‘while you were watching TV, your neighbor dropped by’.]

3. Cagri: Drop by olabilir mi o? [Can it be ‘drop by’?]

4. Ayla: Olabilir. [Yes, it can be].

5. Cagri: ‘Drop by’ uğramak demek, ‘stop by’ ile ikisi aynı anlamda. [‘Drop by’ means to visit someone, ‘stop by’ and ‘drop by’ have the same meaning.]

6. Ayla: Ben onu ‘eve damladi’ falan gibi anlamıştım. [I thought that it meant ‘he popped in suddenly in your house’ or something like that.]
In line (2) above, Ayla is linking a newly introduced vocabulary item (i.e., “drop by”) with a past context in which the same vocabulary item was used. By explicitly sharing her transcendence with the teacher, Ayla creates an affordance for herself and the other students as well regarding the meaning and usage of “drop off.” She also lets the teacher realize that she does use inference, an effective L2 strategy, and assists the teacher to go one step further in understanding where she stands in inferring the meanings of vocabulary items from the context.

Relating current to past learning should also be discussed in relation to the integration of knowledge. The Gillette study (1994) concerning three effective and three ineffective L2 learners of French informed us that the ineffective language learners do not “link new information effectively to what they already know.” Thus, they “behave as if they had no internal representation of the target language at all and were forced constantly to start over, with the L1 as their only point of reference” (Gillette, 1994, p. 209).

One of the findings of Gillette (1994) was that learners attributed their inability to retain previously introduced lexical items to their “forgetfulness”; however, Gillette hypothesized that maybe this resulted from their “reluctance to integrate them into some meaningful context” (p. 209). Not surprisingly, Leyla, whose language learning potential is considered to be less developed, mentioned this exact phenomenon in our second interview in answer to my question of whether she linked her current learning with past learning: “I can’t say I do it a lot because I don’t remember whether I learned it before or not.”
In sum, drawing on Gillette’s findings and the findings of the present study, I argue that adopting an integrative approach towards learning language, hence, linking current with past learning helps learners to improve their language learning potentials.

The present study revealed another theme regarding transcendence: relating current learning to other contexts. In addition to linking what she has learned “now” with previous learning, the learner with more developed language learning potential in this study (Ayla) tried to imagine the newly introduced material in other contexts as well. This theme is further discussed in the following section.

Figure 18. Relating current learning to other contexts

Transcendence, Theme 2: Relating Current Learning to Other Contexts (Figure 18)

Drawing on Feuerstein and his colleagues’ research, Poehner (2007) stated that “The concept of transcendence (…) involves not only extending performance to other tasks but also creating new connections within a domain of study” (p. 332). In this study, relating current learning to other contexts involves verbal indicators that demonstrate the moments of making new connections between newly introduced language items and their appropriation (Wertsch, 1991) to other hypothetical contexts. As seen in Table 11, Ayla manifested 6 verbal indicators for this theme while Leyla manifested none. Extract (41) presents one of these six occurrences.

In the context for this extract, I was teaching how and in which situations one can use “I was wondering if….” Ayla comments on the use of this phrase:
Extract 41.

1. Ayla: Şikayet mektubumuzda da kullanabilir bir kalipmis. [It is a structure we could have used in our letter of complaint (see Figure 19 for Ayla’s letter of complaint).]

2. Cagri: Evet, orda da kullanabilirdiniz. [Yes, you could have used it there.]

3. Ayla: Benim kendi kuruluğum durumda böyle bir şey vardı. Ben ‘bize bir servis elemani gönderip gönderemiyoruz’ gibi bir şey kullanmıştım. [There was something like this in the situation I made up (referring to her letter of complaint). I used something like ‘I was wondering if you could send us a maintenance guy’].

4. Cagri: Bu çok güzel bir kalip aslında. Yazalım, bir sürü örnek yazalım. [This is a very good phrase, in fact. Let’s write, let’s write a lot of examples on the board].

Subsequent to my statement in line (4), Ayla stood up and got her letter of complaint from my desk, which she had submitted at the beginning of class as a homework assignment. She glanced through her letter of complaint to find the context in which she could have used the phrase, I was wondering. Then, she commented:

Ayla: Ben ‘hope’ kullanmışım. [Apparently, I used ‘hope’ (referring to her sentence, I hope you can advise me, in her letter of complaint regarding a treadmill she bought from an online store).]

Ayla thus created a new connection between her current learning and a novel situation (Summers, 2008). By engaging in this behavior, she let me see that she comprehended the usage of “I was wondering,” because she was able to use it
meaningfully in another context. Moreover, she contributed to the affordances in the environment, since after her comment, I shared her original sentence (“I hope you can advise me”) with the class, followed by modeling the usage of “I was wondering” in that context.

*Figure 19. Classroom artifact: Ayla’s letter of complaint in extract (41)*

Even though the participants did not produce a significant number of verbal indicators for relating their current learning to other contexts, they revealed in the interviews that they tried to “situate” (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989) newly introduced language items in other contexts but did not necessarily make these mental connections
public in class. That is to say, the learners might be relating their current learning to other contexts in their minds but they may not demonstrate it. For this reason, I draw a distinction between the two different forms of transcendence. If learners relate current learning to other hypothetical contexts in their minds, they are engaged in *intra-mental transcendence*. On the other hand, if they relate new learning to other contexts and make it public in class, they demonstrate *inter-mental transcendence*. For instance, when Ayla commented that “I was wondering if” was a structure they could have used in their letter of complaint in extract 41 above, she was engaged in inter-mental transcendence because the moment she made that comment, she included the teacher and others in the classroom setting in her transcendence. She could have also constructed that connection in her mind without sharing it with the teacher and the class. In this case, she would have been involved in intra-mental transcendence since her mental behavior did not result in a social interaction. In terms of SCT, engaging in inter-mental transcendence would benefit the teacher and the learners more, since it adds to their repertoire of affordances. Recall that van Lier viewed affordances as “meaningful ways of relating to the environment through perception-in-action” (van Lier, 2002, p. 147).

In our second interview, I asked Leyla whether she related what she learned “now” to other contexts. She replied “Yes, I do that a lot” without hesitation and added:

> For example, I imagine that “I can use this word when something like this happens or I can use it in so-and-so situation.” I do that all the time. -Leyla

I further asked Leyla if she exercises this as *inner speech* (Lantolf, 2003); she confirmed my assumption by saying “Absolutely.”
The themes I have discussed so far are related to how learners manifest their language learning potentials inside the classroom setting. However, learners sometimes engage in behaviors outside the classroom in order to practice what they have learned. By engaging in such behaviors they, in a sense, extend their learning beyond “now,” which is the next and last theme to be discussed with respect to transcendence.

Figure 20. Extending experience beyond ‘now’

Transcendence, Theme 3: Extending Experience beyond “Now” (Figure 20)

A handful of researchers in the sociocultural tradition point out that successfully co-constructing new language is not sufficient for learning. For the internalization of the language features, new language needs to be “re-used” (Donato, 1994). In the present study, “re-using” refers to extending experience beyond “now.” The hypothesis of this theme is that the more learners engage in such activities, the faster they will internalize and process the new language. Among my initial pre-study themes was “awareness to extend experience beyond ‘now’.” However, after analyzing the data, I concluded that awareness to extend experience beyond “now” is not sufficient for greater language learning potential. The language learner needs to take action to extend his/her experience beyond the immediacy of learning. For example, in all of her interviews, Leyla acknowledged that practicing English whenever possible was necessary to learn and retain English; however, she did not actualize it in real life. Thus, having “awareness to extend experience” and “actually extending experience” are distinct concepts. Besides,
once language learners carry out action to extend experience beyond “now,” sooner or later they will realize that there is more to transcend. This realization will happen as the goals of learners evolve.

For instance, when learners go abroad on exchange programs, they will find plenty of affordances to extend their learning (e.g., practicing the foreign/second language with more competent speakers of the target language). However, the fact that they experience the school culture in another country will set other goals, such as learning how to write academic papers in the foreign/second language. This time, learners will need to extend experience beyond “now” by engaging in activities that would hopefully improve their academic writing. Learners who wish to develop their potential would engage in, for instance, reading books in various genres in the target language. As they engage in reading fiction, magazines, newspapers, and the like, they would be more likely to transfer this experience to academic writing. In sum, learners with greater language learning potentials would immerse themselves in continuous engagement with the target language as their goals keep evolving. I consider every action in this engagement as an extension of experience beyond “now,” since the learners transcend whatever they have learned in artificial settings (e.g., classrooms) and actualize their affordances through engagement in authentic activities (i.e., “coherent, meaningful, and purposeful activities” Brown et al., 1989, p. 34). In this respect, transcendence is closely related to Brown et al.’s (1989) argument on making use of acquired tools in other situations. For Brown et al. (1989), learners may acquire tools (e.g., a new lexical item) but acquiring it does not denote that they can properly use it in another context. These authors further claim that learning occurs through building “an increasingly rich implicit
understanding” (ibid., 1989, p. 33) of the language concepts. This understanding is actualized on condition that learners continuously get engaged in authentic activities since “a concept (...) will continually evolve with each new occasion of use, because new situations, negotiations, and activities inevitably recast it in a new, more densely textured form. So a concept, like the meaning of a word, is always under construction” (ibid., p. 33). In this sense, the transcendent nature of activities signifies incessant meaning construction of newly acquired language items.

Brown et al. (1989) also draw attention to the interdependency of (a) activities, (b) concepts, and (c) culture, and claim that “Learning must involve all three”. They further explain, “Teaching methods often try to impart abstracted concepts as fixed, well-defined, independent entities that can be explored in prototypical examples and textbook exercises. But such exemplification cannot provide the important insights into either the culture or the authentic activities of members of that culture that learners need” (ibid., p. 33). For this reason, it is vital for language learners to go beyond the classroom instruction (i.e., extend their experience beyond “now”) in order to use the target language in situations where they can understand the target culture, and thus contribute to the continually evolving construction of language concepts.

Extending experience beyond “now” was the only category that did not emerge through verbal indicators as manifested during classes. It did emerge during the interviews as learners told me about their out-of-class activities. Recall that this study took place from October 12, 2009 to January 4, 2010. Until ten days later, on January 14, 2010, I had considered their engagement with these activities as a separate theme.

18 The classes ended on December 30, 2009; however, we had the focus group interview on January 4, 2010.
associated with language learning potential apart from reciprocity and transcendence. As recorded in the researcher journal entry for January 14, 2010, I suddenly realized that this category is a theme critical to transcendence. By engaging in these activities, learners were, in fact, extending their classroom experiences (represented by now in the label of this theme) to other novel situations.

I came up with an exciting, original thought today. Normally, I was worried about the number of occurrences about transcendence. I almost concluded that transcendence wasn’t something observable through verbal indicators in the classroom. But today it suddenly hit home that “engagement in out-of-class activities” was not another element of language learning potential as I have been thinking. I think what the case studies told me in the interviews is completely about extending their current experiences beyond “now” because they go and engage in an activity outside the class in order to transfer their learning to novel situations which require them to apply what they have learned so far to other situations. So, they transcend their learning by extending their experiences beyond “now.” –Researcher journal entry, January 14, 2010

Since the data source from which this theme has been drawn is the interviews rather than verbal indicators, there are no occurrences recorded for it. Thus, I present my analytical notes from Leyla and Ayla’s interview data below.

Leyla: When Leyla was at hazırlık, their teachers told them to watch the shows or movies on cnbc-e, a TV channel in Turkey, broadcasting in English. As instructed by their teachers, Leyla and her classmates used to cover the Turkish subtitles on the TV
with paper while watching this channel. However, Leyla did not continue to engage in this activity after the *hazırlık* year. Their teachers also told them to talk to the foreigners visiting the Great Mosque, one of the famous tourist attractions in Turkey, located in their hometown. Even though Leyla did not go and talk to the foreigners by her own initiative, some tourists came up to her and asked for information in English on few occasions. Apart from these limited experiences, she did not make use of this opportunity to interact with more competent learners of English.

As for using the Internet, Leyla said that she only uses it to do research for some course assignments (which are in Turkish). She does not listen to music in English. She does not have a foreign pal whom she can communicate in English. In short, she does not engage in extra activities to extend her experience beyond “now.”

**Ayla:** Since Ayla is an assistant professor in guidance and counseling, she is constantly engaged in reading articles and books written in English with regards to her field. She was a subscriber to Word Test, an online vocabulary teaching resource. She said she practiced and learned new vocabulary items by means of this resource. Other than that, she had recently started listening to music in English. As for watching TV channels in English, she said it is an activity she does from time to time but it wasn’t a habit for her yet. In the interviews, Ayla mentioned many times that being a participant in this study made her gain awareness in many aspects. For example, she began to watch the *Seinfeld* episodes which I mentioned above regarding seeking opportunities for improvement. Finally, Ayla was taking private classes once a week to get prepared for the ÜDS, *Interuniversity Board Foreign Language Examination*, because getting a
sufficient score on this national exam is a requirement for promotions to associate professor.

**Previous Literature and the Current Study: Similarities and Differences**

In Chapter Three, I stated that the previous literature about learner reciprocity and transcendence had been used as “sensitizing concepts” (Patton, 2002, p. 279) during the data collection and analysis process in this study. Given that the current study is exploratory in nature, not much previous research was available pertaining to the concepts of learner reciprocity and transcendence. The existing literature mainly included Feuerstein, Rand, and Rynders’s conceptualization of transcendence (1988), transcendence as one of the subscales in Lidz’s (1991) Mediated Learning Experience Rating Scale, Poehner’s (2008) study on learner reciprocity, and lastly, the reciprocal behavior inventory in Response to Mediation Rating Scale (see Table 3 in Chapter Three) developed by Lidz in 1997 and modified by van der Aalsvoort (1998) as cited in van der Aalsvoort & Lidz, 2002.

Based on this literature, I initially compiled 11 themes for learner reciprocity and 4 themes for transcendence, which were:

**For learner reciprocity:**

1. Responding to teacher’s mediations
2. Comprehension of activity demands
3. Learner agency
4. Asking for approval
5. Negotiating the mediations
6. Rejecting mediations
7. Using the mediator as a resource
8. Seeking opportunities for improvement
9. Affective dimensions when interacting with teacher
10. Self-regulating attention
11. Reaction to challenge

For transcendence:
1. Relating the current with past and future
2. Awareness to extend experience beyond ‘now’
3. Constructing “if-then,” “what-if” sentences
4. Cause and effect thinking

However, the analysis and coding of the data coming from the current study led to

However, the analysis and coding of the data coming from the current study led to

the following themes:

For learner reciprocity:
1. Learner agency
2. Using the teacher and peers as a resource
3. Responding to the teacher and peers
4. Affective dimensions of interactions with the teacher and peers
5. Self-regulating attention
6. Reacting to challenge
7. Seeking opportunities for improvement

For transcendence:
1. Linking current learning with past learning
2. Relating current learning to other contexts
3. Extending experience beyond “now”

When one compares the initial themes and the themes that emerged through the thematic analysis of these data, the overlap is apparent. For example, five of the initial themes for learner reciprocity emerged in the current data as well; whereas two were modified and four were removed for various reasons. As for transcendence, three themes emerged in this study, two of which were conceptually similar to the initial themes regarding transcendence.

One of the themes unsupported by the data in this study was “comprehension of activity demands.” As van der Aalsvoort and Lidz (2002) stated, the reciprocal behaviors in the Response to Mediation Rating Scale represented a child’s behaviors during a Mediated Learning Experience (MLE). That MLE originated in order to understand behaviors of children with cognitive impairments explains why no verbal indicators in the present study emerged under this theme.

“Seeking mediator approval” in Poehner (2008) emerged as a category under “Using the teacher and peers as a resource” theme in the present study based on the fact that learners ask for confirmation to benefit from the teacher’s expertise with respect to the target language, thus “seeking mediator approval” doesn’t differ markedly from “using the teacher or peers as a resource.”

The learners in the present study hardly ever manifested “negotiating the mediations” and “rejecting mediations” themes. In the interviews, Leyla said, “No, I wouldn’t reject your guidance; I would listen to you” in answer to my question of whether she negotiates or rejects my guidance. As for Ayla, she revealed that she was satisfied with the degree and quality of my guidance, so she never felt the need to
negotiate or reject my scaffolding. The fact that Ayla and Leyla almost never manifested these themes might be attributed to the collectivistic nature of the Turkish culture (Hofstede, 2001), which values “obedience and attention to adult guidance” (Triandis, 1995 as cited in Newman et al., 2007).

Another distinctive characteristic of the themes that emerged in this study pertains to the collaborative nature of the classroom interactions. That is, the learners not only responded to the teacher or used the teacher as a resource but also responded to their peers and used their peers as resources. Hence, a peer dimension has been added to some of the themes and categories in this study.

Lastly, two initial themes vis-à-vis transcendence, constructing “if-then,” “what-if” sentences and “cause and effect thinking” were not observed through the learners’ verbal indicators that took place in the classroom setting. As the learners reported in the interviews, though, they manifested these as inner speech (Lantolf, 2003). In brief, examining the learners’ verbal indicators to see whether they transcend by constructing “if-then”; “what-if” sentences or by demonstrating cause and effect thinking may not be an appropriate method to discern these two behaviors. In the future, a study using a different method, such as a learner diary, might elicit more of these themes.

In conclusion, the initial themes compiled from the previous literature served as significant tools for the sensitizing concepts approach (Patton, 2002). On the other hand, the rigorous data coming from the longitudinal participant observations and various interviews led to the emergence of new themes as well as calling for slight modifications to the previous themes.
Summary

The findings of this study confirm my initial hypotheses that adult learners’ language learning potential substantially depends on how they reciprocate in the formal classroom setting, as well as how and to what degree they avail themselves of affordances both inside and outside the classroom setting. It appears that the development of language learning potential is proportional to two main factors: (a) learners’ reciprocity, which refers to: exercising agency, using the teacher and peers by initiating questions, responding to the teacher and peers, incorporating affective dimensions to interactions with the teacher and peers, self-regulating attention, positively reacting to challenge and seeking opportunities for improvement, and (b) learners’ transcendence, which takes place when: learners link their new learning with their past learning experiences, relate current learning with different contexts, and extend new learning beyond the classroom setting.

Drawing on Ayla and Leyla’s interview data and their verbal indicators in the adult EFL classroom and approaching the analysis from a sociocultural stand, I have found that the language learner with greater language learning potential applies every theme associated with reciprocity and transcendence to language learning, whereas, the language learner with lower language learning potential either does not employ certain themes at all or infrequently and inadequately exercises them.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the reiteration of the research questions and data collection procedures followed by introductions to my two participant case studies.
In subsequent sections, I elucidated the first dimension of language learning potential, *learner reciprocity*, based on seven themes: (a) learner agency, (b) using the teacher and peers as a resource, (c) responding to the teacher and peers, (d) affective dimensions of interactions with the teacher and peers, (e) self-regulating attention, (f) reacting to challenge, and (g) seeking opportunities for improvement. I discussed these themes and related categories *vis-à-vis* selected examples from Ayla and Leyla’s verbal indicators excerpted from the classroom videos. I suggested that the second dimension of language learning potential, *transcendence*, is actualized through (a) linking current learning with past learning, (b) relating current learning to other contexts, and (c) extending experience beyond “now.”

The following chapter, Chapter Five, begins with a brief overview of this dissertation study. Then I discuss the findings as they relate to the complexities of language learning potential. In the light of the findings, I offer an illuminating post-study definition for language learning potential. Finally, I discuss limitations, suggestions and future directions, followed by implications of the present study on the SLA research, ESL/EFL learners and teachers and teacher educators.
Chapter Five: Discussion

The main purpose of this dissertation study was to investigate the cognitively oriented phenomenon of language aptitude using sociocultural theory as a theoretical filter. An in-depth review of the previous literature revealed that SLA researchers have treated cognition as if it were the Tower of Leandros and aptitude as if it were the priestess living in this tower, isolated from other people. My objection to this dualistic approach was the main motive behind this study.

I began the journey with an overarching question: How can language aptitude be re-conceptualized through sociocultural theory? Subsequently, I offered a new term, *language learning potential*, to deconstruct any associations that can be made with the traditional concept of language aptitude. Then, I formulated two specific questions: (a) What are the verbal indicators that reflect adult EFL learners’ reciprocity and transcendence pertaining to their language learning potential? and (b) How are these verbal indicators manifested in dialogic interactions between learners and the teacher in an adult EFL classroom? To address these questions, I used a staged, nested case study design. My data sources were participant observations (all videotaped) over a period of 44 hours, three series of individual interviews, a focus group interview, and a researcher journal.

At the core of the study was the concept of *language learning potential*. An in-depth study of one learner whose language learning potential was higher and one whose was lower suggested that one’s disposition in learning a foreign/second language rests on two mutually constitutive elements: learner reciprocity and transcendence. The results of the case studies accord with my initial assumptions. The findings led to the emergence of
ten themes with regards to these two elements. The seven themes for learner reciprocity were: learner agency, using the teacher and peers as a resource, responding to the teacher and peers, affective dimensions of the interactions with the teacher and peers, self-regulating attention, reacting to challenge, and seeking opportunities for improvement. The three themes for transcendence were: linking current learning with past learning, relating current learning to other contexts, and extending experience beyond “now.”

The present study not only confirms the findings of other sociocultural researchers (Gillette, 1994; van Lier, 2004; Poehner, 2008), but also are reinforced by the poststructuralist arguments discussed in the SLA literature in that, for instance, ecological factors such as the learner’s semiotic budget and affordances (van Lier, 2000) as well as his or her investment (Norton Peirce, 1995) in the language learning process impact language learning potential. Furthermore, I suggest that language learning potential is not a fixed trait bestowed upon human beings at birth. It develops along a complex continuum; the learner may or may not avail him/herself of more affordances at various times. For example, the learner with less developed language learning potential in this study, Leyla, availed herself of an affordance by choosing to participate in these EFL classes; however, she did not seem to benefit substantially from the affordances once in the classroom.

Questions may arise concerning the validity of the arguments in this study. For example, How can we be sure that all these factors, in reality, reflect the learner’s language learning potential? Perhaps it is all about self-regulation or learner autonomy or personality traits. My answer to this is that language learning potential is an umbrella term, embracing all of these factors and connecting them to one’s disposition to learn a
language. To give a specific example, a learner could show autonomy in the classroom setting, be very inquisitive, and excel at self-regulating his/her learning, but unless the same learner extends his/her learning beyond the classroom and the immediate language goals, this learner would fail to fully invest in his/her language learning potential. After all, as Boyatzis suggests, “The goal of all research is to obtain insights and to create frameworks with which to understand the world around us” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 34). Since I was dissatisfied with the general reductionist understanding of the notion of aptitude, I conducted this study in order to approach aptitude with a different perspective and to change the traditional parameters surrounding it. Van Lier (2008) asserts that agency is “something that learners do, rather than something the learners possess, i.e., it is behavior rather than property” (van Lier, 2008, p. 171, emphasis original). I share this view of language learning potential as something learners do rather than possess, in contrast to the conventional conceptualization of aptitude. While a descriptive case study is not sufficient to generalize about the phenomenon examined here, it does provide valuable insights into language learning. Foremost among these insights is that language learning “ability” does not appear to be innate, but rather can be developed. Furthermore, I am not suggesting that language learning potential consists only of learner reciprocity and transcendence. However, these two dimensions, working synchronically, constitute the *sine qua non* of language learning potential.

One may also question whether the less agentive learners’ language learning potential is lower by default because of personality factors. I concede that certain personality traits might impede the improvement of learner reciprocity, but they should not be an impediment for transcendence. Such learners could benefit by reciprocating in
the classroom setting as well as investing in developing their potential through transcendence, for instance, by engaging in appropriate affordances such as reading books in English or finding English-speaking pen pals with whom to chat via the internet. (One interesting avenue of research would be the investigation of whether online social interactions can compensate for engagement in affordances such as face-to-face encounters or reading.)

Another point regarding the relationship between less agentive learners and language learning potential is the role of the cultural setting. For instance, a passive or an introverted learner who learns a language in a foreign language environment might approach the language analytically and excel at grammar; however, the development of his/her productive skills (especially speaking) might be delayed due to lack of engagement in socioculturally appropriate acts. However, if the same language learner moves to a second language environment, s/he would have many more opportunities for social interaction, including learning from more competent adults (i.e., native speakers). Therefore, it is worth asking if actively developing language learning potential is more critical in a foreign language environment, since the learner has to compensate for the lack of affordances that would otherwise be easily accessible. Hence, a future study might look into whether foreign language learning potential and second language learning potential differ from each other, and if so, in what ways they differ. Pavlenko and Lantolf’s 2000 study could serve as the starting point for this line of research.

As cited in Brown (1994), “Binet believed diagnosis to be of little use if it were not followed by remediation” (p. 9). Binet’s field of study was mainly intelligence; however, the same doctrine applies to the assessment of language aptitude as well. If it is
not possible to change aptitude, why measure it? This doctrine was, in fact, one of the originating points of this dissertation study. That’s why language learning potential is offered as an alternative term since it can be assessed and followed by remediation. Assessment of language learning potential and the specifics of how learners can develop their potential are areas that warrant future investigation.

One of the peripheral purposes of this study was to develop a satisfactory definition for language learning potential. The definition I proposed at the beginning was: “one’s disposition to take action in order to improve his or her learning of a language in a foreign/second language context.” The findings supported this barebones definition, especially considering that improving one’s learning of a language relates closely to the third theme of transcendence: extending experience beyond “now.” Having brought the study to its conclusion, I now propose a more nuanced and comprehensive working definition:

Language learning potential is a dynamic complex of dispositions that include learner reciprocity and transcendence. It is not a dichotomous notion; every learner ontologically has some level of potential. This potential develops through active participation in classroom interactions as well as through the extension of classroom learning to all aspects of life, achieved in the course of investment (Norton Peirce, 1995). Furthermore, language learning potential is dynamic; that is, learners may invest more or less in the development of their potential at any given time. Besides, “different learners invest selectively in different skills” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 297). Finally, drawing on van Lier’s work on agency (2002; 2008), we
can claim that language learning potential is not a fixed, irremediable “individual possession” but rather reflects one’s remediable “action potential.”

**Limitations, Suggestions, and Future Directions**

The current study adopted a case study approach. Thus, the findings may not be transferable to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Future research focusing on other methodologies, such as activity theory, might contribute to our understanding of emic perspectives with respect to learners’ intentions and perceived reasons for their actions pertaining to language learning potential. Ethnographical or phenomenological studies could shed light on this notion by examining the relations between one’s potential and one’s history pertaining to one’s internal and external orientations toward learning a language. Furthermore, as I also stated in Chapter Four, the fact that the present study focused on verbal indicators did not allow for many occurrences regarding linking current learning with past learning and relating current learning to other contexts. Learners revealed in the interviews that they are engaged in such acts in their minds even though they do not make them public. Hence, different methodologies such as learner diaries and learners’ class notes (Gillette, 1994) could be employed in future research on language learning potential. Lastly, both of the participants in this study were female. A future study can examine the role of gender in developing one’s language learning potential.

Another limitation of this study was its examination of the learners’ verbal indicators only. However, my observations indicated that learners’ verbal indicators did not take place independently from the teacher’s verbal indicators. For instance, both Leyla and Ayla stated in the interviews that they did not need to ask for additional
examples or negotiate my guidance, since they thought I had already provided them with plenty of examples and contexts, as well as given adequate instructions for classroom activities; therefore, they rarely asked for additional information or requested clarification. Thus, language learning potential research might benefit immensely from future studies that would (a) focus exclusively on teacher’s verbal indicators, and (b) focus on both learners’ and teachers’ verbal indicators to elucidate the dynamic interplay between teacher-learner interactions.

Language learning potential research would also benefit from future research investigating the interplays between the poststructuralist notions, *investment* and *social identity*, particularly in second language contexts. Some other suggestions for further research are:

- Investigating how English teachers’ transcendence, specifically their extension of experience beyond “now,” plays a role in the effectiveness of their teaching particularly in foreign language environments.

- Focusing on Asian learners as a specific cohort since, in the literature, they are often reported to have anxiety and reticence (Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Tsui, 1996; Kim, 2007). It might be illuminating to examine these factors in relation to language learning potential.

- Focusing on non-verbal indicators such as gestures. For interested researchers, McCafferty & Ahmed’s (2000) study is recommended.

- Examining whether the notion of fossilization (Selinker, 1972) has any bearings on one’s language learning potential. This, in fact, would be a very interesting study owing to two distinct theoretical origins of both notions (cognitive
perspectives vs. SCT, respectively). Washburn’s (1998) study, *Working in the ZPD: Fossilized and nonfossilized nonnative speakers*, could serve as a springboard for intrigued researchers.

**Implications**

The findings of this study can provide new insights to four communities in the field of second and foreign language studies: researchers, teachers, students, and language teacher educators. I strongly believe this research fills a gap in foreign/second language research, since there were no studies published, as far as I know, that examined language aptitude within a sociocultural framework.

This study provides the first group, foreign/second language researchers, with an opportunity to question their conceptualizations about the cognitively oriented notion of language aptitude, and a new term, language learning potential, which offers further avenues for research.

The second and third, probably the largest groups, that can benefit from the present study are foreign/second language teachers and students. This study may help teachers deconstruct their traditional understandings as to what assessing language learning ability entails. The findings can have a direct impact on their curriculum and lesson planning. For instance, they can create classroom circumstances that allow learners to take responsibility for their own actions, such as debates, discussions, and task-based activities (van Lier, 2008). Furthermore, by understanding the importance of transcendence and reciprocity in language learning, teachers can tailor language instruction in order to support the development of their students’ language learning potential. Second/foreign language learners can constantly be reminded that “The co-
construction of linguistic knowledge in dialogue is language learning in progress” (Swain & Lapkin, 1998, p. 321), and by engaging in dialogue, they give their teacher both the opportunity to discover the scope of their ZPDs and the chance to gauge their readiness for further learning. Teachers can reinforce learners’ reciprocal acts by both explicitly and implicitly encouraging them to actively participate in the classroom activities. Teachers can also model transcendence both in and outside classroom settings, as this may increase learners’ transcendence-related habits.

Finally, the fourth group who can benefit from these findings is foreign/second language teacher educators. In their language teacher-training programs, they can raise awareness of the importance and implications of learner reciprocity and transcendence on learning a language.

Conclusion

Drawing from a sociocultural perspective, the present study offers a fresh framework for the elucidation of the phenomenon, language learning potential. It has examined in detail two learners’ verbal indicators through rigorous longitudinal data collection methods and cast light on how they manifested these verbal indicators with reference to learner reciprocity and transcendence. Learner agency, using the teacher and peers as a resource, responding to the teacher and peers, affective dimensions of the interactions, self-regulating attention, reacting to challenge and seeking opportunities for improvement were the themes that emerged for learner reciprocity. For transcendence, linking current learning to past learning, relating current learning to other contexts and extending experience beyond “now” were found to be pertinent. The present study not
only lent strong support to a thorough investigation of the research questions, but also triggered many other new inquiries.

I strongly believe that this study and my working definition of language learning potential contribute to debunking the "gift for language learning" myth. I hope this exploratory research will serve as a catalyst for imminent studies that will solidify the understanding of language learning potential and illuminate its inextricable role in foreign/second language learning.
References


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### APPENDICES

#### Appendix A

*Complete list of the subscales in the MLE Rating Scale (Lidz, 1991)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Working Description</th>
<th>Indicators for Mediators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Intentionality     | Initiating, maintaining and terminating the interaction; regulating and refocusing the child’s attention and participation; maintaining a goal orientation, inhibiting impulsive behavior | Statements such as: “Let’s move this closer so you can reach all the pieces by yourself”  
“Why don’t we try putting out just the pieces you need, so you aren’t tempted to touch everything?” |
| Meaning            | Attributing cultural values of what is good and bad, what is important to note, and what can be ignored; elaborations of descriptive characteristics of things, people | Statements such as “Oh! This is really funny!”, elaborations such as “Look how thick these crayons are; that makes them easier for you to hold” |
| Transcendence      | Relating events in the current situation to those in the past or anticipated in the future | Statements such as “Remember what we did last week?” |
| Sharing (Joint Regard) | Expressing emphatic inference; sharing views, feelings, reactions, gaze-focus on the same object; synchronization of movements, encouragement of sharing feelings and perceptions | “Wow, you were afraid you couldn’t do that but you did anyways” |
| Sharing (Shared Experience) | Statements of a thought or experience; statements do not need to refer to the past, they can represent current thoughts | “I used to think that dolls were just for girls, and that if I played with them I would turn into a girl! Isn’t that silly? or “I used to play with something like this when I was at your age”. |
| Competence (Task Regulation) | Stating a principle of problem solution or inducing strategic thinking; statements do not need to be elaborate | “Where shall we start?”  
“This will be more stable if we start from the bottom” |
| Competence (Praise/Encouragement) | Statements that include praise/encouragement | “Great!”; “Good job”  
“You really slowed down and worked carefully, great job” |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence (Challenge)</th>
<th>Refers to the optimal match between the presentation of the task and the child’s ability to respond; balancing support with challenge, providing a “one-step-ahead” kind of strategy</th>
<th>One statement wouldn’t be enough to indicate this subscale; lengthy observations are required.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Differentiation</td>
<td>Refers to the “intrusiveness” of the mediator; product becomes more important than the process</td>
<td>Not allowing the child to get involved in the task, statements N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent Responsivity</td>
<td>Adapting behaviors and reactions to the child’s behaviors in timely and appropriate manners; the most inferential of the components</td>
<td>Showing flexibility in the reactions directed to the child, statements N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Involvement</td>
<td>Manifesting, overtly or covertly, a sense of caring about the child</td>
<td>Statements that communicate indifference and hostility would be negative indicators of affective involvement, specific examples N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>The difference between prior performance and performance after the interactions which shows that the child benefited from the experience</td>
<td>Requires observation, statements N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
<td>In this scale, reciprocity relates to the child’s behaviors</td>
<td>Demanding certain behaviors from the mediator, statements N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Interview Questions – First Round

Seidman’s (2006) three-interview series will be used in this study. Since the first interview aims to set the context of the participants’ experience, questions will target to understand their early experiences with learning English. It is worth remembering that the first interview will be structured while the other two will be semi-structured.

Questions

1- Can you tell me a little bit about your first experiences with learning English?
   (For probing: How old were you? Do you remember your teachers?)

2- Would you mind sharing some of these experiences about learning English with me? (For probing: What types of activities were you engaged in when learning English?)

3- In what sense do you think your early experiences were helpful for you to learn English?

4- Do you think you can apply what you learned in the classroom to real-life situations?

5- In your opinion, how is a foreign language learned the best?

6- In your opinion, what kind of characteristics a language learner should have?

7- How do you view your characteristics as a language learner?

8- Do you have anything else you want to add before we finish the interview?

Questions for the second and third interviews will be posed after some amount of data are collected.
Appendix C

*Interview Questions – Second Round*

1) In general, what do you pay attention to when learning English?

2) Based on your own experiences, can you tell me which ones you pay more attention to among reading, listening, speaking, writing, grammar and vocabulary? Can you put them in a sequence from the one you pay the most attention to the one you pay the least?

3) Now, please imagine yourself when learning English in class. I am asking you to evaluate yourself and provide concrete examples as much as possible based on your *own* behaviors in class regarding the following behaviors:

- Responding to teacher’s mediations
- Comprehension of activity demands
- Communicating and commenting about the activity
- As a language learner, regulating your learning independent from the teacher (for example, asking questions, taking initiatives)
- Asking for approval (for example, would it be correct if I used X like this? would X be used in this situation?)
- Negotiating the teacher’s mediations (examples for probing: if you did X this way, it would be more helpful; you are doing X but it doesn’t work that much, if you do X this way, it might be better; can we cover this topic, too)
- Rejecting the teacher’s mediations (for example, just a minute, let me try it myself first; I can do it myself)
- Using the teacher as a resource
- Asking for additional guidance or information regarding the subject being learned
- Seeking opportunities for improvement
- Complementing your interactions with the teacher through affective dimensions
- Self-regulating attention
- Reaction to challenge
- Do you think you have other behaviors in class regarding verbal communication other than these? Anything you want to add?

4) In this question, I am again asking you to evaluate yourself and provide concrete examples as much as possible based on your own behaviors in class regarding the following behaviors:
- Linking your current learning with past and future
- Relating your current learning to contexts that you might face in the future
- Awareness to extend experience beyond ‘now’
- Constructing if-then, what-if sentences
- Cause and effect thinking related to the language
- Identifying the underlying principle regarding new learning, generalizing
- Ensuring that new learning has long-term effects
- Widening of the interaction beyond its immediate goals to other goals that are more remote in time and space, not leaving current learning ‘here’ but moving to ‘there’
- Do you think you have other behaviors in class regarding ‘relating current learning with past and future other than these? Anything you want to add?
Appendix D

Interview Questions – Third Round – Ayla

1) In our second interview, you said, “I spend my energy in following the class carefully and I try to take notes while learning English”. Are these true only for English or did you do these in other classes as well when you were a student?

2) What kind of effects do your attentiveness and your habit of taking notes regularly in the classes have on your learning English?

3) In our second interview, you said, “I don’t comment on the class activities that much; I do it as inner speech”. In terms of teacher-learner relationship, what kinds of advantages and disadvantages, do you think, might this behavior have on your learning English?

4) You said that you have an active, extroverted personality. In your opinion, what kinds of advantages and disadvantages might having such a personality trait create on learning English?

5) You said “I am not a very active student in terms of asking questions, getting the teacher’s approval but I actively participate in the activities”. How would this situation affect your learning English? What kinds of advantages and disadvantages can it have?

6) You said, “I continue to be a learner outside the class, instead of asking additional information about a topic being covered, I go learn it myself”. What kinds of advantages and disadvantages might this circumstance have on your learning English?
7) You said, “I try to be a good listener in class, I try to follow the instructions and I respect the teacher”. In your opinion, how could these behaviors influence your learning English?

8) You said, “I think, I don’t have a good natural sense of musical pitch”. Can you elaborate more on that? (For probing: How did you reach this conclusion? What kinds of experiences led you to this conclusion?)

9) You said, “Learning does not occur if you don’t link what you have learned with your daily life”. Can you please elaborate on that a little bit? What do you mean by “learning does not occur”? (In what ways learning wouldn’t take place?)

10) In the future,
    - for instance in 2 years, where do you see yourself in terms of learning English?
      (For probing: What do you think you will be able to do regarding English skills? What will you have accomplished? What skills will you be still trying to develop?)
    - for instance in 10 years, where do you see yourself in terms of learning English?

11) That’s all I wanted to ask. It was a very fruitful interview. Are there other things you want to add? Thanks.
Interview Questions – Third Round – Leyla

1) You said, “When learning English, vocabulary and grammar are the most important elements for you, then come speaking & listening, and finally reading & writing.” Could you please elaborate more on that, why do you place more emphasis on vocabulary and grammar?

2) In our second interview, regarding asking for confirmation, you said, “I don’t do it a lot, I feel intimidated”. What kinds of advantages and/or disadvantages, do you think, this behavior of yours might have in your learning English?

3) Regarding suggestions to the teacher on her/his approach to instruction and guidance in class, you said, “I agreed with Oner when he mentioned, but I don’t recall any other examples”. Do you come up with such suggestions for the teacher’s approach and guidance in other classes? What kind of advantages and/or disadvantages might this behavior bring to your learning English?

4) With regards to asking for additional material and information on the topic, you said “After your questions, I realized that on that front I’m not very active in class”. What kinds of advantages and/or disadvantages, do you think, this behavior might have in your learning English?

5) Regarding ‘Complementing the interactions with the teacher through affective dimensions’, you said, “I feel comfortable in class, I like your approach; however I do not engage in oral communication too much”. In your opinion, what may be the advantages and/or disadvantages of this behavior in learning English?
6) You said “I usually don’t give up when I face a challenge in learning, but I start thinking negatively immediately, I feel that I may not succeed”. Does this happen only when studying English, or do you feel the same way for other courses?

7) You mentioned that you don’t link your current learning with past learning. What kinds of advantages and/or disadvantages, do you think, this might have in your learning English?

8) Regarding linking your current learning with future contexts, you said, “I do that all the time. When I learn a new word or expression, I imagine that I can use this word when something like this happens or I can use it in a specific situation”. What kinds of advantages and/or disadvantages, do you think, this might have in your learning English?

9) You said, “I kind of expect everything to be handed to me on a silver plate; I don’t relate what I’ve just learned to other things myself”. Could you please elaborate more on that? What kinds of advantages and/or disadvantages would that behavior bring in learning English?

10) You mentioned that you often don’t practice what you learn; for example, you don’t watch a movie in English, or speak with friends. In your opinion, what may be the advantages and/or disadvantages of this behavior in learning English?

11) In the future,

- for instance in 2 years, where do you see yourself in terms of learning English?
  (For probing: What do you think you will be able to do regarding English skills?
  What will you have accomplished? What skills will you be still trying to develop?)
- for instance in 10 years, where do you see yourself in terms of learning English?

12) That’s all I wanted to ask. It was a very fruitful interview. Are there other things you want to add? Thanks.
Appendix F

Focus Group Protocol

Introductory talk: First of all, thank you very much for your time for this focus group interview. There are a couple of things I would like to articulate before we start the interview. Firstly, whatever we speak here will remain confidential, if I use this information, I will change your names, so who said what will not be known/identified by others. Secondly, everybody’s opinion in the group is equally important for me; thus, please feel comfortable to share your ideas. Lastly, I have a request from you. We would have an efficient interview if we didn’t interrupt each other while talking, if we listened to each other carefully, if we didn’t digress from the topic, and if we gave equal opportunities for everyone to talk. Nobody should feel intimidated; we are here to exchange our ideas about a certain topic and enjoy ourselves while doing this.

1) In your opinion what is language learning potential?

2) How is language learning potential reflected in class? (With what type of behaviors and oral expressions is it reflected? If a student has good language learning potential, how would s/he behave in class? )

3) In your opinion, can language learning potential be developed? If yes, how?

4) In your opinion, what is language ability/aptitude?

5) What do you think about the concepts of language ability/aptitude and language learning potential? (Do you think these concepts are different? If yes, in what ways?)

6) That’s all I wanted to ask you today. Do you want to add anything to what we have talked today? Thank you.
Appendix G

*Picture frames from the New York State’s Placement Test for English as a Second Language Adult Students*
Appendix H

Sample video transcript and accompanying researcher notes

December 1, 2009

11:46 C: what does your friend Sally do? She is a film director. Sinifca: really, wow, that sounds really exciting. Butun cevapları tek tek okuyorlar. Burda 7 kişi var, tek call out etmeyen Leyla. Calling out answers in English along with others


17:19 Nesrin: Ahmet Hoca “often” diye vurguluyor da…A: o doktorasını İngilteredenaldi ya..commenting on a sidetracked conversation

17:27 E: çok yuvarlama yapıyorlar Amerikalılar herhalde, genelde filmlerde filan da böyle..çok böyle kelimeyi yarım soyluyorlar bırakıyorlar gibi. Commenting on English language ornegi al C: herseyi kısaltıyorlar falan. (…)

17:48 E: bir de şey mesela, going’te biz going diyoruz onlar goin diyor bırakıyor.. C: evet..comparing English and Turkish ILK KEZ ornegi al Acaba en ana theme learner agency mı olmalı? Commenting, asking bunlar alt dalları olmalı belki de.
Appendix I

Data Catalog

The following catalog describes the seven major themes with respect to learner reciprocity as well as three major themes relating to transcendence, all leading up to a fresh framework as to what language learning potential encompasses. The descriptions also illuminate my two research questions: a) What are the verbal indicators that reflect adult EFL learners’ transcendence and reciprocity? and b) How are these verbal indicators manifested in dialogic interactions between learners and the teacher? by providing labels, descriptions, patterns, and examples for the verbal indicators as well as providing their occurrences. Examples are selected from Ayla and Leyla’s verbal indicators (the positive and negative cases of the study) in addition to two more participants (Oner and Elif). This was done purposefully in order to provide the readers of this dissertation with a better picture of the themes, categories, and subcategories regarding reciprocity and transcendence as well as to better utilize this catalog as a tool for data analysis. Ayla and Leyla’s early experiences regarding learning English are given in Chapter Four. Please see the end of this catalog for Elif and Oner’s early experiences in learning English.

Learner Reciprocity

The major seven themes regarding learner reciprocity are:

- **R1.** Learner agency
- **R2.** Using the teacher and peers as a resource
- **R3.** Responding to the teacher and peers
- **R4.** Affective dimensions of interactions with the teacher and peers
R5. Self-regulating attention

R6 Reacting to challenge

R7. Seeking opportunities for improvement

I use the notions of theme, category, and subcategory quite frequently in this catalog. A theme refers to the main subsets of learner reciprocity as listed above. A category refers to the subsets under a theme, and finally a subcategory refers to the subsets under a category. Every theme has categories but not every category has subcategories. To give some examples, learner agency is a theme, commenting is a category, and commenting on a vocabulary item is a subcategory. Excluding seeking opportunities for improvement, all of the themes have categories, the majority of which consist of sub-categories as well.

R1. Learner Reciprocity, Theme 1: Learner Agency

Learner agency refers to the self-initiated verbal moves carried out by the four participants, which led to the enrichment of the communication in the classroom for favor of more efficient teaching and learning. In this study, learner agency was demonstrated primarily by the following categories or subcategories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Learner agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Commenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Repeating on one’s own initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Suggesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Giving examples on one’s own initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Guessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Explaining</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Being persistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Translating into English/Turkish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Telling the meaning of a vocabulary item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Negotiating with teacher/peers on shared activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Requesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Communicating with peers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is common to all of these categories or subcategories is that learners took action by their own initiatives, in other words, they did not depend on the teacher or their peers when performing these indicators. Some of these categories have subcategories as well. Please refer to Table 12 at the end of this appendix for a list of all themes and occurrences by each of the four participants. Detailed explanations below illuminate the themes, categories and the subcategories regarding learner reciprocity.

**R1.1. Learner Agency, Category 1: Commenting**

Commenting has the largest number of subcategories among all categories. The four participants, two being the cases in this study, used 15 different ways to express their comments, which are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Commenting on</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The way a word is pronounced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>One’s learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Peer’s question or remark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>English language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A vocabulary item</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Shared activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Language learning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>One’s language level/proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Future activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The class</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>A national language exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Activity in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Textbook</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Teacher’s approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**R1.1.1. Commenting on the way a word is pronounced**

Commenting on the way a word is pronounced occurred 19 times in total (Ayla, #17; Oner, #2). It took place in two situations: a) when the teacher explained the
pronunciation of a word in English, and b) when the learners heard the pronunciation of a word in English in the listening materials.

Example 1.

For the pronunciation of the word “internet”, I uttered that:

Cagri: Internet’e innernet diyorlar. [They say ‘innernet’ for internet]. Ayla commented:

Ayla: Sanki böyle “iç” dermiş gibi (showing her chest) [It is like saying ‘inner’].

Example 2.

Another interesting example for this subcategory is:

Cagri: /a:.nst/ diye okunuyor, h’siz. [It is pronounced as /a:.nst/, without the ‘h’].

Ayla: Kırk yıl düşünsem, öyle söyleneceği aklına gelmezdi (laughing). [It wouldn’t hit home that it would be pronounced like that even if I thought about it for forty years].

Example 3.

Elif: Hocam, great’i çok vurgulu soyluyorlar. [Hodjam, they say ‘great’ with a lot of emphasis].

As the selected examples illustrate, participants commented on the pronunciation of the words after they heard the pronunciation from me or from the native speakers in the listening materials, taking the initiative to speak up in situations which did not necessitate them to speak.
R1.1.2. **Commenting on one’s learning**

This subcategory includes comments uttered when participants wanted to express their thoughts about their learning English. Selected examples are:

*Example 1.*

Ayla: İlk hafta yaptığımızda ben hiçbir şey anlayamadım, baktım öyle. Ama bugün daha çok anladım. [When we did it in the first week, I didn’t understand a thing. But today I’ve understood more].

*Example 2.*

Ayla: Bir de en güzeli sakir sakir yazabilmek artık, daha once 10 kere düşünuyordum, simdi artık yazabiliyorum. [Also, the best is to be able to write fluently now, I used to think 10 times before but I can write now].

R1.1.3. **Commenting on a peer’s question or remark**

This verbal indicator occurred when the participants took initiative to comment on a peer’s question or remark directed, in fact, to the whole class.

*Example 1.*

In one of the classes in which we studied vocabulary by means of a reading material, I was telling the students what ‘to be wiped out’ meant. A student (Sevgi) who was not among the four participants whose verbal indicators were exemplified in this data catalogue asked a question about this expression, then Ayla commented on her peer’s question. Verbal indicators which the participants uttered and which illustrate other subcategories are indicated within star signs.

Cagri: To be wiped out, to be very tired, exhausted.

Ayla: Çok yorgun olmak. [To be very tired]. *Translating into Turkish*
Cagri: This is a very informal expression.

Sevgi: Fatigue...Fatigue daha çok kullanılıyor mu konuşma dilinde? [Fatigue...Is it being used more frequently in daily language]?

Ayla: Sey, ilaçların üstünde oluyor. [It is written on the medicines].

Cagri: Yok, konuşma dilinde değil. O biraz böyle, sürekli bir yorgunluk falan hissetme durumunda kullanılıyor. [No, not in daily language. It is, you know, used in a situation where there is a constant feeling of tiredness].

Sevgi: Hastalık halinde. [In the condition of an illness].

In this example, Ayla’s comment, it is written on the medicines, clearly shows the fact that she took the initiative to say something about her peer’s question. She not only created a context for the forthcoming discussion, but also informed me that she is familiar with the semantic differentiations of some lexical items.

Example 2.

This example occurred in another class in which we were engaged in a reading activity from the textbook:

Cagri: Build a good name for yourself, kendin için iyi bir isim insa etmek, oluşturmak. [Build a good name for yourself, building a good name for yourself].

Oner: Mecaz anlamında yani? [That is, in its figurative meaning..?]

Cagri: Nasıl? [Sorry?]

Oner: Mecaz anlamında. [In its figurative meaning]. *Repeating for comprehension of others*

Ayla: Tabii ki. [(everybody laughs) Of course].
Here, Ayla’s comment sounds a little condescending at first glance; however, Ayla’s manner and body language was not humiliating; she set her tone in a way to only express her astonishment in a humorous way. That’s why the class was able to turn Oner’s question to an entertaining moment.

Example 3.

Oner: Hocam, örnek verelim mi? [Hodjam, shall we give examples]?

Leyla: Yazıyor zaten (showing the grammar notes they made copies from my notes) [They are already written].

In the entire duration of the classes she attended, Leyla commented on a peer’s question or remark only once, which was the example above. Her only comment regarding this subcategory makes sense considering the fact that she was the only student who brought the grammar notes (which they made copies from my own notebook) to this class, which we had agreed to study grammar only.

R1.1.4. Commenting on English as a language

Verbal indicators pertaining to this subcategory include comments on the characteristics of English as a language such as its grammar, phonetics, syntax, etc. Selected examples are:

Example 1.

In one of the grammar classes¹⁹, students brainstormed about the tenses in English while I wrote them on the blackboard. At the end of this activity, Elif commented:

Elif: Amma çok tense varmış yaa! [Geez, there are so many tenses]!

¹⁹ In total, we spent two of the classes on grammar. We agreed to allot one class time to go over the tenses, and another one to study the relative clauses.
Example 2.

Elif: Yeni Ay filmi var ya, ordaki konuşmalarına dikkat ediyorum, hemen kestirip atıyorlar, going diyor hemen bitiyo…[You know the movie New Moon, I pay attention to the conversations there, they cut it short, s/he says ‘going’ and it ends right there].

Example 3.

Cagri: As soon as’i gördüğunuzde illa past tense olacak diye bir sart yok [There is no such rule that you will use ‘past tense’ wherever you see ‘as soon as’].

Oner: Hep sart yok hocam yaa [but hodjam, it is always ‘there is no rule’].

In this last example, Oner let me have an idea about his frustration with the ‘no rule’ feature of English. There was not much I could do about it; however, knowing that Oner felt uncomfortable with this aspect of the language, I tried pointing out fewer exceptions for a while. In short, this verbal indicator brought about awareness for me to tailor the instruction according to the needs of the students.

R1.1.5. Commenting on a vocabulary item

Commenting on a vocabulary item was the third most frequent verbal indicator after ‘asking for information’ and ‘asking for confirmation’. Ayla employed 160 verbal indicators, while Elif employed 31 and Oner 39. Leyla, not surprisingly, did not comment on a vocabulary item at all. In order to render the label of this subcategory more inclusive, I specifically preferred ‘a vocabulary item’ to ‘a word’ because participants not only commented on simple words, but also on chunks of words such as phrasal verbs,
expressions and idioms. I believe that ‘vocabulary item’ encompasses all of these vocabulary units.

Since there were so many indicators for commenting on a vocabulary item, more examples than the average are presented here. Five illustrative examples for this subcategory are:

Example 1.

When I was explaining what ‘to get a second wind’ meant, Ayla commented on its meaning, in other words, paraphrased my explanations according to her own understanding:

Ayla: Nefes nefese kalip sonra rahatlamak. [Getting out of breath and then relax]

In this example, what Ayla did was to voice her understanding of the meaning of this idiom. However, it was not correct. By raising her voice, though, Ayla gave me an opportunity to further explain what this idiom meant. In short, not all the comments about a vocabulary item had to be correct; far from it, vague or wrong comments gave me the chance to clarify any misunderstandings on the spot. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that Ayla did not ‘guess’ the meaning of this idiom; she just shared her understanding after I explained the meaning of it.

Example 2.

In the context of talking about whether or not there is a direct translation of the Turkish word “huzur” into English:

Ayla: Guzel degil mis ama yaa. Ingilizce’deki bir kelimenin Türkceye…Simdi de peace, huzurun anlamini tam karsilamiyor. [Nah, I don’t really like it,
though. Sometimes it doesn’t fit, a word in English to Turkish…This time, ‘peace’ doesn’t match with the exact meaning of ‘huzur’.

Example 3.

When Elif asked me the meaning of ‘envy’, Oner commented on it before I told its meaning:

Oner: Envy’yi canavar diye biliyorum ben. [I thought ‘envy’ meant ‘beast’].

Then, Ayla guessed that ‘envy’ could mean ‘dusman’ [enemy]. In fact, I think she got ‘envy’ and ‘enemy’ mixed up. Oner, after thinking loudly by saying ‘dusman, canavar, böyle olumsuz birşey’ [enemy, beast, it is like a negative thing], asked me what it actually meant, repeating Elif’s initial question. I will discuss this interesting example again under the category ‘Being Persistent’ because Oner was not satisfied with the meaning I gave them, and he furthered the dialogue for a while.

Example 4.

On discussion of the word ‘drop me off’, one of the students asked:

Melis: Kaba bir kullanım mı? [Is this usage a rude one]?

Cagri: Yok değil. [No, it is not].

Ayla: Gunluk dilde. [In daily language].

Example 5.

This is one of the most attention-grabbing examples in the study, which I will talk about at length under transcendence; hence, only the relevant verbal indicator for this example is provided here:

Cagri: HIV carrier da deniyor. [HIV carrier is said, too]

Elif: Hmm, hastalıklarda kullanılıyor. [Hmm, it is used for illnesses].
R1.1.6. Commenting on/about shared activity

There were 203 verbal indicators in total for commenting on/about shared activity, the fifth most frequent subcategory. Commenting on/about shared activity occurred whenever a participant wanted to share his/her opinions about an activity we were engaged in the class at a certain moment. Sometimes, it was a positive feedback about the activity while, at times, it was used to raise a concern such as ‘this dialogue is too fast for us’, ‘I couldn’t do this one’ or ‘I don’t understand the difference between ‘when’ and ‘while’’. It was also used to simply comment about the activity such as ‘It looks as if James might also say that’. Two explanatory examples are explained below.

Example 1.

In the following example, students were engaged in an activity in which we listened to a conversation among three native speakers, one of whom was introducing two of her friends for the first time.

Elif: Ya orasını nasıl geçiyor anlamadım (laughing). [Shoot, how does he pass that part, I don’t understand].

The sentence that Elif did not understand was the longest one in the dialogue we listened to: “Louise tells me that you’re studying medicine”. By commenting on this activity, she let me gauge her level of listening ability in a better way. In the listening activities following her comment, I tried to pause the audio CD when there was a relatively long sentence in the dialogue. Furthermore, since there were other comments about the difficulty they were having with the speed of the conversations in the listening activities, I projected their scripts to the wall so that they could both read and listen.
However, I did not provide the tape scripts in their first or second listening in order not to ruin the purpose of listening activities.

*Example 2.*

In this activity, the students listened to a song by Leonard Cohen, “Dance Me to the End of Love”. I first distributed the lyrics of the song which I had cut into separate lines and mixed up in advance. Then students had to put the lyrics in order while listening to the song. The first student who arranged them according to the right order would be the winner. We listened to this pleasant song several times. Ayla commented on the activity right before we went on a break:

Ayla: Bu çok keyifli bir aktiviteydi, bu arada. [This was a very cheerful activity, by the way].

Comments like the ones in example (2) informed me about the types of activities the students found interesting and fun. As long as they fit the instructional objectives, I tried to incorporate more of these activities.

**RI.1.7. Commenting on cultural differences**

This subcategory includes verbal indicators where participants expressed their opinions about the differences between the American and Turkish cultures. The following is a very good, demonstrative example from Elif:

*Example 1.*

In the textbook I used, there was a section called ‘spotlight’ which touched upon the pragmatics of English such as “Just a minute is a polite way to ask someone to wait”. The following example occurred after I read out loud what was written in the spotlight box to the students: “Asking about or commenting on someone’s major or occupation can
be used as a polite way to start or continue a conversation”, and after I described,
referring to my first-hand cultural knowledge and experiences, how native speakers start
conversation when they first meet with someone. At the end of my explanations, Elif
commented:

Elif: Çok ilginç..onlar da herhalde Türklerin şeyini yapsalar, nerelisinden
girerler…[Very interesting…if they did it for Turkish people (meaning, if
they wrote a textbook to teach Turkish), they would start with ‘which city
are you from?’]

The verbal indicators for the following three subcategories were not repeate
d many times (see Table 12). Yet, they were distinct enough to be put under different
labels.

R1.1.8. Commenting on the language learning process

I believe that the label for this subcategory is self-explanatory. The dialogue
presented here took place on December 30 at the end of our last class, and reflects both
Elif’s and Ayla’s comments on the language learning process. Verbal indicators
illustrating other subcategories are indicated with star (*) signs20.

Example 1.

Cagri: Güzel oldu bugün. [It’s been nice today (meaning today’s class)].

Ayla: İstesen böyle dört kişiye özel birşey bulamazsin. [You wouldn’t find
something special like this for 4 people]. *Commenting on the class*

Elif: Evet ya, özel ders gibi oldu bu. Yapabilecek miyim kaygisi yok artık,
bitiyor tam şey olduğumuzda. [Yeap, this was like a private tutoring
session. There is no anxiety for ‘will I be able to do it?’ any more but it is

20 All of the verbal indicators illustrating other subcategories will be indicated with star signs from now on.
coming to an end right after we are...(meaning ready)]. *Commenting on the class*

Ayla: Demek ki insanlar bazı steplerden geçiyor. [That means people go through some stages]. Commenting on language learning process

Elif: Evet, demek ki. [Yes, that must be so]. *Agreeing with a peer* O kaygıyi attığın an zaten ne söylersen şöyle düzeltilecek ya da hani doğrusunu bulcaksın bir şekilde. [Once you get rid of that anxiety, whatever you say will get corrected anyways or, you know, you will find what is correct one way or another]. Commenting on language learning process

R1.1.9. Commenting on one’s language level/proficiency

This subcategory could easily be mixed with commenting on one’s learning. However, when learners commented on their proficiency levels, they said something more general and ‘static’ about their capabilities, in comparison to saying something more contextual and spontaneous such as ‘why does it get more understandable when you listen to something twice or three times?’ regarding the class activity happening at that time. The following examples are selected to clarify this distinction.

Example 1.

When it was Leyla’s turn in a group speaking activity, she suggested:

Leyla: Hocam, ben yapmasam? [Hodjam, can we skip me]? *Suggesting*

Elif: Konusursun. [You can speak]. *Encouraging peers*

Leyla: Konusana kadar çok zaman geçiyor. [A lot of time passes until I speak].
Example 2.

Ayla: Çok basit şeyleri bile bazen, hani, bilmediğimi farkедiyorum. Bir üst bilgiye sahip oluyosun ama bir asagıdaki bilgiye sahip değilsin. [I realize that I don’t know very simple things sometimes, you know. You possess upper-level knowledge but lack knowledge at a lower level].

In the first example, Leyla commented about her proficiency in speaking English, helping me understand why she did not want to take her turn in that activity. In the latter example, Ayla gave clues about the inconsistent aspects of her proficiency in English, which was helpful for me to gauge her actual and proximal level of developments.

**R1.1.10. Commenting on a future activity**

Verbal indicators in this subcategory refer to comments about a homework assignment or a class-related activity planned by the teacher and students to be carried out in the future such as going to a movie in English. Even though there were no questions asked about a future activity among the verbal indicators of this study, I assume that ‘asking about a future activity’ would emerge in a different context, with different set of data.

Ayla: Baska odevimiz var mı? [Do we have another homework assignment?]

Cagri: Baska odev yok. [There are no other assignments].

Ayla: Öyle birşey planlamamıştık zaten. [We did not plan something like that any ways].

**R1.1.11. Commenting on the class**

This subcategory refers to comments about the class in general, rather than comments on a specific activity. It also includes comments about the materials the
teacher used such as the textbook, and comments about the teacher’s approach in
teaching the subject matter. For example, once Ayla stated:

*Example 1.*

Ayla: Ders nasıl geçiyor anlamiyoruz. [We hardly notice how time passes in
class].

Another example for this subcategory was mentioned above under the
subcategory of commenting on the language learning process.

*Example 2.*

Cagri: Güzel oldu bugün. [It’s been nice today (meaning today’s class)]

Ayla: İstesen böyle dört kişiye özel birşey bulamazsin. [You wouldn’t find
something special like this for 4 people]. *Commenting on the class*

Elif: Evet ya, özel ders gibi oldu bu. Yapabilecek miyim kaygisi yok artık,
bitiyor tam şey olduğunuuzda. [Yeap, this was like a private tutoring
session. There is no anxiety for ‘will I be able to do it’ any more but it is
coming to an end right after we are…(meaning ready)]. *Commenting on
the class*

*Example 3.*

Finally, this example excerpted from a long conversation about students’
evaluation of the course, illustrates Elif’s verbal indicator on teacher’s approach:

Elif: Böyle pat diye yanlis birşey söylesek, siz sert bir tepki verseniz, bitti yani.
[If we suddenly said something wrong, and you reacted harshly, that
would be the end of it (meaning that they would be discouraged in class)].
**R1.1.12. Commenting on a national language exam**

As I might have mentioned elsewhere in this study, getting a sufficient score from the ÜDS, *Interuniversity Board Foreign Language Examination*, is a requirement for promotions in associate professorships; for admission to master’s and doctoral programs, for teaching and research assistantship positions in Turkey. For this reason, the students who were planning to go to graduate school or academia referred to this exam in relevant contexts in addition to occasionally raising their concerns about it. I present only one example here due to its rare occurrence.

*Example 1.*

Ayla: Hand on’un ne oldugunu hatırladım, nesilden nesile aktarmak gibi…phrasal verb dosyasi var bir tane, hatta bir zamanın ÜDS sorusuydu. [I remembered what ‘hand on’ was, like to pass on from generations to generations…there is a phrasal verb folder, it was even a ÜDS question once].

Cagri: Hadi? [Really]?

Ayla: Ya öyle kiyida kosedeki kalmış şeyleri sordukları için. [Yup, since they ask things you would rarely come across].

**R1.1.13. Commenting on the activity in English**

Commenting on the activity in English was carried out in two ways: a) commenting in English in a group activity, and b) taking initiative to speak up in a group activity.
Example 1.

This example took place in our last class on December 30, 2009. We were covering a unit on ‘giving opinions, agreeing and disagreeing’. I instructed the students for the speaking activity in English. They were going to think of a big decision that they needed to make in the near future and write down the pros and cons of that decision to exchange opinions with each other when they were ready. After working on their own for 10 minutes and asking individual questions to me, they formed a group of four to start speaking. Ayla was the first student who took the initiative to speak up in English:

Ayla: My decision is about my son’s school. I think he should go to public school. I think public school is near our house, so he has extra time. He will not go to school with school bus. I think that he grows up in society. What do you think? *Taking initiative to speak up in a group activity*

Elif: I agree with you because..near your house. It is good thing because school bus is bad for your children. That’s all. *Commenting in English in a group activity*

Leyla: I think time is necessary for your children. So, she…she doesn’t get up early. *Commenting in English in a group activity*

Melis: What about public school’s teachers, are they good?

Elif: Education…*Commenting in English in a group activity*

Ayla: Yes, yes, but public schools’ class are crowded and it could be an issue about cleaning and supplying educational materials. What do you think? *Commenting in English in a group activity*

Elif: Crowded…bad thing, I think. *Commenting in English in a group activity*
In this example, Ayla was the one who took the initiative to start the conversation. Subsequently, Elif and Leyla continued to comment in English. Since I felt that the students were not ready for such an activity in previous classes, not many ‘commenting in English in a group activity’ and ‘taking initiative to speak up in a group activity’ occurred.

**R1.2. Learner Agency, Category 2: Repeating on One’s Own Initiative**

Repeating on one’s own initiative refers to the verbal moves when the participants repeated, by themselves, the pronunciation of a vocabulary item in English or a new structure they just heard, without me telling them to repeat. For the distinction between ‘repeating on one’s own initiative’ and ‘thinking aloud’, please refer to page 260 where ‘thinking aloud’ is discussed. The verbal indicators in this category were displayed only by Ayla and Oner, 36 and 13 times, respectively.

*Example 1.*

In our first class, we did some spelling practice. In order to role-play a dialogue in which two interlocutors asked each other questions such as “Hi, what’s your name, please? How do you spell your family name?” I was spelling my last name:


When Ayla heard that I used the word ‘dash’ between my two last names, she repeated it by herself several times: dash, dash, dash.

Some of the other words she repeated in other classes were career, earthquake, couch, happiness, flour.
Example 2.

This example was taken from a context in which Oner asked me what ‘sağlık olsun’ [never mind] in English meant. Since it was an idiom in Turkish, it was hard for me to provide a direct translation of it off the top of my head. So, I gave Oner several options that I thought were close to its meaning such as ‘whatever’, ‘what are you gonna do, don’t worry’. When I said ‘what are you gonna do’, he did not understand the sentence clearly and asked:

Oner: What...?

Cagri: What are you going to do?

Then, he repeated it for several times on his own, emphasizing each word:

Oner: What are you going to do? What are you going to do?

R1.3. Learner Agency, Category 3: Suggesting

Suggesting, as the name already implies, occurred whenever one of the four participants wanted to suggest something. Sometimes it was a suggestion for badly-given instruction, sometimes a suggestion for an activity such as ‘why doesn’t everybody say one word?’ or ‘let’s not pause the song’, and sometimes a suggestion for a peer during pair work ‘shall we start?’. What distinguished suggesting from commenting was that it did not include statements as in commenting, rather, it implied that the teacher, the whole class or a peer took action as a response to a suggestion, directed mostly in the form of a question. Selected examples are:

Example 1.

In the context of a listening activity:
Ayla: Hatta bu sarkiyi alalım, arada biz bize bunu yapmak için. [Let us even get this song (from the teacher), in order to do this activity on our own once in a while].

Example 2.

When I was explaining the present perfect tense, I had a hard time expressing my thoughts clearly, and Leyla suggested:

Leyla: Geçmişte baslayıp etkisi hala suren desek? [What if we said ‘something started in the past, effects of which still apply’]? 

R1.4. Learner Agency, Category 4: Giving Examples on One’s Own Initiative

This subcategory applies to contexts in which the participants chose to give examples of their own after the teacher told them the meaning of a vocabulary item, explained the usage of a structure, etc. It is worth pointing out that the participants gave examples with their own initiatives without receiving a specific request either from the teacher or from their peers. For instance, the first example below happened when I was explaining what ‘all over’ meant and in which contexts it was used. Ayla shared her own example after I said ‘all over the place, all over the country’:

Example 1.

Ayla: All over the world.

What distinguishes this example from ‘calling out’ is that Ayla was not expected to throw in answers or brainstorm for that activity. In the former situation, the initiation would mainly come from the teacher while in the latter one, she gave an example using her own initiative.
Example 2.

This incidence occurred when I was teaching how and in which situations we could use the structure of ‘I was wondering if…’ Oner wanted to give an example on his own:

Oner: I was…I want to change my ticket.

Cagri: Orda ‘would like to’ demek daha kibar; ‘want to’ çok direk oluyor, kaba oluyor. [It is more polite to say ‘would like to’ there; ‘want to’ is too direct].

When Oner tried to give an example of his own, he first attempted to construct a sentence with “I was wondering” structure; however, he immediately changed his mind, in a way, avoided, and constructed a simpler sentence instead. Even though his example was not directly related to what I was teaching at that moment, I explained the more proper usage of ‘I want to’. This verbal indicator gave me opportunities for two things: a) understanding Oner’s current ability to construct complex sentences, and b) explaining a better usage of ‘want to’ in terms of the pragmatics of language.

R1.5. Learner Agency, Category 5: Guessing

Guessing was employed by Ayla 39 times, by Elif 8 times and by Oner 3 times in total. It exclusively occurred when the participants wanted to participate in contexts pertaining to the meanings of lexical items by taking their own guesses. They, sometimes, shared their guesses before I told them the meaning of a vocabulary item while sometimes took a guess upon seeing that I was having difficulty in finding the right translation in Turkish. Guesses were not limited to Turkish only; even though it was rare,
participants threw in guesses in English as well. The second example below represents the latter occurrences.

*Example 1.*

In a class in which we had an activity related to occupations, I asked Yasemin who was an instructor in the department of nursing:

Cagri: Sizde ‘nurse practitioner’ diye birşey var. O ne oluyor acaba? [There is something called ‘nurse practitioner’. I wonder what that is]?

And Oner just took a guess before Yasemin answered my question:

Oner: Hemsirelik uretimi, production. [Nurse production, production].

Then, Yasemin explained what a nurse practitioner was. Even though Oner’s guess was not true, it gave me a chance to see that he was mixing certain lexical items looking alike such as practitioner and production as well as giving me a chance to see his ability to guess the meaning of words from the context.

In this study, guessing was different than commenting on a vocabulary item in that, in the latter one, four participants commented about the meaning of a vocabulary item after they heard an explanation from the teacher or from another peer (but still taking an initiative to share their opinions). However, in guessing, four participants were pro-active in telling what they thought the vocabulary item meant. Besides, verbal indicators of commenting on a vocabulary item tended to include longer phrases or sentences whereas verbal indicators of guessing consisted of one or two words in many situations.
Example 2.

Elif: Baska nerelerde kullanabilirizhocam, bu tasiyıcı şeyini? *Asking for information*

Melis: Bebek tasiyan annelere ne deniyor acaba?

Elif: Carrier mother.

In this example, Melis asked the meaning of the ‘tasiyici anne’ [surrogate mother]. Then, Elif took a guess in a context where we were already discussing the various usages of the word ‘carrier’. I was sure that ‘carrier mother’ was not used for ‘tasiyici anne’ but could not remember the exact expression, either. However, I looked it up in an online dictionary on the spot and told them the correct meaning, surrogate mother. This example helped me see that Elif was still at a stage where she directly translated words from Turkish to English, and also opportunity to draw attention in class to the fact that direct translations into English may not always work.

**R1.6. Learner Agency, Category 6: Explaining**

Explaining occurred in two different ways: explain something to the teacher, and to a peer or peers.

Explaining to the teacher was employed in situations where the participants wanted to give reasons for their behaviors such as why they selected a particular answer, especially if it was wrong or different than others’ answers. Explanations were initiated by the four participants themselves. In other words, they were not answers to the teacher’s questions.
Explaining to a peer or peers, on the other hand, was used to make something more clear or easy to understand by giving information about it. Again, they were initiated by the participants themselves and were not answers to a peer’s question.

Selected examples are:

Example 1.

In this context, prior to reading a passage about shopping and supermarkets, students were introduced with some words and asked to place them in the blanks in the sentences provided. The first sentence was ‘Do you look in the refrigerator and kitchen _____ and make a list?’ One of the students filled in the blank with the word ‘decision’ instead of ‘cupboard’ and explained why she picked ‘decision’ for this sentence. Then, Ayla continued:

Ayla: Hikaye yazdığımız için. Ben de aynı hatayı yaptım, hani naparsın, bakarsın karar verirsin gibi. Hani hiç orda ben, şey, mutfak dolabı olarak düşünmedim..Bir de orda ‘make a list’ var ya (looks at me and laughs), liste yapmadan once karar verirsin (laughs even more). [Since we make up stories. I made the same mistake, you know, what you would do, you look at and decide. You know what I mean, I did not think kitchen cupboards there at all..Also, there is ‘make a list’ there (looks at me and laughs), you would decide before you make a list (laughs even more)].

Example 2.

This example took place when I gave an example to explain the past perfect tense: ‘When I went home, my sister had already cooked the dinner’. Oner was having a hard time understanding how the past perfect tense was used. So, Elif explained to her peer:
Oner: (…) Eve gittiğimde yani belirli surec icersinde farklı bir fiilin…(he stopped) [When I went home, that is, within a certain duration, a different verb’s…(he stopped)]

Elif: Sen eve gitmişsin, o bir geçmiş. Senin kardesinin yaptığı aktivite senden daha once olmuş bir şey. [You went home, that is in the past. The activity your sister did is something which had happened before the activity you did].

Oner: Daha da geçmiş [Even more ‘past’].

Elif: Hi-hi. [Yeap].

Cagri: Mutlaka geçmişe bir atıfta bulunulması lazım. Bazi sorular var, cozerken simdi ustunden geçeriz. [‘The past’ must definitely be referred. There are some questions; we can go over (referring to the past perfect tense) soon when we solve those questions].

**R1.7. Learner Agency, Category 7: Being Persistent**

Some of the questions that the four participants asked or some of the statement they uttered were not addressed by me, either because I did not hear it at all or because I was talking about something else at the time it was asked or said. In some situations, four participants persisted and asked the same question again, or raised their voices to bring up the same subject again. In addition, there were times when they asked to get classroom materials from me such as CDs or the Seinfeld episodes with English subtitles. Even though I agreed to bring the material for them, we did not have a chance to discuss how we would do the exchange. So, the four participants brought up the subject again. Being persistent consists of the verbal indicators articulated in these situations.
Example 1.

After watching one of the Seinfeld episodes with subtitles, we went over the unknown vocabulary items of which the students took notes. According to the video, Leyla called out a word something like “ready clause” but I did not hear her since her voice was a little low and since I was explaining another word at that time. Shortly after this, she attempted to utter the same word again but it got interrupted by another student. Exactly three minutes after her first attempt, Leyla threw in “ready clause” again, raising her voice a little bit. Even though she was mispronouncing the word, I knew that she meant “ridiculous” by “ready clause” but instead of correcting it directly, I repeated the word with the correct pronunciation in my response to Leyla:

Leyla: Ready clause hocam…[Ready clause hodjam]

Cagri: Ridiculous! Evet, güzel bir kelime. [Yes, that is a nice word].

Example 2.

In this context, Elif asked me examples of other contexts in which the word “carrier” could be used. I looked the word up in an online dictionary and provided them with its usages in other contexts.

Cagri: HIV carrier var, carrier pigeon var, hani o tasiyici guvercinler var ya, letter carrier var. [There is the HIV carrier, there is the carrier pigeon, you know those carrier pigeons, there is the letter carrier].

Elif: Pigeon’in yazilisini yazsak ya hocam? [Why don’t we write ‘pigeon’s spelling, hodjam’?]

But I did not hear Elif’s question, so she persisted:
Elif: Pigeon nasıl yaziliyodu? [How is ‘pigeon’ written]?

Then, I wrote pigeon’s spelling on the board. By being persistent, she created an opportunity for herself to learn the spelling of ‘pigeon’.

*Example 3.*

In several occasions, Ayla displayed a distinct form of being persistent. At the beginning of a class, she asked me if they could get the listening CDs to practice at home. I said yes; however, we did not talk about how we would do the exchange. So, Ayla asked again at the end of the class,

Ayla: CD icin ne yapabiliriz? [What can we do for the CD]?

Once Ayla told me that she, too, wanted to get the Seinfeld episodes from me like several other students; however, her request passed unnoticed in the first time. So, she persisted and asked the same question later in that class:

Ayla: Peki bu filmleri almak icin nasıl bir yol izleyeceğiz? [So, what kind of a way we are going to follow to get these episodes]?

*Example 4.*

There were times when being persistent did not necessarily seem to be a positive aspect of learner agency. Initial parts of the example below were discussed under the subcategory of “Commenting on a vocabulary item”.

Oner: Hocam, envy ne? Dusman miydi hocam? [Hodjam, what is envy? Was it ‘enemy’]?

Cagri: Dusman, enemy.

Ayla: Envy ne demek peki? [What is envy, then]?

Cagri: Envy, imrenmek. [Envy is ‘to envy’].
Oner: Envy canavar demek değil mi hocam? [Doesn’t envy mean ‘beast’, hodjam]?  

Here, I answered Oner’s question by telling him that maybe he was confusing envy and enemy. Meanwhile, Ayla commented and asked:

Ayla: Sanki şeytan gibi bir anlami vardı. Seytan neydi? [I think it has a meaning something like ‘devil’. What was ‘devil’]?  

Cagri: Devil. Seytan, devil.  

Then, Oner persisted:

Oner: Hocam bu envy’nin başka bir anlamı vardı ya sanki. Kesinlikle hatırlıyorum başka bir anlaminı. [Hodjam, I think envy had another meaning. I definitely remember that it had a different meaning].  

Cagri: Baska bir anlami oldugunu sanmiyorum. [I don’t think there is a different meaning].  

Oner: Yok mu? [No]?  

Here, I commented again that maybe he was confusing ‘envy’ with another word looking alike such as ‘ivy’ referring to poisonous ivy. He was still not convinced and the dialogue went on for a few minutes. This incidence took place when the students were working in two groups and writing the scripts of a role-play activity. While Oner was discussing the meaning of ‘envy’ with me, his team (including Elif, another student and Ayla) continued to write the role-play script.

**R1.8. Learner Agency, Category 8: Translating into English/Turkish**  

This category includes verbal indicators when the four participants simply translated a sentence in Turkish into English or vice versa during an activity. The four
participants translated a sentence by their own initiatives, that is, without being asked, in most cases; however, there were a few occasions where they displayed translation after being asked by the teacher. Even in that situation, though, the fact that the four participants took the initiative to translate the sentence when the question was directed to the whole class made this category a part of the theme of learner agency. Also, when the translation occurred as a response to the teacher’s question, the verbal indicator was coded as ‘answering the teacher’ as well. In those instances, the verbal indicator was only counted under the ‘answering the teacher' subcategory in order to prevent duplication.

*Example 1.*

Cagri: Surayi, 10.sayfayi okuyorum [I am reading this part on page 10]…Asking about or commenting on someone’s major or occupation can be used as a polite way to start or continue a conversation.

Ayla: Kibar bir yoludur..iletisimi devam ettirmenin kibar bir yoludur…[It is a polite way, is a polite way to continue communication].

*Example 2.*

Cagri: “Of course, studying with the best in the business is great”. Bu cumle ne demek? [What does this sentence mean]?

Oner: Bu isteki en iyi okul çalışma hayati. [The best school in this business is the work life]. *Answering the teacher* & *Translating into Turkish*

In this example, Oner’s translation wasn’t correct but still, it informed me where Oner was standing in terms of his ability to understand sentences in English.
Example 3.

While translating into Turkish occurred 47 times (Ayla 14; Elif 9; Oner 19 and Leyla 5), translating into English was carried out only twice by Ayla.

Cagri: Have you ever heard this expression, “Senin ilacin sende”? [“Your cure is in you”].

Ayla: You should look inside.

When Ayla translated this expression into English, I was able to see that she does not rely on literal meanings only. Thus, she created an opportunity for me to evaluate her language level in a different context.

**R.1.9. Learner Agency, Category 9: Telling the Meaning of a Vocabulary Item**

The verbal indicators for this category were elicited 54 times by Ayla and 3 times by Elif. Data indicate that they told the meaning of a vocabulary item in three different ways: a) on the spot (Ayla 41 times), b) using a laptop/dictionary (Ayla 13 times), and c) using previous class notes (Elif 3 times).

**R1.9.1. Telling the meaning of a vocabulary item on the spot**

This subcategory included verbal indicators of Ayla when she simply and without hesitation told the meaning of a vocabulary item when I asked the meaning of a word to the class in general or when a classmate asked the meaning of a word to me.

**Example 1.**

Cagri: Spontaneous?

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21 Direct translation for Senin Ilacin Sende is ‘Your medicine, your cure is in you’; however, it means that you are the person who knows yourself better than anybody, so, instead of looking for outside help, you should look inside you.
Example 2.

Cagri: What does attractive mean?

Ayla: Carpici, etkileyici. [Attractive, impressive].

Example 3.

Cagri: Poison?

Ayla: Zehir. [Poison].

Example 4.

Nesrin: Hocam, individually? [Hodjam, individually]?

Ayla: Bireysel. [Individual].

R1.9.2. **Telling the meaning of a vocabulary item by using a laptop/dictionary**

Ayla used to bring her laptop to the classes. Since there was wireless Internet access in the building, she could use her laptop during classes to look some words up in the online dictionary. It is worth explaining that Ayla did not bring her laptop specifically for our classes; she was an assistant professor in the university and used to come to the classes held on Monday directly from her office. Yet, she could have chosen the option of not using her laptop as an additional resource.

Example 1.

On one of the days when we watched a Seinfeld episode, Elif brought ‘croc off’ to our attention. However, I did not know the meaning of it. For a while, we tried to remember the context it was used. Then, Ayla asked:
Ayla: Croc of’un yanında shit var mıydı? “Shit”li var; “to be stupid” diyor. [Was ‘croc of’ used together with “shit”? (Looking at her laptop) There is a meaning with “shit”, it says “to be stupid”].

R1.9.3. Telling the meaning of a vocabulary item by using previous class notes

Example 1.

In this context, I was explaining the adverbs of frequency. After I used the Turkish version of the word ‘pretty’ in a sentence, Leyla asked what ‘pretty (adverb)’ meant.

Leyla: Bayagi neydi, dun öğrenmiştik? [What did pretty mean, we learned it yesterday]. *Asking peers*

Elif: Bayagi, evet, bayagi’yi dun öğrenmiştik. [Pretty, yes, we learned ‘pretty’ yesterday]. *Agreeing peers*

Oner: Bayagi, neydi, işte hemen unuttuk. [Bayagi, what was it, see, we have forgotten immediately.]. *Commenting on a peer’s question*

Nesrin: P-ret-ty! (slowly recalling its meaning)

Cagri: Evet! [Yes]!

Elif was looking for the meaning of ‘pretty’ among her previous class notes when Nesrin remembered its meaning, but apparently she did not hear Nesrin. She continued to look for ‘pretty’ in her notes and when she finally found it, she told her peers that it meant ‘bayagi’.
**R1.10. Learner Agency, Category 10: Negotiating with the Teacher/Peers on Shared Activity**

These verbal indicators were elicited when the four participants had something to say against what the teacher or a peer said regarding a shared activity in order to reach a common agreement. The following example demonstrates how Oner negotiated with the teacher regarding the usage of the past perfect tense.

*Example 1.*

Nesrin: Yapmıştı, hangisine giriyor? [In which one is ‘yapmıştı’ included (meaning the past tenses)]?

Oner: Evet, hocam, yapmıştı ne oluyor o zaman? [Yes, hodjam, what is ‘yap-miş-tım’, then]? *Agreeing with a peer*

Cagri: Hicbirine girmiyor. [It is not included in any of them].

Nesrin: Hocam past perfecte girmiyor mu, yap-miş-tı in? O da geçmişin geçmişi oluyor. [Hodjam, isn’t it included in the past perfect tense? That is ‘past’ of a ‘past’, too].

Oner: Mesela bir tane past perfectly örnek verelim hocam? [For example, let’s give an example for the past perfect tense, hodjam]? *Suggesting*

Elif: O senin dediğin şey mis’li geçmiş zamanın hikayesi (talking to Nesrin) [What you said is indicative mood, past perfect compound narrative tense (a past tense structure in Turkish)] *Communicating with a peer related to shared activity*

Cagri: When I went home, my sister had already cooked the dinner. Eve gittiğimde kardesim yemegi çoktan yapmıştı.
Oner, Nesrin: Tamam işte, yapmişti diye çevirdiniz. [See, you translated it as “yap-misti”].

In the remainder of this dialogue, I explained them that not all the tenses in Turkish have to have a corresponding tense in English and that languages have their own grammar structures. I also told them that it would be misleading to try to find an exact equivalent of each tense in Turkish. Instead, they should focus on their meaning. By negotiating in which tense ‘yap-mis-tin’ would be included in English, Oner gave me an opportunity to explain the students how they could handle the different grammatical structures in English and Turkish.

Example 2.

This example shows how Oner negotiated with a peer whether we say “I am getting up at 8” or “I get up at 8” to express habitual events in Turkish. Since I discuss this example further in chapter five, I present only a short section of it here.

Upon prior discussion about the same topic:

Melis: Sabah 8’de kalkarım demiyoruz mesela, sabah 8de kalkiyorum…[We don’t say ‘I get up at 8’, though, we say “I am getting up at 8”].

Oner: Ben Sabah 8’de kalkarım diyorum. [I say “I get up at 8”]

Cagri: Onu o şekilde kullanmiyoruz işte, sabahlari 8’de kalkiyorum diyoruz; simdiki zaman kullaniyoruz. [See, we don’t use it like that, we say ‘I am getting up at 8”; we use the present continuous tense].

Both of the examples selected above were taken from Oner’s scripts because negotiating with the teacher and peers on a shared activity was employed 25 times by
R1.11 Learner Agency, Category 11: Communicating with Peers

Communicating with peers refers to verbal indicators when the participants initiated a communication with their peers.

Example 1.

In this context, we were going to listen to a song by Leonard Cohen, Dance Me to the End of Love. I first distributed the lyrics of the song which I cut line by line and mixed, then, I asked students to put the lyrics in order while listening to the song. The first student who would arrange them according to the right order was going to be the winner. One of the students in the class was a music instructor at the university. So, Ayla communicated with her peer and said:

Ayla: Ali, senden performans bekliyoruz. [Ali, we are expecting a performance from you (meaning, we are expecting you to do well in this activity].

Example 2.

Another example by Ayla occurred when she suggested at the end of a class that I give them a writing assignment. After her suggestion, she turned to her peers and said:

Ayla: Ben kendi adima oneriyorum. [I am suggesting on my own behalf].

R1.12 Learner Agency, Category 12: Requesting

Requesting as a category was used 12 times (Oner 10; Elif 2) in total. It simply referred to a request made during the class time. Since Ayla and Leyla did not display any verbal indicators for this category, I did not discuss it in Chapter Four. Two selected examples for requesting are:
Example 1.

Oner: Hocam sunu bir yazalım bir saniye, iki saniye…[Hodjam, let us copy this from the board (to their notebooks), one second, two seconds…]

Example 2.

In this example, Oner was talking to the classmate sitting next to him, probably something relevant to the class activity. Since he missed what I said while talking to his classmate, he requested:

Oner: Bir daha alabilir miyiz cumleyi, hocam? [Would you please repeat the sentence again, hodjam]?

R2. Learner Reciprocity, Theme 2: Use of the Teacher/Peers as a Resource

Use of the mediator as a resource is one of the five forms of learner reciprocity Poehner used (2008). According to Poehner, autonomous learners know when they need guidance. If they are not capable enough “to provide it for themselves (...) they turn to the mediator as a knowledgeable interlocutor” (Poehner, 2008, p. 44). In the context of the current study, mediator mainly refers to the teacher and occasionally the more capable peer(s). Similar to what Poehner (2008) pointed out, use of the teacher and peers as a resource refers to verbal indicators which the four participants utilized to meet their needs stemming from lack of knowledge or guidance. Data in this study indicated that there is only one category pertaining to this theme: asking.

R2.1. Use of the Teacher/Peers as a Resource, Category 1: Asking

Use of the teacher and peers as a resource has only one category: asking. The questions that the four participants asked in this study constituted five different subcategories:
R2.1.1. Asking for information

Asking for information occurred whenever the four participants attempted to ask a question to the teacher or to the class in general. For example, on October 26, 2009, Ayla asked:

*Example 1.*

Ayla: Bucks ne? [What is ‘bucks’]?

when we were going over the students’ answers for a fill-in-the-blanks vocabulary exercise. The sentence in which ‘bucks’ was used was: “I am afraid to broach this subject but can I borrow a few bucks?” Normally, the vocabulary item they were supposed to place in the blank here was ‘broach the subject’; however, by asking what ‘bucks’ was, Ayla not only created a learning opportunity for herself but also gave me a chance to explain the daily usage of this word for the whole class. Another interesting question Ayla asked was:

*Example 2.*

Ayla: Bakis acısı ne? Nasıl deriz? [What is ‘viewpoint’? How do we say that]?

*Example 3.*

This is a good example since it demonstrates a different intention for asking for information. Here, Oner asked for the pronunciation of a vocabulary item:

Oner: Linen nasıl okunuyor hodjam? [How is ‘linen’ pronounced, *hodjam*]?
Oner wasn’t sure about the pronunciation of this word, so attempted to use the teacher as a resource for its correct pronunciation. In fact, one of the students (Pelin) in this class was majoring in textile engineering and she commented on the pronunciation of this word by saying that their English teacher pronounced it as “/lain.in/” in their vocational English course. However, as far as my familiarity with this word went, linen was pronounced as “/\ln.in/”. Since I was not sure, I told them that I would check for the correct pronunciation and tell them the following day. The next day, I told them the correct pronunciation which was “/\ln.in/”. By asking this question, Oner created a chance for a learning moment for the whole class, especially for the textile engineering student who would come across this word frequently in her future job.

Example 4.

This example which shows both Leyla’s and Elif’s verbal attempts for the use of the teacher as a resource occurred after we watched a Seinfeld episode. Even though I did not specifically instruct the students that they should take notes of the unknown words while watching the episode (this was a deliberate decision on my side), Elif (and Ayla, too) took a lot of notes for the unfamiliar words she came across. After watching the episode for the first time, the students called out these vocabulary items. We watched the episode again subsequent to talking about the meanings and contexts of these items. Elif asked for information for the meaning of a vocabulary item while Leyla asked for information for the spelling of that item.

Elif: ‘Coy’ diye bir şey vardi. [There was something called ‘coy’].

Leyla: Hocam nasıl yazılıyo? [Hodjam, how is it written]?

Melis: Ce- O- Ye (spelling the letters in Turkish phonetics).
Elif: Coy (pronouncing ‘coy’ in Turkish phonetics as if she was saying ‘joy’).

*Example 5.*

This example includes questions both for asking for information and asking for confirmation. In this context, the students were working in groups. I was walking around to answer their individual questions. This dialogue started when Ayla wanted to make sure about a sentence:

Ayla: Peki surda, ‘did you ask another person’ olur mu? [So, would ‘did you ask another person’ be OK here]? *Asking for confirmation*

Cagri: Hi-hi [Yeap] ya da present perfect de olur. [Or present perfect would be fine, too]. Bu da olur da, have you asked..[This one would be fine, too, but ‘have you asked’…

Ayla: İşte, öyle yazmışım, sonra sanki…[In fact, I had first written it like that but then, you know…]

Cagri: Olur olur, ‘have you asked another person’ hatta daha iyi. [Uh-huh. ‘have you asked another person’ is even better].

Then, Ayla asked a good question to use the teacher as a resource and created an additional learning opportunity for herself:

Ayla: Konusma dilinde hangisi daha sik kullanılıyor? [Which one is used more often in the spoken language]? *Asking for information*

**R2.1.2. Asking for confirmation**

Verbal indicators were coded as ‘asking for confirmation’ if the four participants used them to make sure about something they were not completely certain. For this reason, the verbal indicators had to include the element of the language (e.g., a meaning
or a sentence) that needed to be confirmed. It is also worth mentioning that no verbal
indicators were observed for asking for confirmation from a peer or peers. All of the
questions asked to get confirmation were directed to the teacher in this study. However, it
is possible that the questions four participants asked their peers silently might have been
asked for confirmation.

Example 1.

In this example, Elif asked for confirmation from the teacher while she was
working on her own for a role-play activity:

Elif: Mesela, cumle kurarken şey diyebilir miyim, if I go internationally-known
school, it will be good for my job? [For example, can I say, like, ‘if go
internationally-known school, it will be good for my job’ when
constructing sentences]?

Cagri: Hi-hi, olur. [Yeap, you can say]. Go to an internationally known school.

Example 2.

The subject of this class was “Asking about lost items, describing objects”. We
listened to several dialogues in which people were calling their friends or a taxi station to
inquire about their lost items. If the item was found, they would give reactions such as
“Oh, really, that’s great!” Following this activity, I was telling the students that they can
use expressions like “Oh, really, that’s great/Wow, wonderful” whenever they feel happy
about the news they just heard. Then, Oner asked for confirmation:

Oner: That’s great, muhteşem mi demek? [Does ‘that’s great’ mean
‘muhteşem’]?
In this case, if Oner had asked a question like “What does ‘that’s great’ mean?”, the verbal indicator would be coded as ‘asking for information’; however, since he provided the meaning about which he wanted to make sure (muhteşem), this verbal indicator was coded as ‘asking for confirmation’.

Example 3.

While she working on a writing task individually, Ayla asked:

Ayla: ‘Some advice’ olur mu? [Is ‘some advice’ correct]?

Cagri: Hi-hi, some advice. [Yeap, some advice].

Ayla: ‘With you’ mu deriz ondan sonra? [Do we use ‘with you’ after it]?

Cagri: Cumleye bakayim. ‘I need some advice from you’ ya da ‘I need your advice’ diyebilirsin. [Let me see the sentence. You can say ‘I need some advice from you’ or ‘I need your advice’].

Ayla: Hmm, ‘I need some advice’ diyeyim. [Hmm, I will use ‘I need some advice’].

Two of the questions Ayla asked in other classes to get confirmation were:

‘Temel ihtiyac, basic need mi?’ [Is ‘temel ihtiyac’ basic need]? and ‘Make a career olur mu?’ [Is ‘make a career’ correct]?

In these situations, if she wanted to get information from me, she would directly ask: ‘What is ‘temel ihtiyac’?’ and ‘Which word do we use with career?’ Instead, she included her alternative answers in the questions as well.

Example 4.

In a context in which I was explaining what the word “Asian” referred to in American English:
Cagri: Japon, Hong konglu, Taiwanli tipleri kastediyorlar. [They refer to folks from Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan].

Ayla: Uzak doğulu [Far Easterner] * Commenting on a vocab item*

Ayla: Hintilere ne deniyo? [What are Indians called (meaning people from India)]? *Asking for information*

Cagri: Indian.

Ayla: Indian diye şeye de deniyor mu, kizilderililere? [Is Indian also used for the Native Americans, too]? Asking for confirmation

Cagri: Deniyor. [Yeap, it is used].

Ayla: Ben bugün ona iliskin birşey okumustum. Allah allah ne alakasi var Amerika yerlilerinin Hintilerle falan, sonra anladım da anlayasiya kadar baya bir zaman geçti. [Today I read something about it. I said, hmm, what do Native Americans have to do with Indians, then I got it but it took me a while]. *Commenting on a vocabulary item*

Example 5.

While the students were writing a dialogue on their own to get prepared for a pair activity, Elif asked for confirmation:

Elif: Vakit ayiramamak, ‘I won’t share time’ olur mu? [Would ‘vakit ayiramamak’ be I won’t share time]?

Ayla: O paylasmak oluyor. [That means ‘to share’]. *Commenting on a peer’s question or remark
R2.1.3. Asking peers

This subcategory simply occurred whenever the four participants wanted to get information from their peers. In some cases, it was about the meaning of a vocabulary item I just said in class (they probably asked their peers in order not to distract the whole class for something I just said) whereas, in other cases, it was about finding out where we were in terms of the activity such as asking a page number. Both of the examples were taken from Oner’s verbal indicators given that Oner displayed this subcategory by 22 times compared to Ayla, Elif and Leyla who displayed it for 2, 5 and 3 times, respectively.

Example 1.

When we were reading a passage from the textbook, a student asked for the meaning of ‘handful’:

Nesrin: Handful of positions?

Cagri: Handful, bir avuc, az. [Handful, a few].

Then, Oner asked asked his peer for the sentence it was used in the passage:

Oner: Nerde geçiyo? [Where is it used]?

Example 2.

This example was taken from another context in which Oner asked a question to the student sitting next to him. Since he asked too many questions to his peer that day, I took initiative to answer his question so that the other student could focus on her own task without getting distracted too much. As I pointed out in the researcher journal, December 1, 2009 was the day I began to realize that Oner was asking too many questions to his peers sitting next to him, and perhaps this was something that bothered
his peers. I discuss this matter further in chapter five. It is also essential to state regarding this example that, shortly before Oner asked what ‘essential’ meant to his peer, another student asked me what ‘essential’ meant and I explained to the class. He apparently missed that moment since he asked this question as if it was being asked for the first time.

Oner: Essential neydi? (toward his peer) [What did ‘essential’ mean?]


* Asking a peer silently *

Even though the verbal indicators of this pattern of questioning were not audible in the video-recordings, it was observable that the four participants were asking something relevant to the class activity. Asking a peer silently was elicited 9 times by Leyla, 5 times by Oner, 5 times by Ayla and 2 times by Elif.

**R2.1.4. Asking in English**

This category includes any questions asked in English during the classes. It has two subcategories: a) asking for information in English to the teacher and b) asking peers in English during group activities.

1.1.1. Asking for information in English

*Example 1.*

Ayla: Anlami neydi spread’in? [What did ‘spread’ mean]?

Cagri: Passive’de fiilin 3. hali kullanılıyor. (Answering someone else’s question at that time) [In passive voice, past participle form of a verb is used].

---

22 Sometimes participants used the simple present tense to ask about the meaning of a word such as “What does ‘X’ mean?” Sometimes, on the other hand, they used the simple past tense: “What did ‘X’ mean?” In Turkish the latter tense implies that the participant knew the meaning of that word or saw it somewhere before but can’t remember for that time being. For this reason, I kept the correct translations of the tenses in their questions.
Example 2.

According to the video transcript of December 14, 2009, Ayla asked me another question in English: ‘Case means..?’ What I wrote in my researcher journal regarding today is worth mentioning: “Today I noticed something about Ayla. If I am speaking in English at a particular period in a class, she asks her questions in English. Even though they are not complex sentences, she tries to maintain the language for that particular duration. Today she asked the meaning of a word in English, which I can’t remember right now. I think, the fact that she tries to maintain English in class activities is a sign of her autonomy as a learner.”

1.4.2 Asking peers in English during group activities

Asking peers in English occasionally occurred during speaking activities such as role-plays and discussion activities.

Example 1.

I talked about this example under the subcategory of commenting on/about the activity above. In this context, we were covering a unit on ‘giving opinions, agreeing and disagreeing’. I instructed the students for the speaking activity in English. They were going to think of a big decision that they needed to make in the near future and write down the pros and cons of that decision to exchange opinions with each other in a group speaking activity. After working on their own for 10 minutes and asking individual questions to me, they formed a group of four to start speaking. Ayla was the first student who took the initiative to speak up in English. At the end of her comment, she asked her peers’ opinions in English:
Ayla: My decision is about my son’s school. I think he should go to public
tschool. I think public school is near our house, so he has extra time. He
will not go to school with school bus. I think that he grows up in society.

What do you think?

Elif: I agree with you because..near your house. It is good thing because school
bus is bad for your children. That’s all. *Commenting in English in a
group activity*

**R2.1.5. About target culture & cultural differences**

The four participants used the teacher as a resource from time to time by asking
about the target culture and how certain things are done in the US as compared to Turkey.
The following example was taken from a class in which we watched a Seinfeld episode.
Ayla asked me how ‘treating someone to something’ worked in the US.

Ayla: Amerika’da ismarlama kulturu nasıl? [How is the concept of treating
someone to something in the US]?

Cagri: Var öyle..acayip yok ama var yine de. Karsılıklı; birisi sana birşey
yaptıysa sen de onu yemeğe götrebiliyosun. [Yes, there is treating..It
does not happen very often but it is in the culture. It is reciprocal; if
someone did you a favor, you can take him/her to dinner]. Iyilik yaptıysa
birisi sana, para vermek ayıp olcaksa ‘let me buy you lunch’ falan
diyosun. [If someone did a favor for you and you can’t offer money
directly, you say ‘let me buy you lunch’ or something like that].
Ayla: ‘Alman hesabi’ kavrami var ya, hani herkes kendi hesabini kendi odesin gibi… [You know there is this concept of ‘German way of paying the bill’, like, everybody pays for what they order]…

Cagri: O da var. Daha rahatlar en azından bize göre. Ama şey de var hani, ismarlama falan, öyle şeyler de var. O anlamda hiç borçlu kalmak istemiyorlar; sen birine birşey aldiysan, çok geçmeden hemen onun karşılığında birşey yapmak istiyorlar. [There is that, too. At least, they are more comfortable (when paying separately) as opposed to us. But, they treat you to something, too. They don’t want to remain debted to anyone; if you bought something for someone, they want to do something in return before too long].

Asking questions about target culture is a good way of using the teacher as a resource in view of the fact that such information is not written anywhere and is usually learned either by first-hand experience or by asking someone who had first-hand experience in that culture. In case of an adult EFL classroom, the number of questions about target culture might heavily depend on whether the teacher has lived or visited the country in which the target language is used.

Example 2.

This is the last example pertaining to the theme of using the teacher as a resource. It demonstrates how the four participants in this study asked about cultural differences between the US and Turkey. We were covering the relative clauses when Oner asked me:
Oner: Hocam, bizde Türkçe dersleri var ya, orda da İngilizce dersleri var mı? [Hodjam, you know we have the Turkish classes, do they have English classes, too]? 

Cagri: Edebiyatını falan öğretiliyorlar da, bizdeki gibi ozne yüklem falan o tarz İngilizce yok. [They teach English literature and such but they don’t teach subject, verb, etc, (meaning English grammar) as we do with Turkish]. 

Oner: Nasıl yok? Dilbilgisini nasıl öğretiliyorlar o zaman hocam? [What does ‘they don’t teach grammar’ mean? How do they learn grammar, then, hodjam]? 

Asking about target culture was displayed 6 times by Ayla and 2 times by Oner while asking about cultural differences were displayed only 3 times by Oner. 

R3. Learner Reciprocity, Theme 3: Responding to the Teacher/Peers 

Responding to the teacher and peers has the second larger number of categories (i.e., six) as a theme after learner agency. Responding to the teacher and peers encompasses verbal indicators which were carried out in order to respond to a question, a comment, in short, a verbal indicator coming from the teacher or a peer. In this study, responding to the teacher and peers was demonstrated primarily by the following categories or subcategories:

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<tr>
<td><strong>Responding to the teacher/peers</strong></td>
<td>Answering</td>
<td>Agreeing</td>
<td>Repeating when asked by the teacher</td>
<td>Indicating comprehension</td>
<td>Remembering</td>
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Each category and subcategory is described with selected examples below.

R3.1. **Responding to the Teacher/Peers, Category 1: Answering**

R3.1.1. **Answering the teacher/peers**

After making students listen to the pronunciations of some words from the audio recording, I asked them:

*Example 1.*

Cagri: Dikkatinizi ceken neler var? [What are the things you have noticed]?

Then, Ayla was the first student who answered me:

Ayla: Sanki write’ta bir yukselis varmis gibi. [It sounds as if there is a rising intonation in ‘write’].

*Example 2.*

The second example regarding ‘answering the teacher/peers’ category occurred when we were reading a passage on the textbook. There were some sentences with relative clauses. At first, I tried to explain the sentences to the class but since I wasn’t sure if they were able to follow me, I asked:

Cagri: Bunlari anlamaniz zoruyor mu, hangisi relative clause, hangisi ne? [Is it difficult for you to understand these, which one is a relative clause, which one is what]?

Elif: Ben ilk defa goruyorum sahsen su anda. [I am, personally, seeing them for the first time].

Here, Elif both answered my question and commented on the activity by responding to the question initiated by the teacher.
**Example 3.**

In this context, we were translating the follow-up discussion questions given at the end of a unit a whole class; I asked the students if they wanted me to write the sentences on the board. Probably because they were already written on the textbook, Oner answered my question by saying:

Cagri: Yazmama gerek var mı tahtaya? [Is there a need for me to write these on the board]?

Oner: Yok hocam, yorulmayın. [No need, hodjam, don’t get tired].

**Example 4.**

The fourth and fifth examples are provided to show contexts where one of the four participants answered one of his/her peer’s question.

Nesrin: Bu relative clause’lar şeyler oluyor değil mi, which ni-ni-ni diye açıklama amaçlı kullanılıyor. [These relative clauses are the ones that are used to explain something, right? Like, you say ‘bla bla’ after using ‘which’]?

Oner: Evet…mesela yer açıklıyor where diyosun. [Yes…for example, if you are describing a place, you use ‘where’].

**Example 5.**

In this context, Demet was talking in English to summarize her group’s decision for a group speaking activity. While she was talking, she paused to ask a word she couldn’t remember at that moment. Ayla, was the first peer who responded to Demet’s question among the other eight students.

Demet: Duzenli? [Regular]?

Ayla: Regularly.
In Turkish, adverbs are not designated with suffixes such as “ly” as they are done in English. Instead, adverbs are expressed with phrases such as “düzenli bir şekilde” [in a regular manner or way]. Even though Demet did not openly say “in a regular way” in her question, Ayla answered her by saying “regularly” rather than “regular”. Ayla could have easily said “regular” if she did not pay attention to the grammar structure the word was going to be used. Before asking the question, Demet implied that she was going to use the word with “earn money”. The fact that Ayla directly said “regularly” showed that she was able to distinguish between the use of adjectives and adverbs. This is a good example to one of Duranti’s (2004) three properties of agency: ‘producing actions that are the object of evaluation” (Duranti, 2004 as cited in van Lier, 2008, p. 163) because in her response Ayla gives the teacher, whether it is intentional or not, a chance to understand where she stands in her actual development regarding adjectives and adverbs.

R3.1.2. Calling out

‘Calling out’ occurred in situations where the teacher asked questions to the whole class directly or indirectly and got answers from one or a few (or sometimes the whole class) students who called out answers. The relation of this category to language learning potential is that participants chose to answer the teacher’s question even though they were not nominated by the teacher. Hence, there was some kind of initiation involved. “Calling out” was carried out in four different subcategories:

R3.1.2.1. Calling out answers alone in Turkish

As the label already implies, calling out answers alone in Turkish refers to the answers which the four participants called out an answer individually, that is, independent from the other peers in class and performed at different times. This
subcategory included answers given completely in Turkish. In some cases, however, the four participants called out verbal indicators having one or two words in English. As long as the main clause was in Turkish, these verbal indicators were grouped under this subcategory as well. Example (1) below demonstrates such occurrence:

*Example 1.*

In this warm-up activity, we were brainstorming about materials such as plastic and leather prior to covering the order of adjectives. Ayla called out an answer alone:

Ayla: Paper olur mu? [Would ‘paper’ be OK]?

By means of this question, Ayla both called out an answer alone and asked for confirmation as to whether ‘paper’ could be counted as a material.

**R3.1.2.2. Calling out answers along with others in Turkish**

This subcategory included answers called out by a few students simultaneously in Turkish.

*Example 1.*

I asked students what the simple present tense was to activate their previous knowledge about the topic. I wrote answers on the blackboard as they called out.

Cagri: Simple present ne oluyo? [What is the simple present]?

Melis: Fiilin 1. hali. [Present form of the verbs].

Elif: Tekillerle ‘s’ takisi. [‘S’ ending with the single people].

Oner: Yapar, eder diye gider. [It goes like ‘he does, he makes’].

**R3.1.2.3. Calling out answers alone in English**

This subcategory refers to answers called out individually and completely in English.
Example 1.

During a whole class discussion about decision-making styles, I asked:

Cagri: Can you decide spontaneously?

Melis: Sometimes…when I want to go near my family, I can say ‘I am going’.

Cagri: It depends..I think sometimes it takes me a while to decide about simple things.

Ayla: Yesterday, I changed wedding ring spontaneously.

Cagri: It was a quick decision.

R3.1.2.4. Calling out answers along with others in English

‘Calling out answers along with others in English’ comprises of verbal indicators which were displayed by at least two students to answer a teacher’s question simultaneously and in English.

Example 1.

In this class, we were covering a unit on ‘asking about lost items and describing objects’. This example occurred during the warm-up exercise in which students were asked to match the six descriptions of objects with their pictures. After letting the students do the exercise on their own, I read out loud the descriptions one by one (e.g., it has my history book inside) and they called out the names of the objects (e.g., bag). It is worth noting that the names of the objects weren’t provided on the book.

Example 2.

This example was taken from a context in which the students were supposed to put six sentences in the correct order to make a conversation. The first sentence was already numbered on the book, so I provided the second sentence to get the exercise
going. Then, all of the students began to call out their answers one by one. There were seven students in this class. All of the sentences they called out were audible by others; however, Leyla did not seem to be calling out her answers loudly. In the video, only the last sentence she uttered (i.e., She is) was heard.

Cagri: What does your friend Sally do (1)? She is a film director (2).

Whole class: Really, wow, that sounds really exciting (3), Yeah, I think she likes it (4), She must be pretty creative (5), She is (6).

R3.1.3. Answering the teacher/peers in English

Verbal indicators coded as ‘answering the teacher/peer in English’ referred to the four participants’ responses given in English to the teacher’s or a peer’s question.

Example 1.

In this class, we covered material outside the textbook, a dialogue between a father and his daughter about the daughter’s study abroad experience as well as her jetlag. The dialogue was followed by some vocabulary exercises.

Cagri: Do we know what jetlag is? (Students murmured).

Ayla: Time…time differences.

By saying “time differences”, Ayla allowed me know that she was familiar with the concept of ‘jetlag’ but she wasn’t able to express it in English with a complete sentence. In this context, Ayla’s answer differed in that she was the first student who tried to express the definition of jetlag in English while other students called out answers in Turkish. Then, I read out loud the definition of jetlag from the worksheet.

Example 2.

This is another example displayed by Ayla as to answering the teacher in English.
Cagri: Embarrassing…cumle içinde kullanırsak nasıl kullanabiliriz?

[Embarrassing…How can we use it in a sentence]?

Ayla: This situation is embarrassing.

Example 3.

This example was taken from a class in which we covered material outside the textbook. The topic was money. There were some discussion questions, which were: Do you think that your society places too much emphasis on material things? Do you think that societies in the past were different? In what ways they were different? I directed these questions to the whole class. One of the students began to share her opinions in Turkish. Then, I invited them to express their opinions in English and encouraged them to at least give it a try. After several students shared their opinions in English, Ayla answered my question in English:

Ayla: Trust and honesty more important for marriage, now money.

Example 4.

In this class, we were discussing the decision-making styles. I intended to start a whole-class discussion by asking:

Cagri: Which one is better? (referring to the decision-making styles)

Elif: Maybe picturing is better than others because picturing the consequences is important.

Example 5.

Answering a peer’s question in English usually included short answers with regards to the meaning of some vocabulary items in English such as:

Hakan: Utangaç neydi? [What did ‘utangaç’ mean]?

Ayla: Shy.
Answering peers silently

Even though the verbal indicators of this pattern of answering were not audible in the video-recordings, it was observable that the four participants were silently answering a question their peers’ asked with regards to the class activity. Answering a peer silently was elicited 12 times by Ayla, 3 times by Elif, and 2 times by Leyla. Oner, on the other hand, did not elicit any verbal indicators for answering a peer silently.

R3.2. Responding to the Teacher/Peers, Category 2: Agreeing

Agreeing took place whenever the four participants expressed that they had the same opinion or accepted the teacher’s or peers’ suggestions or ideas. Mainly two subcategories emerged related to agreeing: agreeing with the teacher and peers in Turkish, and agreeing with the teachers and peers in English.

R3.2.1. Agreeing with the teacher/peer(s) in Turkish

This subcategory includes verbal indicators that were performed merely in Turkish when agreeing with the teacher or one’s peer(s).

Example 1.

This example was taken from a class in which we covered material outside the textbook. The topic was money. There were some discussion questions, which were: Do you think that your society places too much emphasis on material things? Do you think that societies in the past were different? In what ways they were different? I directed these questions to the whole class. One of the students (Sevgi) began to share her opinions in Turkish. After she was done, I kindly invited them to express their opinions in English. Right after my question, Ayla agreed with me in Turkish by saying “Evet, İngilizce ifade edebileceksek” [Yes, if we can express these in English]. She did not complete her
sentence but she most likely meant that there was no point in expressing one’s ideas in Turkish since the actual purpose of this class was to learn English rather than exchanging opinions about a certain topic in Turkish.

*Example 2.*

In the class from which this example was excerpted, we covered a reading passage about decision-making styles. By coincidence, Ayla’s dissertation topic was about decision-making styles as well. The students were working individually to write their dialogues for the following role-play activity, Ayla opened a sidetracked conversation while other students were working silently:

Ayla: Benim doktora tez konumdu karar verme stilleri. [‘Decision-making styles’ was my dissertation topic]. *Sidetracking*

Cagri: O konu aslında çok ilginç bir konu. [That topic is, in fact, a very interesting one].

Then, Ayla agreed with me in Turkish:

Ayla: Kesinlikle ilginç bir konu. [Absolutely an interesting topic].

*Example 3.*

In this context, I was explaining the adverbs of frequency. After I used the Turkish version of the word ‘pretty’ in a sentence, Leyla asked what ‘pretty (adverb)’ meant and Elif agreed with her peer in Turkish:

Leyla: Bayagi neydi, dun öğrenmiştik? [What did pretty mean, we learned it yesterday]. *Asking peers*

Elif: Bayagi, evet, bayagi’yi dun öğrenmiştik. [Pretty, yes, we learned ‘pretty’ yesterday]. *Agreeing peers*
Example 4.

In this example, Hakan commented on a vocabulary item (i.e., mud) while we were answering some ‘fill-in-the-blanks’ vocabulary exercises about a reading passage outside the textbook.

Hakan: Bir de ‘bulch’ diye birşey var. [There is also something called ‘bulch’].

Melis: Hic duymadım. [I never heard (that one)].

Ayla: Ben de. [Me, neither].

By suggesting another word whose meaning was similar to ‘mud’, Hakan let me understand that his vocabulary knowledge is beyond some simple vocabulary. By agreeing with one of her peers, Ayla created an opportunity for me to evaluate her vocabulary knowledge, even with a simple dialogue.

R.3.2.2. Agreeing with the teacher/peer (s) in English

This subcategory includes verbal indicators that were performed merely in English when agreeing with the teacher or one’s peer (s).

Example 1.

This example took place when we were engaged in a whole class discussion about decision-making styles. One of the people in the reading passage decided by consulting with a palm-reader. I commented on this decision-making style by saying:

Cagri: I think, consulting with a palm-reader isn’t good. Like, fortune-tellers or palm-readers (students laughed). What are they going to say about your life? So, I don’t agree with the second one.

Then, Elif agreed with me in English:

Elif: Yes, I agree with you (while laughing).
Example 2.

After covering a reading passage outside the textbook, Yasemin answered my question in English and Ayla agreed with her peer in English:

Cagri: What is the general message the author is trying to give us?

Yasemin: Be careful in the supermarket! (We all laughed since Yasemin’s answer was the same with the title of the reading passage we covered).

Cagri: Yes, anything else?

Ayla: Yes, same.

Example 3.

Last example is taken from the same context as the first example in this subcategory. After we finished our whole class discussion about decision-making styles, I asked students: “Anything else you want to add?” Upon a few seconds of silence, I asked again: “You want to go?” and laughed. Then, Melis commented:

Melis: I don’t want to go.

Cagri: We are done. Hayatinizda iyi karar vermeler diliyorum. Bu kursa gelmekle iyi bir karar verdiniz. [I wish you good decision-making throughout your life (in a humourous way). You made a good decision by joining this class].

Ayla; Melis: Kesinlikle. [Absolutely].

Cagri: Umarım öyle düşünüyosunuzdur. [I hope you think so (smiling)].

Elif: Yes, you are right (smiling).

R3.3. Responding to the Teacher/Peers, Category 3: Repeating

Repeating as a category has three subcategories: repeating when asked by the teacher, repeating on one’s own initiative and repeating for others’ comprehension.

Repeating on one’s own initiative was described above under the theme of learner
R3.3.1. Repeating when asked by the teacher

This subcategory refers to the verbal indicators produced when the teacher asked students to repeat a language item in English. In most cases, repeating when asked by the teacher was related to practicing the pronunciation of a word in English.

Example 1.

In the first class on October 19th, I mainly focused on the pronunciation of some basic vocabulary about classroom expressions such as ‘listen to the conversation’. In this particular context, I was making students repeat ‘vocabulary’ one by one. When it was Ayla’s turn, she started laughing and couldn’t repeat at first. Then, she repeated the word once but it was problematic. After proving the correct pronunciation, I asked her to repeat again. Even though she was still laughing, she managed to repeat the word the second time but this time, she mispronounced another syllable in ‘vocabulary’. Since she burst into laughing after the second one, we agreed to continue with the student sitting next to her and come back to her after her laughing stopped but I did not make Ayla to repeat the word again since I did not want to make her the center of attention after all. This type of repeating mostly occurred in the initial classes; after the fourth or fifth class, I did not ask students to repeat the pronunciation of a word unless there was a serious case. For example, one thing I asked them in the later classes was the pronunciation of ‘career’ since all of the students seemed to confuse the pronunciation of ‘career’ with the pronunciation of ‘carrier’.
R3.3.2. Repeating for others’ comprehension

This subcategory simply occurred when the teacher or a peer did not understand or even hear what a student or a peer just said. For example,

*Example 1.*

In the class in which we talked about whether education, personality or experience was the most important for some occupations, we agreed that personality was not critical for engineers because they dealt with machines. Then, Ayla asked with regards to the occupations dealing with people:

Ayla: Digerleri icin de deal with human mı olacak? [For the others, is it going to be ‘deal with human’]?  

However, I did not hear what she said at the first time, so I asked her to repeat it again:

Cagri: Hih? [What]?

Ayla: Digerleri icin de deal with human mı? [For the others, is it ‘deal with human’]?

*Example 2.*

In this example, Elif asked me what ‘get into shape’ meant but I did not hear her at first, and asked her to repeat it.

Elif: ‘Get into shape’ ne? [What is ‘get into shape’]? *Asking for information*

Cagri: Nasıl? [How*23*]?

Elif: Get into shape?

Cagri: Sey, böyle hani…[Mmm, like, you know…(trying to find the right word while using body language showing a good body shape)]

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23 In Turkish, ‘how’ is sometimes used instead of ‘what’ to make the question sound more polite.
Elif: Forma girmek? [To get into shape]?

Cagri: Forma girmek, hi-hi. [Right! To get into shape]. *Facilitating the communication with the teacher*

R3.4. Responding to the Teacher/Peers, Category 4: Indicating

Comprehension

Indicating comprehension refers to responses which the participants simply indicated comprehension after they understood what the teacher or a peer said or explained such as “Haa, tamam” [Oh, OK] and “Tamam, anladim” [OK, I got it]. It is carried out by Ayla 5, by Elif 9, by Oner 5 and by Leyla 2 times.

R3.5. Responding to the Teacher/Peers, Category 5: Remembering

Remembering refers to verbal indicators which reflected that the participants normally knew the meaning of a vocabulary item, the usage of or rule about a grammatical structure, etc. but forgot it for that time being, and remembered immediately after the teacher or a peer told them what it was.

Example 1.

Oner: Mesela, bir yerde çalışmak, bir universitede çalışmak? *Asking for information*

Cagri: Work.

Oner: Hah, work! [Yup, work]!

Example 2.

Ayla: Pismak olmak? [To regret]? *Asking for information*

Cagri: Regret.

Ayla: Regret. *Repeating on one’s own initiative*
Cagri: I don’t regret it.

Ayla: I don’t regret it. *Repeating on one’s own initiative*

Elif: Regretten sonra nasıl kullanacağız? [How are we gonna use after regret (referring to the verb after regret)]? *Asking for information*

Cagri: I don’t regret coming.

Elif: Hah! Coming! [Right! Coming]!

Cagri: Sey, mmm… [Like, mmm]…(trying to say gerund or ‘-ing’)

Ayla: “-ing” geliyor [It takes “-ing”]. *Facilitating the communication with the teacher*

Cagri: “-ing” geliyor, evet! [It takes “-ing”, yes]!

R3.6. Responding to the Teacher/Peers, Category 6: Giving Examples When Asked by the Teacher/Peer(s)

This subcategory took place when the participants gave examples after the teacher or a peer asked the participants to give examples about a certain topic. Selected examples are:

Example 1.

when asking a question about hobbies, instead of ‘Do you like reading a book?’ we say ‘Do you like reading books?’ In Turkish, we don’t say ‘Do you like reading books’ but in English, it is asked like that. When asking whether someone likes reading books, you need to ask in general. It is neither ‘Do you like reading a book’ nor ‘reading book’; we need to say ‘reading books.’ What other examples can you give?

Emine: Do you like writing?

Ayla: Do you like eating?

Cagri: Do you like writing? Hmm, tekil-cogul ayrimina girebileceğimiz birşey olmasi lazim. [Well, it needs to be something we can distinguish as either singular or plural].

Belma: Watching film? Movies?

Ayla: Hmm, evet, movies. [A-ha, yes, movies].

Cagri: Evet, ‘watching movies.’ Do you like drinking a beer değil, do you like drinking beer? Ama mesela, reading books olsaydi, Do you like reading a book değil, reading book da değil; reading books? ‘Novels’ ayni sekilde: ‘reading novels.’ Do you like reading novels? [Yes, watching movies. It is not ‘Do you like drinking a beer; Do you like drinking beer (writing on the board)? But, for example, in the case of ‘reading books’, it is not ‘Do you like reading a book’ or ‘reading book’; reading books (writing on the board)? ‘Novels’ again, in the same way: ‘reading novels.’ Do you like reading novels]?

[Students repeat ‘novels, do you like reading novels’ to themselves.]
Cagri: İckilerde dediğim gibi, ‘beers’ sayılabilen birşey olmadığı için ‘Do you like drinking beer’ dememiz gerekiyor. Do you like drinking vodka?

Vodkas ya da beers diyemeyiz zaten, sayılamayan birşey olduğu için.

Tekil kullanmamız lazım, şu şekilde. What other examples can you give?

[For drinks, as I said, we need to say ‘do you like drinking beer’ since ‘beer’ is an uncountable word. Do you like drinking vodka? We cannot say ‘vodkas’ or ‘beers’ anyway, since they are uncountable. We have to use them in singular forms, like this (writing the sentence on the board).

*What other examples can you give?*

Selin: Do you like singing songs?

Cagri: Do you like singing songs. Yes. Instead of saying ‘Do you like singing a song,’ we say: Do you like singing songs?

Ayla: Do you like eating foods?

Cagri: Do you like…?

Ayla: Eating foods.


Food cogu zaman cogul olabilen birşey değil. ‘Food’ needs to be used in the singular form here. It must be something we can distinguish as singular or plural (Ayla indicating comprehension by nodding and saying ‘uh-huh’). Eating food (writing on the board) Food can’t be plural in most contexts).

Demet: Playing football…?
Ali: Playing sports (but I did not hear his example as the video-recording shows)

Cagri: Playing football, we can’t say ‘playing a football.’ ‘Playing footballs’ da olmaz. Var mı baska akliniza gelenler? ['Playing footballs’ is not possible, either. Are there other things that come to mind]?

*Example 2.*

This instance exemplifies giving examples when asked by a peer. Emel normally directed her question to the teacher but Ayla gave a context regarding the peer’s question:

Emel: Hocam should have’i cumle icinde kullanabilir miyz? [Hodjam, can we use ‘should have’ in a sentence].

Ayla: Ornegin, otobus duraktan geçti, farketmedin onu; beni alsa iyi olurdu gibi. [For example, the bus passed by the bus stop, you didn’t notice it; you say, like, ‘it should have taken me; it would have been great’].

One could easily argue that giving examples when asked by the teacher can as well be included under the theme of learner agency because a certain level of initiation is at stake when a participant gives an example to a question directed normally to the teacher, or even directed to the whole class. In both cases, the participant *chooses* to respond to the peer’s question by his/her own initiation. Yet again, the participant *chooses* to respond to the teacher by giving an example for something which the teacher asked to the whole class. Nonetheless, I included these examples under the category of responding to the teacher and peers because they took place *after* a question asked by the teacher or a peer, namely, the main initiation came from the teacher or the peer whereas in the subcategory of ‘giving examples on one’s own initiative’, the participants *chose* to
give an example when neither the teacher nor the peers specifically asked for an example. It is easily noticeable from the above examples that in both instances, both the teacher and the peer specifically asked for an example about the topic which was being talked about.

R4. Theme 4: Affective Dimensions of Interacting with the Teacher/Peers

Affective dimensions contain the participants’ remarks which they used not only to ease their communication both with the teacher and with their peers but also to add an emotional aspect to their communication with them. In total, four participants whose verbal indicators are exemplified here elicited 144 verbal indicators during the class.

This study only focuses on verbal indicators; hence, affective aspects were taken into consideration as long as they included verbal moves; however, it was not possible to discard the non-verbal indicators such as a smile or eye-contact when interpreting these verbal indicators. The three categories of affective dimensions of interacting with the teacher or peers are listed below:

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Affective dimensions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Facilitating the communication with the teacher and peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Making jokes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Encouraging peers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R4.1. Affective Dimensions, Category 1: Facilitating the Communication with the Teacher/Peers

Facilitating the communication with the teacher or peers occurred when the participants engaged in interactions with the teacher or their peers in an emotionally-supportive manner. For instance, if the participants helped the teacher remember a word when she was having a hard time to find the word or if a participant communicated with
his/her peers in order to make him/her feel better about something, or if a participant communicated with the teacher or peers in a warm, accepting manner, all of these verbal indicators were categorized under facilitating the communication with the teacher and peers. This category was elicited 77 times by Ayla (68 of them were with the teacher, 9 with peers), 12 times by Oner (11 times with the teacher, 1 time with peers), 6 times by Elif (4 with the teacher, 2 with peers), and finally was not elicited by Leyla at all.

Example 1.

The students seemed unusually quiet and tired in this class. Twenty-five minutes after we began the class, I asked them directly to find out if something was wrong and if there was something I could do to make them more active and attentive. After my question, Ayla facilitated our communication by conveying a message that this silence was not my fault as a teacher, rather, it was related to the fact that it was the first day of the week.

Cagri: Bugun bir yavas gidiyoruz, herkeste bir sakinlik var. Nasıl canlandırabilirim? [We are moving a little slowly today, everybody seems to be quiet. How can I brisk you up]?

Ayla: Pazartesi sendromu ya. [It is because of the Monday syndrome].

Oner: Haftasonu herkes yorulmus hocam. [Everybody seems to have gotten tired at the weekend, hodjam].

Example 2.

In this example, Elif asked in what form we would use the verb after ‘regret’. I answered her question by giving an example. Then, I tried to remember the word
‘gerund’. Seeing that I was having a hard time in remembering, Ayla facilitated my communication with the class by telling the word I was trying to say.

Elif: Regrettten sonra nasıl kullanacağız? [How are we gonna use (the verb) after regret]? *Asking for information*

Cagri: I don’t regret coming.

Elif: Hah! Coming! [Right! Coming]!

Cagri: Sey, mmm… [Like, mmm]…(trying to say gerund)

Ayla: ‘Gerund’ geliyor [It takes ‘gerund’]. *Facilitating the communication with the teacher*


Facilitating the communication with the teacher or peers entailed being attentive and fully engaged in class most of the time. Otherwise, a student would definitely miss the non-verbal clues which signified that the teacher or a peer was having some kind of an emotional difficulty during interaction.

*Example 3.*

In this example, Elif asked me what ‘get into shape’ meant but I did not hear her at first, and asked her to repeat it. After she told me that she wanted to know the meaning of ‘get into shape’, I began to think about its meaning in Turkish but I couldn’t remember it immediately, which I also made obvious with my body language. While I was trying to find the right word while using my hands to show the shape of a female body, Elif facilitated our communication and suggested the meaning of ‘to get onto shape’ by means of the body language I was using.

Elif: ‘Get into shape’ ne? [What is ‘get into shape’]? *Asking for information*
Cagri: Nasıl? [How]\(^2\)?

Elif: Get into shape? *Repeating for others’ comprehension*

Cagri: Sey, böyle hani…[Mmm, like, you know…(trying to remember)].

Elif: Forma girmek? [To get into shape]? 

Cagri: Forma girmek, hi-hi. [Right! To get into shape].

*Example 4.*

The last example shows a context where a peer facilitated one of his peers’ communication with the class. We were covering a reading passage and Nesrin was calling out the unknown words in that passage.

Nesrin: Hocam, hep ben soruyorum; kendimi salak gibi hissettim. [Hodjam, I am the one who keeps asking; I’ve felt stupid].

Oner: Sen bize sözcülük yapıyosun. [You are our spokesman].

By telling Nesrin that she is their spokesman, Oner added an affective component to his communication with her while, at the same time, making Nesrin feel better about the fact that she raised her voice a lot for that particular activity.

**R4.2. Affective Dimensions, Category 2: Making Jokes**

Making jokes emerged as a category in affective dimensions of interacting with the teacher and peers. When a student adds humor to the shared activity by making a joke, it creates a warm, facilitating atmosphere in the classroom. Students, thus, find an opportunity to learn in a relaxed, constructive environment.

*Example 1.*

In this context, we were covering the adverbs of frequency. I was listing the adverbs starting from the most frequent one to the least frequent. I asked for students’

\(^2\) In Turkish, ‘how’ is sometimes used instead of ‘what’ to make the question sound more polite.
help for an adverb which would be used to mean ‘happening more often than sometimes’

since I couldn’t think of an adverb myself. Then, Leyla surprisingly made a joke about

this moment since nobody was able to come up with an adverb which referred to

‘happening more often than sometimes’.

Cagri: Bazenden daha sık olana ne diyebiliriz? [What can we say for something

more often than sometimes]?

Oner: Bazenden daha sık? [More often than sometimes]? *Thinking aloud*

Leyla: Aynen öyle deriz: bazenden daha sık. [We say exactly like that: more

often than sometimes (everybody laughs)].

Example 2.

This example was taken from an activity in which we listened to a dialogue

between three native speakers of English. In the dialogue, one of the speakers introduced
two of her friends with each other. At the end of the activity, I shared with students a
cultural note that this conversation was indeed occurring a lot when meeting with people

for the first time.

Cagri: Bu hakikaten da böyle oluyor arkadasını falan tanistirirken. Vurgulu bir

sekilde sesleniyosun arkadasina: Sam, this is my friend Ayla. Hi Ayla,

nice to meet you. Aynen bu sekilde gerceklesiyor konușmalar. [This

(dialogue) really happens like this when you introduce a friend of yours.

You call out to your friend with an emphasis: Sam, this is my friend Ayla.

Hi Ayla, nice to meet you. The conversations take place exactly like this].

Ayla: Yani bu diyalogu ezberleyip gitsen, tamam. [So, if you memorize this
dialogue and end up there, that’s it (everybody bursting into laughter)].
R4.3. Affective Dimensions, Category 3: Encouraging Peers

When it was Leyla’s turn in a group speaking activity, she asked:

Leyla:  Hocam, ben yapmasam? [Hodjam, can we skip me]? *Suggesting*

Elif and Ayla tried to encourage her:

Elif:  Konusursun. [You can speak].

Leyla:  Konusana kadar çok zaman geçiyor. [A lot of time passes until I speak].

Ayla:  Ya Leyla, ilk geldiğimde senden farklı değilim, öyle düşün. [Come on Leyla, I wasn’t any different than you when I first started (the class), think that way].

Leyla:  Yok ya, konuşmıyorum. [No no, let me not speak].

Even though Elif and Ayla were not able to make Leyla participate in the speaking activity, they at least tried to give her confidence to give it a try. This example will be discussed again with regards to the theme of reacting to challenge.

R5. Theme 5: Self-regulating Attention

In the literature on second language learning, the term attention is usually associated with cognitive behaviors such as ‘noticing’ (Schmidt, 2001). Citing numerous studies, Gass, Svetics and Lemelin (2003) claimed that “What is generally agreed upon in the field of SLA is that attention is important in accounting for the ways that learners sort through the large amounts of sometimes incoherent and incomprehensible data to which they are exposed” (p. 498). In this study, attention is used to describe the state of showing interest in and being attentive to what is going on in the class in general in contrast to the salient understanding of attention in the field of SLA. Self-regulating attention, thus, refers to monitoring one’s attention in order to remain attentive during
classes. The categories that I found conceptually related to self-regulating attention are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Self-regulating attention</th>
<th>Sidetracking</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Contributing to a sidetracked conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thinking aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiating with a peer about a sidetracked topic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**R5.1. Self-regulating Attention, Category 1: Sidetracking**

Sidetracking refers to converting the teacher’s and classmates’ attention from the shared activity to a less relevant subject, for instance, by initiating a conversation, by asking a question, or by sharing a personal experience. Among the four participants whose verbal indicators were exemplified in this data catalogue, Oner elicited the largest number of occurrences for sidetracking, which is 23. Ayla and Elif elicited sidetracking 9 and 8 times, respectively. Leyla, on the other hand, did not engage in sidetracking at all. Selected examples for sidetracking are presented below.

*Example 1.*

In this context, we completed a reading activity outside the textbook. There was a follow-up vocabulary activity about the verb, noun and adjective forms of the vocabulary items selected from the reading text. After we talked about these various forms of the verb ‘decide’, Ayla began to tell some etymological information about this verb:

Ayla: Leverman'in kitabında çevirmen şey diye not döşmüştü, homicide suicide, adam öldürmek iste intihar etmek gibi hani karar verirken seceneklerden bir tanesini seçersiniz, diğerlerini öldürürsünuz, iste o mantıksa kokunun öldürmeye dayandığıını not olarak döşmüş çıktı çevirci. [In Leverman’s book, the translator noted that, like in homicide, suicide, while deciding,
you choose one of the options and kill the others, by that reasoning, the root of ‘decide’ is based on killing, the translator noted].

Cagri: Hmm. Neyin? [Hmm. Of what (meaning the root of what)]?

Ayla: Decision’ın..Homicide, suicide..yani orda öldürmek var ya. [Of decision. Homicide, suicide, that is, there is killing there, right].

Cagri: Hiii [A-ha].

Ayla: Yani karar vermek neden zordur cunku bir tane..Yani on kisiyle evlenmezsiniz; bir kisiyle evlenmek zorundasiniz. [That is to say, to make a decision is difficult because only one…Namely, you don’t get married to ten people; you have to get married to one person].

Cagri: Decide’da yani, bir şeyi diğerlerinden ayırıp bir şeyey karar veriyosun. Olabilir, Latince’den falan…[So, in decide, you separate one thing from the others and decide on that one. It is possible, from Latin or something]…

Ayla: Cunku secim yapmak zorundasiniz ya, bir şeye karar veriyosunuz. [Because you have to make a choice, you decide on one thing].

Cagri: Olabilir…cunku homocide’larin sonu falan da cide’la bitiyor ya. [It could be…because homicide and suicide end with ‘cide’, right (writing on the board)].

Ayla: Herhalde cevirmen dikkatli bir çevirmendi ya da Leverman’in kendi notu da olabilir. [I guess the translator was meticulous or it could be Leverman’s own note as well].
After this sidetracked conversation, a student, Selen, started to explain something she read elsewhere that there were fifty basic vocabulary roots in English and all other words were derived from these roots. Selen added that this ‘cide’ was probably one of those. Finally, Ayla commented that she talked about the root of ‘decide’ whenever she covered decision-making in her classes. Ayla, in a way, digressed from our actual activity in order to share additional information about ‘decide’. We continued to talk about the remaining lexical items in the vocabulary activity. Even though Ayla initiated a sidetracked conversation here, as it was also mentioned in the researcher journal, most of her sidetracked conversations were conceptually related to the shared activity.

Example 2.

This example was taken from a class in which we covered the tenses in English. I was writing a multiple choice question on the board. The question was: “As soon as the signal ____ the whole force will chart in the direction of the enemy trenches”. Oner began to read the question out loud, then he stopped and asked what ‘signal’ meant:

Oner: As soon as the signal...Signal ne demekti hocam? [What did ‘signal’ mean, hodjam]? *Asking for information*

Cagri: Isaret falan. [Sign, something like that].

Oner: Signal...dis macunu var ya. Colgate...Colgate marka değil mi hocam? Ingilizce anlami var mı colgate’in? [Signal...you know there is that toothpaste. Colgate...Colgate is a brand, right, hodjam? Does it mean anything in English]?
Cagri: Hi-hi, marka. Bir anlami oldugunu farketmedim. [Yeap, brand. I haven’t realized that (Colgate) has a meaning (while continuing to write the choices of the multiple-choice question on the board)].

Here, Oner was simply sidetracking by asking whether ‘colgate’ was a brand or not following his question about the meaning of ‘signal’.

Example 3.

This last example of sidetracking took place when Oner asked a sidetracked question about the bicycle taxis in the US. I was explaining the students about the difference between regular taxis and ‘black cabs’ in London. After I stated that this distinction was specific to London and that in America ‘cab’ was used for regular taxis as well, Oner asked:

Oner: Bir de hocam bisikletli taksiler vardi sanki. [Also, hodjam, I think there are those bicycle taxis].

Cagri: Neler var? [There are what]?

Oner: Hani böyle adam geçiyormus one, o Amerikadaydi değil mi? [Like a guy sits on the front, it was in the US, right]?

Cagri: Var, o Work and Travel’la gelenler çalışiyorlar onlarda. Bisiklet; arkasında bir veya iki kişilik falan oturcak yerler var. [Yes, those guys who come via Work & Travel work on those. It is a bicycle; there is a seat for one or two people at the back (explaining for others)].

Oner: ‘Kesinlikle yapmayin’ diyorlar. [They say that ‘don’t ever do it’].

R5.2. Self-regulating Attention, Category 2: Contributing to a Sidetracked Conversation
This category refers to, as its label already implies, participating in a sidetracked conversation by sharing further experiences, asking further questions, namely by showing interest in a sidetracked topic. Participants in this study contributed to a sidetracked conversation only in Turkish, probably because their proficiency levels did not allow them to express lengthy opinions in English. Contributing to a sidetracked conversation was carried out 48 times by Ayla, 67 times by Elif, 89 times by Oner and 13 times by Leyla, in total 217 times, as the fourth most frequently occurring verbal indicator.

Selected examples are:

*Example 1.*

This example of ‘contributing to a sidetracked conversation’ is actually the continuation of the last example in the ‘sidetracking’ category. After I talked about the famous London black cabs, Oner opened a sidetracked conversation about the bicycle taxis. Please refer to the sidetracking category for the beginning of this conversation.

Pelin: Ben televizyon’da gördüm, çok böyle fakir bir ulkede de vardı onlardan. [I saw it on TV, a very poor country also had those (bicycle taxis)].

Cagri: Hindistan’da da var galiba onlar. [I think they can be found in India, too].

Ayla: Hani Kordon’da bizim at arabalari vardir ya..[Like our hourse-drawn carriages in Kordon (a broad seafront promenade in Izmir, Turkey)].

Cagri: Hani Central Park var ya New York’da, orda zevk icin, hani bir yerden bir yere getirmekten çok, parkin icinde mesela yurumek istemiyosun çok, hem zevk icin olabilir hem de...faytonlar falan da var orda gerci de..[You know the Central Park in New York City, you can find those bicycle taxis}
there, too. But they are used for pleasure more than for transportation purposes. There are hourse-drawn carriages there, too].

Elif: Fayton var mı? [Are there hourse-drawn carriages]?

Oner: Fayton da var? [There are hourse-drawn carriages as well]?

Cagri: Hi-hi, var. Türkler alan çalışiyor zaten onlarda genelde [Yeap, there are. Usually Turks and such people work in those bicycle taxis (several students laugh)].

(...)

Ayla: Amerikalilar o zaman Türklerle bir öğrenci olarak bir de o tur islerde çalışanlar olarak mı karşılanıyorlar? [So, do Americans face two types of Turkish people, one students, two Turks who work in those types of jobs]?

Cagri: Evet. [Yeap].

Ayla: Hangi islerde daha çok çalışıyor Türkler ki? [In what type of jobs do Turkish people work, then]?

Here, Pelin, Elif, Oner, Ayla, they all contributed to a sidetracked conversation. After Ayla’s question, we talked about this topic for a few minutes more and I directed everybody’s attention to our class activity.

Example 2.

This example demonstrates Leyla’s contribution to a sidetracked conversation.

We were talking about some follow-up discussion questions at the end of a unit such as ‘Should universities be more for general learning, or mainly to prepare people for jobs? Why?’ Addressing a sidetracked conversation Oner initiated, Leyla said:
Leyla: Kendisini geliştirebilmesi acisindan. [So that s/he can improve her/himself].

But Oner did not address Leyla’s comment probably he did not hear it, so he continued to express his ideas about the topic in Turkish. The rest of this example is also discusses in the category of ‘negotiating with a peer on a sidetracked topic’.

Example 3.

In the class from which this example was excerpted, we covered a reading passage about decision-making styles. By coincidence, Ayla’s dissertation topic was about decision-making styles as well. The students were working individually to write their dialogues for the following role-play activity, Ayla opened a sidetracked conversation as well as contributing to it while other students were working silently. It is also worth explaining that I, as the teacher, contributed to this sidetracked conversation by sharing some of my observations about men and women’s decision-making styles.

Ayla: Benim doktora tez konumdu karar verme stilleri. [‘Decision-making styles’ was my dissertation topic].

Cagri: O konu aslında çok ilginç bir konu. [That topic is, in fact, a very interesting one].

Ayla: Kesinlikle ilginç bir konu. Spontan karar verisler, rasyonel karar verisler, sezgisel, kendiliğinden olan karar verisler. [Absolutely an interesting topic. Spontaneous decision-making, rational decision-making, intuitive decision-making styles].

R5.3. **Self-regulating Attention, Category 3: Thinking Aloud**
Thinking aloud includes the participants’ verbal indicators regarding their private speeches (Lantolf, 2003) in other words, “meta-comments” (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p.204) which they elicited to regulate their cognitive processes in task engagement. The various forms of thinking aloud were speaking out, reading out loud, and repeating in Turkish what they heard. They also employed thinking aloud when they “suddenly understood or mastered a source of difficulty” (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p.204). I consider thinking aloud as a component of self-regulating attention since it could have helped students to increase their concentration on the shared activity. It is also worth noting that verbal indicators for thinking aloud were only helpful for the student who carried them out and did not benefit the others in the class much, if not at all. The medium language the participants used in their verbal indicators for this category was Turkish. Thinking aloud was carried out 18 times by Ayla, 8 times by Elif, 35 times by Oner and none by Leyla. Some selected examples are:

**Example 1.**

Oner: Ne demek ‘hire’? [What does ‘hire’ mean]?


[Hire normally means ‘kiralamak’ but here it means ‘ise almak’].

Oner: Ise almak. [To hire].

In this instance, Oner repeated in Turkish what he heard while taking a note on the side of this textbook. This is a very good example to describe the distinction between ‘thinking aloud’ and ‘repeating on one’s own initiative’. If Oner repeated the word in English for pronunciation purposes here, the verbal indicator would have been included in ‘repeating on one’s own initiative’; however, he repeated the meaning of ‘to hire’ in
Turkish, in a way, he spoke to himself. Thus, any verbal indicator carried out to repeat a vocabulary item in English was categorized under ‘repeating on one’s own initiative’ whereas verbal indicators carried out in Turkish were taken into consideration under the category of ‘thinking aloud’.

*Example 2.*

In this example, Ayla was about to ask something to me but she changed her mind and said:

Ayla: Haa, tamaaam. [A-ha, OK].

Here, Ayla must have found the answer to her question on her own since she decided not to ask it to me. This behavior which occurred within seconds reflected her ‘thinking aloud’, namely her intrapersonal communication.

**R5.4. Self-regulating Attention, Category 4: Negotiating with a Peer on a Sidetracked Topic**

Negotiating with a peer on a sidetracked topic took place whenever a participant got involved in a sidetracked conversation in Turkish to express his/her opinions against another student’s ideas. In total, there were 22 verbal indicators for this category (Oner: 13, Elif: 7, Leyla: 2 and Ayla: 0). The following example illustrates how two peers started a discussion on a sidetracked topic:

*Example 1.*

In this context, we were talking about three follow-up speaking questions at the end of a reading activity. In order to give everybody a chance to talk, the students were instructed to answer the questions in English by taking turns. It was Leyla’s turn to talk. After she answered the first question (What do you hope to do in the future? How will
you prepare?), I encouraged her to talk about the second question, too (Should universities be more for general learning, or mainly prepare people for jobs? Why?). Although it was Leyla’s turn to talk, Oner interrupted and asked:

Oner: Hocam o cumleyi tam anlayamadim ya, ne diyor orada? ‘Insanları yetistirmeye dayalı mı yoksa genel bir çalışma mı’ diyor? [Hodjam, I couldn’t understand that sentence exactly. What does it say there? Does it say “Is it based on cultivating people or is it a general study”? *Asking for confirmation*

Elif: Genel bir öğretim mi olsun yoksa mesleğe dayalı mı olsun? [Should there be a general education or should it be based on vocational education (towards Oner)]? *Answering peers*

Oner: Duz lise mi meslekli lise mi, o ayrim gibi birşey. [Regular high school or vocational high school, something like that distinction (looking at Elif)].

Elif: Biraz. [Somewhat (not fully agreeing with Oner)].

Cagri: Hani tarih, Türkçe bu tarz derslerde olmalı mı yoksa direkman meslek dersleri mi verilsin universitede diyor. [Like, ‘should there be courses like history, Turkish or should job-related courses be offered in the universities’ it says].

Oner: Tamam iste, meslek liselerinde nasıl? İlk yıl Türkçe falan verilir sonra direkt mesleğe dayalı eğitim verilir. [Right, see, how is it in vocational high schools? First year they offer Turkish and stuff, then they only offer vocational education (talking with Elif)].
This conversation went on a little bit more until Melis nicely told Elif that they (Elif and Oner) should continue this discussion later.

Several examples from the category of ‘suggesting’ can be talked about with regards to self-regulating attention as well. For example, students were engaged in a sidetracked conversation about a workshop on leadership skills that were going to be offered in a private language institution. Since I was writing a multiple-choice grammar question on the board, I let them talk about it for a few minutes. However, they continued to talk among themselves even after I finished writing the question on the board. By remaining silent and directly looking at them, I conveyed my message that they should end their conversation. Leyla raised a suggestion: “Anyways, let’s talk later”, since she most likely got my message.

In a different class, Elvan asked Ayla silently about a sidetracked subject while I was talking to the class:

Elvan: Arzu Hocam, sizin o dedikleriniz Haticeler değil mi? [Arzu Hodjam, the people you talked about are Hatice and her friends, right]?

Ayla: Sonra konuşalım mı? [Shall we talk later]? *Suggesting*

By suggesting Elvan that they should talk later, Ayla self-regulated her attention to focus on the class activity rather than engaging in a sidetracked conversation with Elvan. As a participant observer, I witnessed many instances between Ayla and other students pertaining to self-regulating attention. Some of these observations were based on interpreting non-verbal indicators, though. For example, in the class on November 17, a student, Melis, started to tell Ayla about a funny thing happened in a TV show the previous week. Ayla listened to Melis’ story about this TV show a little bit; however, she
did not comment on it much, and then by holding her head down (instead of keeping her
eye-contact with Melis), she used her body language to bring an end to the conversation.
There were no verbal indicators in this instance; however, it was clearly observable that
Ayla was self-regulating her attention by not letting others to interfere with her
attentiveness.

R6. Theme 6: Reacting to Challenge

Reacting to challenge encompasses verbal behaviors through which the
participants reflected their attitudes toward a challenging task. In this study, two
categories emerged for reacting to challenge. In some situations, the four participants
spent the required mental effort to accomplish the task (reacting to challenge positively)
while in other situations they preferred to withdraw from the task (reacting to challenge
negatively). In total, 10 positive reactions to challenge (Ayla: 6, Elif: 3, Oner: 1, and
Leyla: 0) and 6 negative reactions to challenge (Ayla: 0, Elif: 0, Oner: 2, and Leyla: 4)
were observed. Two negative and one positive example are discussed below to better
portray this theme.

Example 1.

In this context, we were talking about three follow-up speaking questions at the
end of a reading activity. In order not to ‘deprive some students of the opportunity to
practice the target language’ (Tsui, 1996, p.159), I asked all students to answer the
questions in English by taking turns. My suggestion was negotiated by one of the
students who suggested that those who wanted to say something should just improvise.
However, I rejected his suggestion and reminded them of the fact that if we followed that
route, only a few students would get to talk and others would remain silent. After two
students answered the questions, it was Leyla’s turn to talk. She directly asked me if we could skip her but I kindly turned her request down. So, she started talking:

Leyla: Hocam beni geçsek? [Hodjam, can we skip me]?

Cagri: Geçmiyoruz. [We are not skipping you (while smiling)].

Leyla: I hope...work in big hospital.

Cagri: Hi-hi. [Uh-huh].

Leyla: For example, university hospital.

Cagri: Hi-hi. [Uh-huh]. How will you prepare for that? What are you going to do?

Leyla: I am studying KPSS25 (laughing since she used Turkish phonetics for this acronym, I gestured that it was OK).

Cagri: How about the other questions?

Leyla: I think universities should be mainly to prepare people for jobs.

Cagri: Not for general learning. The last question?

Oner: (interrupting) Hocam o cumleyi tam anlayamadım, ne demek yani?

‘Insanları yetistirmeye dayalı mı yoksa genel bir çalışma mı’ diyor?

[Hodjam, I couldn’t understand that sentence exactly. What does it say there? Does it say “Is it based on cultivating people or is it a general study”]? *Asking for confirmation*

Exactly four minutes later, I came back to Leyla again, and asked:

25 KPSS stands for another national exam in Turkey, Kamu Personeli Secme Sinavi (Public Personnel Selection Exam).
Cagri: 3. soruyu cevaplams miydik? Ben unutmadiim. [Have we answered the third question? I haven’t forgotten (both Leyla and Cagri laughing)]. What is more important for you, education, experience or personality?

Leyla: I think personality because...one person is not talking...(switching to Turkish) iyi bir iletisim kuramıyorsa..[if s/he cannot communicate well].

Cagri: If somebody is not good at effective communication, etkili iletisim kuramiyorsa...[if (somebody) is not good at effective communication].

After this last interaction, Leyla used her body language to convey that she really wanted to end her turn in the activity. So, I didn’t push her further in order not to undermine her self-esteem and said: “Peki, tamam” [OK, then], and moved on to the next student. In terms of communicative language teaching, this activity was not a good one since the students who were not talking were off-task but I just felt that if I tried making the students take turns, particularly the quiet ones would use it as an opportunity to practice English.

Example 2.

When it was Leyla’s turn in a group speaking activity, she asked:

Leyla: Hocam, ben yapmasam? [Hodjam, let me not do it]? *Suggesting*

Elif and Ayla tried to encourage her:

Elif: Konusursun. [You can speak].

Leyla: Konusana kadar çok zaman geçiyor. [A lot of time passes until I speak].

Ayla: Ya Leyla, ilk geldiğimde senden farklı değildim, öyle düşün. [Come on Leyla, I wasn’t any different than you when I first started (the class), think like that].
Leyla: Yok ya, konuşmayayım. [No no, let me not speak].

Leyla simply refused to talk even though it was her turn in this activity. It is also important to articulate that this was our last class and other students showed surprisingly good performances when speaking English.

*Example 3.*

This is a positive example for reacting to challenge. In this speaking activity, Ayla asked me how she could say a sentence in English.

Ayla: Being mother and being father, yani anne baba olmak anlamında kullanılır mı? [so, are they used to mean ‘anne baba olmak’]?

Cagri: Hi-hi [yeap], being parents

Ayla: ..is difficult, are difficult..but they accept...your children...their children...another person. Çok güzel anlattım! [I explained perfectly! (laughing and making fun of herself with this sarcastic comment)]. (Then, telling what she wanted to say in Turkish) Anne baba olmak zor ama cocuklarının buyudugunu belki kabul etmeleri gerekiyor, o daha güzel oldu. [Being parents is difficult but maybe they should accept that their children grow up, this one is better (probably means that ‘their children grow up’ is better as opposed to ‘they become another individual’)]

Cagri: Being parents is difficult but...kabul etmeleri lazım? [they should accept]?

Melis: They have to...

Ayla: They, ‘they’ kullanılır? ['they’ is used]?

Cagri: Hi-hi. [Yeap].

Ayla: They should be accept their children grows up...their children grow up.
Cagri: Hi-hi [yeap], they should accept that their children grow up. Oldu. [Good].

Cagri: (Using body language for “I did it”) Ve çok güzel bu duyguyu bu. [And this is a very nice feeling].

In the above interaction, Ayla positively reacted to challenge by trying to construct a sentence in English. She could have asked me for the whole sentence as well; however, she wanted to construct the sentence on her own by asking for confirmation from me whenever she needed.

**R7. Theme 7: Seeking Opportunities for Improvement**

Seeking opportunities for improvement was elicited 6 times by Ayla, 2 times by Elif, 1 time by Oner and none by Leyla. Verbal indicators were categorized as ‘seeking opportunities for improvement’ if the participants specifically carried them out while looking for opportunities for further practice, in other words, when they wanted to extend their learning beyond the classroom instruction. In this study, the four participants sought opportunities for improvement, for instance, by requesting to obtain copies of the audio CDs I used in the class (Ayla), to obtain the copies of the Seinfeld collection I had (Ayla), by asking to get my grammar notes (Elif), by requesting if we can have additional classes to cover some grammar topics (Oner), etc. It is crucial to point out here that these were the verbal indicators which reflected participants’ seeking for opportunities ‘in the classes’. During the interviews, the participants indicated more occurrences in addition to other ways of seeking opportunities for improvement, which are discussed in chapter four.

**Transcendence**

In this study, three major themes emerged regarding transcendence:
T1. Linking current learning with past learning

T2. Relating current learning to other contexts

T3. Extending experience beyond ‘now’

T1. Transcendence, Theme 1: Linking Current Learning with Past Learning

This theme occurred rarely (12 times in total, 8 times by Ayla and 4 times by Oner as shown in Table 13) throughout the whole course. It refers to verbal indicators which reflected any connections the participants made with their current learning and anything they learned in the past.

Example 1.

In this class, we were covering a reading activity (Getting Yourself Hired) from the textbook. Reading strategy to be taught was ‘inferring content’. The reading passage included short paragraphs about three employers and what kind of things they pay attention to while hiring staff. One of the employees was a retail manager. While covering the vocabulary related to this person, I wrote some words on the board such as ‘retail, wholesale’ etc. Oner commented on these vocabulary items by saying:

Oner: Biz bunları görmüşük, eskiden İngilizce almışım ben de. [We covered these (meaning vocabulary items), I had taken English in the past (referring to the vocational English class he took)].

Example 2.

In this context, we were talking about the unknown vocabulary items from a Seinfeld episode we watched in class with English subtitles. One of the students asked about the phrasal verb “drop off” and I explained its meaning as well as providing several contexts it could be used. Then Elif asked:
Elif: Eve bırakmak anlamında, mesela, ‘drop you off home’ mı diyecceğiz? [For ‘eve bırakmak’, are we going to say ‘drop you off home’]? *Asking for confirmation*

Ayla: Ben bugün bir pasaj okumuştum; orada ‘siz televizyon izlerken komşunuz damladi’ gibi bir şey diyordu. [I read a passage today; there it said something like ‘while you were watching TV, your neighbor dropped by’].

Cagri: Drop by olabilir mi o? [Can it be ‘drop by’]?

Ayla: Olabilir. [Yes, it can be]. *Agreeing with the teacher in Turkish*

Cagri: ‘Drop by’ uğramak demek, ‘stop by’ ile ikisi aynı anlamda. [‘Drop by’ means to visit someone, ‘stop by’ and ‘drop by’ have the same meaning].

Ayla: Ben onu ‘eve damladi’ falan gibi anlıyormuş. [I thought that it meant ‘he popped in suddenly in your house’ or something like that]. *Commenting on a vocabulary item*

Oner: Uğramak [To drop by (while taking notes)] *Thinking aloud*

T2. **Transcendence, Theme 2: Relating Current Learning to Other Contexts**

Relating current learning to other contexts refers to verbal indicators carried out by participants to connect their current learning with different contexts, namely, their transcendence of current learning to different contexts. These different contexts did not necessarily refer to situations that they might face in the future; they referred to past contexts as well. What distinguishes this occurrence with ‘linking current learning with past learning’ is that the latter theme consisted of associative relations between current learning with past learning that the participants experienced such as ‘seeing the
vocabulary item in a reading passage before’ or ‘having been covered an expression or a grammatical structure in one of their previous EFL classes’. On the other hand, in order to relate current learning to a different context occurred in the past, they imagined an alternative usage of the language unit they learned ‘now’ in that past context. Thus, they visualized the new language unit in another context rather than simply linking their new learning with something they learned in the past. The first example below illustrates the former occurrence whereas the second example illustrates the latter situation.

Example 1.

This example was taken from a group activity where students were asked to write dialogues in order to act them out later on. Eight students worked in two groups to create their dialogues. During the role-play activity, Oner used an expression to celebrate his meeting with somebody for the first time at a party.

Oner: Let’s drink it…hani ‘hadi icelim buna’ denir ya..[Let’s drink it…like, as if saying ‘haydi icelim buna’]. *Commenting on a vocabulary item*

Cagri: ‘Let’s toast for this’ deniyor, tost dary a bizim bildiğimiz. [‘Let’s toast for this’ is used, like the ‘tost’26 ‘we know].

Oner: Guzel aslinda haa, [It is nice, in fact, you know what I mean].

*Commenting on a vocabulary item* Romanya’dan tanistım mesela biriyle, ‘hadi icelim görüşelim’ filan. [Say, I’ve just met someone in Romaine, I go ‘let’s toast for this’ etc].

Cagri: Let’s toast for this…buna icelim anlaminda. [Let’s toast for this…meaning ‘buna içelim’ (while writing on the board)].

Oner: Çok güzel…[Very nice]… *Commenting on a vocabulary item*

26 In Turkish, ‘tost’ refers to a ‘toasted sandwich’, made usually with kasseri cheese and beef pepperoni.
In this example, Oner demonstrated transcendence by relating his current learning (let’s toast for this) to another context that he thought he might experience when he went to Romaine on an exchange program. He visualized another context in which he could use the expression he learned ‘now’.

Example 2.

This example occurred when I was teaching how and in which situations we could use the structure of ‘I was wondering if…’ Subsequent to Oner’s attempt to give an example by his own initiative, Ayla commented on the use of ‘I was wondering’:

Ayla: Şikayet mektubumuzda da kullanılabılır bir kalıpmış. [It is a structure we could have used in our letter of complaint (Please see Appendix XX for a copy of Ayla’s letter of complaint she referred to in this example)].

Cagri: Evet, orada da kullanabilirsiniz. [Yes, you could have used it there].

Ayla: Benim kendi kurduğum durumda öyle bir şey vardı. Ben ‘bize bir servis elemani gönderip gönderemiyeceginizi’ gibi bir şey kullanmıştım. [There was something like this in the situation I made up (referring to her letter of complaint)]. I used something like ‘I was wondering if you could send us a maintainence guy’].

I did not respond to Ayla’s example here for some reason, instead, I continued by saying:

Cagri: Bu çok güzel bir kalıpleşti. Yazalım, bir sürü örnek yazalım. [This is a very good structure, in fact. Let’s write, let’s write a lot of examples].

Oner: I was wondering if I…waiting your mail. *Giving examples on one’s own initiative*
Cagri:Cumlen neydi senin? [What was your sentence]?

Oner:Senin mektubunu bekliyorum. [I am waiting for your mail].

Cagri:Orda öyle kullanamazsin da. [But you can’t use “I was wondering” there].

Orda “I am waiting to hear from you” diyebilirsin. [You can say “I am waiting to hear from you” there].

After Oner’s example, Ayla stood up and got her letter of complaint from my desk because it was their writing assignment from the previous week and she had handed it in to me at the beginning of the class. According to the video, I was explaining another example on the board while she was looking at her letter of complaint to find the context in which she could have used the structure of ‘I was wondering’. Then, she commented:

Ayla:Ben ‘hope’ kullanmışım. [It seems that I used ‘hope’ (referring to her sentence, I hope you can advise me, in her letter of complaint regarding a treadmill she bought from an online store)].

On the video recording, I seem to have not responded to Ayla’s transcendence directly here; however, it is apparent that she related her current learning to a different context in the past by openly stating that she could have used the structure she learned ‘now’ in a context in a past assignment she had written. Later on, Ayla demonstrated transcendence for the second time by giving an example for a different context in which “I was wondering” could be used:

Ayla:Bazen misafir öğrenciler derse katılıp katılmacicalarını soruyorlar ya, I was wondering…[You know, sometimes some guest students ask whether they can join your class or not, I was wondering…]

Cagri:…if I can join your class, mesela. […]if I can join your class, for example].
Example 3.

In this instance, I was referring to a past explanation I made regarding the usage of ‘right’ in ‘right away, right now’ and so on.

Cagri: Hani demiştım ya, ‘right’ herşeyde kullaniliyor, hemen anlamında diye. [Remember I said, ‘right’ is used with everything to mean ‘immediately’].

Elif: Şeyde kullanilabiliyor mu, mesela bir kaza olduğunda, will be right over, hemen orada olacağız gibi. [Can it be used, for example when an accident occurs, to say ‘we will be right over’ in the meaning of ‘we will be there immediately’]?

Cagri: Hi-hi. [Yup]. We will be right over.

Example 4.

In this context, we were covering a vocabulary item: carrier. After I explained some of the contexts where ‘carrier’ could be used, Elif asked:

Elif: Carrier’i hastalıklarda taşıyıcı olarak kullanabiliyor muyuz? [Can we use ‘carrier’ as ‘tasyici’ for illnesses]?

Elif’s question, which she asked for confirmation whether they can use ‘carrier’ in a different context (i.e., illnesses), clearly shows her transcendence with regards to relating current learning with other contexts.

T3. Transcendence, Theme 3: Extending Experience beyond ‘Now’

Extending experience beyond ‘now’ was the only category which I was not able to infer from the participants’ verbal indicators during the class. However, during the interviews, participants told me about their out-of-class activities which they intuitively aimed to extend their experience beyond what they had learned by that time. They, of
course, did not explicitly state that their purpose was to extend experience beyond ‘now’ while engaging in these activities, yet, this category emerged as something critically related to transcendence as it is also mentioned in the researcher journal on January 14, 2010.

Some of the out-of-class activities which helped four participants extend their experiences beyond ‘now’ were instant-messaging with pals from other countries (Elif), engaging in authentic conversations with tourists (Oner), practicing vocabulary by means of a vocabulary learning program on the Internet such as Word Test (Ayla), following TV series in English such as House, M.D. (Elif), so on and so forth.
Table 12.

List of Categories and Subcategories for Learner Reciprocity and Occurrences of Verbal Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Ayla</th>
<th>Elif</th>
<th>Oner</th>
<th>Leyla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Commenting on</td>
<td>The way a word is pronounced</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. One’s learning</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>3. Peer’s question or remark</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. English language</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5. A vocabulary item</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>6. Shared activity</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>7. Cultural differences</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>8. Language learning process</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>9. One’s language level/proficiency</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>10. Future activity</td>
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<td>11. The class</td>
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<td>12. A national language exam</td>
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<td>13. Activity in English</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>14. Textbook</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Repeating</td>
<td>When asked by the teacher</td>
<td>39</td>
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<td>17. On one’s own initiative</td>
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<td>18. For others’ comprehension</td>
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<td>19. Affective dimension</td>
<td>Facilitating the teacher/peers</td>
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<td>68T</td>
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<td>20. Making jokes</td>
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<td>21. Encouraging peers</td>
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<td>22. Seeking opportunities for improvement</td>
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<td>23. Agreeing</td>
<td>With the teacher</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>24. With peers</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>25. in English (teacher/peers)</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>26. Answering</td>
<td>The teacher</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>27. Calling out answers</td>
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<td>57</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. in English (teacher/peers)</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Peers</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>30. Peers silently</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>31. Suggesting</td>
<td>Suggesting</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Giving examples</td>
<td>When asked by the teacher/peers</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

27 Only the teacher
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>On one’s own initiative</td>
<td>2 0 5 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Sidetracking</td>
<td>9 8 23 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Contributing to a sidetracked conversation</td>
<td>48 67 89 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Guessing</td>
<td>39 8 3 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>38 7 4 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Explaining to the teacher/peer(s)</td>
<td>43 5(P) 2 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Being persistent</td>
<td>19 5 13 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Asking</td>
<td>77 92 69 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>For confirmation</td>
<td>96 101 99 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>2 5 22 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>in English</td>
<td>10 5 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>About target culture &amp; cultural differences</td>
<td>6 0 5 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Translating</td>
<td>14 9 19 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Telling the meaning of a vocabulary item</td>
<td>54 3 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Thinking aloud</td>
<td>18 8 35 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Indicating comprehension</td>
<td>5 9 5 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Negotiating</td>
<td>0 7 13 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>With a peer on a sidetracked topic</td>
<td>0 9(P) 25 (14P) 4(P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>With the teacher/ peer(s) on a shared activity</td>
<td>0 9(P) 25 (14P) 4(P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Remembering</td>
<td>6 3 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Requesting</td>
<td>0 2 10 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Reacting to challenge</td>
<td>6 3 1 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positively</td>
<td>0 0 2 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negatively</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Table 13.

*Themes for Transcendence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ayla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Linking current learning and past learning</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Relating current learning to other contexts</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Extending experience beyond “now”</td>
<td>N/A in class</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Elif and Oner’s Early EFL Experiences

**Elif.** Elif joined the course on November 16, 2009 and continued attending through December 30, 2009. She missed only one of the 15 classes we covered during this time, which allowed to have 28 hours of videotaped data.

Elif, 21, is a senior student in Mathematics. She heard about this course thanks to her roommate who was another regularly-attending student in the class. Elif began learning English when she was at 4\textsuperscript{th} grade\textsuperscript{29} with 2 hours of instruction per week. In grades 6, 7 and 8, she had 4 hours of English per week. Then, she went to a “super high school”, where she spent one year for intensive language preparation before beginning grade 9. During this time, she had 24 hours of English per week. Later on, the number of hours that she spent for English gradually decreased down to 4 (In grade 9: 10 hours; in grade 10: 8 hours; in grade 11: 4 hours).

“In grades 4 and 5, it was very simple English” she said but in the second stage, her English teacher showed special interest in her. She admitted that this special attention made her love English, and this experience in grades 6 through 8 formed the foundations of her English. She also added that their teacher used to give particular emphasis on writing such as making them keep a journal and having them write their holiday or daily experiences. As for high school, Elif stated, “we started with beginner level English and graduated as intermediate learners". They read books from stage 1 to the highest level. Elif told me about her early experiences in high school with great enthusiasm. She said that they played games, had vocabulary quizzes every two weeks, prepared short plays in English, allotting their time outside the class. They wrote vocabulary items on small flash

\[29\text{ With the introduction of the eight-year continuous compulsory education in 1998, 2 hours of English per week for 4}\textsuperscript{th} \text{ and 5}\textsuperscript{th} \text{ grade participants are included in the national curriculum in Turkey.} \]
cards (on one side in English, one the other side in Turkish) and practiced with peers as a fun way of learning English. They had separate classes and separate books for every skill including a separate video class and they were being tested separately for each skill. Apparently, she believed that her hazırlık year was quite successful in terms of learning English. However, following this year, her English gradually worsened. Especially in grade 11, she spent most of her time studying for the university entrance exams, so totally neglected English. The college she went to (which is the college I conducted this study) did not offer hazırlık at all, and since Elif passed the exemption exam for English, she had not taken any English classes until joining my course.

Lastly, I present Elif’s description of the pictures from the New York State’s Placement Test for English as a Second Language Adult Students, which lasted only 52 seconds. When Elif looked at the pictures, she first described the story in Turkish. Then she continued:

Elif: Şey otobüsünü kaçırarak catch the bus mı diyeceğiz? [Hmm, are we going
to say ‘catch the bus’ for ‘otobüsünü kaçırarak’?] Cagri: Miss, kaçırarak, yakalamak catch. [Miss is to miss, to catch is catch.]

Elif: Hı, catch yakalamaktı, doğru. [Hmm, catch meant ‘yakalamak’,
right.] He is a student, there is a student, he want to go the school,
but he missed the bus and he is waiting another bus, so geç kalmak?

Cagri: Late, he is late.
Elif: He is late his lessons, bu kadar. [that’s all.]

Cagri: Thank you.

**Oner.** Oner, 21, was one of students who joined the course on November 9, 2009. He continued to attend until December 22, 2009\(^{30}\). During this time, he did not attend two of the 14 classes and was late for 4 of them. The reason why Oner had to be late for these classes was that he was an evening education student in Business Administration (junior year), so he had evening courses, one of which was right before our class on Tuesdays. Consequently, he had to be late 50 minutes on average for each of the three classes on Tuesdays. The fourth time when he was late occurred on a Wednesday but it was only for 25 minutes. In total, Oner attended 12 classes and was late for 175 minutes, which allowed for approximately 21 hours of video-taped data.

Oner had similar experiences like Elif. He started learning English at 4th grade with two hours of instruction per week and continued with four hours per week in the second stage of the primary school. He said that they were lucky enough to have an English teacher at 4th and 5th grades since mainstream teachers had to take of English in most of the schools at that time. In primary school, he basically learned simple grammar rules and vocabulary. “By the time we started high school, we knew what apple was, what banana was” he pointed out. In fact, even this was a prestigious thing since most of the other students in class did not know what apple and banana meant.

Like Elif, Oner told me quite positive stories about the English education he received in high school although. He, too, went to a language-focused high school.

\(^{30}\) However, he was present in the focus group interview which was held on January 4th, 2010.
school. They had 24 hours of English per week in addition to the 10, 8 and 4
hours of English instruction in grades 9, 10 and 11, respectively. He admits that
he couldn’t benefit from this language education very much since he wasn’t a
very good student, especially in grades 10 and 11. In hazirlik, they had separate
classes for reading, speaking/listening, writing, and grammar as well as separate
exams for each. They used the books of Oxford University Press. He stated that
“our teachers took us from the lowest level and brought us to the highest level”.
They read books of Forest Gump and Seven subsequent to watching their movies.
Towards the end of the high school, he lost his interest in English because of the
university entrance exams and peer pressure, which he regretted for not
continuing to practice English after hazirlik.

At college, there was no hazirlik and he was exempt from taking English.
He took vocational English in freshman year as an elective class. In addition to
this, he went to a private language institution for two semesters. He said that “it
was OK but not better than the English instruction I got in high school”. Oner
thought that his early experiences equipped him with substantial foundations in
English grammar; however, he was never able to speak English fluently, about
which he complained several times during the interview. This was the main
reason why he wanted to go to a European university through the Erasmus
Exhance Program in Spring 2010 semester. In fact, Oner joined my study since he
thought that it would be good practice for him on the eve of his visit to Europe.

Lastly, I present Oner’s description of the pictures from the test mentioned above.
Oner described the story in Turkish first. Then, he asked if everybody in the class went through this process after the interviews. He seemed hesitant, so I encouraged him to tell the story as much as his English allowed. Oner’s description lasted 4 minutes 54 seconds.

Oner: The boy...the boy...the boy was sorry. The boy is running the bus, at the bus.

Cagri: To, towards the bus ya da [or] to the bus

Oner: To the bus sorry, to bus station mı diyeyim? [should I say ‘to bus station?]?

Cagri: To the bus station

Oner: To the bus station, to bus station. The bus, the bus, the bus is coming. Şey gidiyor şeyi is şeydi demi onu kullanıyordu. [Like, going, like, is, right, we were using that]. Ondan sonra [Then] the bus is coming, the coming the, coming to the bus station, bus station. The boy see it. The dog say hav hav [woof, woof] (laughers), hav hav [woof, woof]. Şimdi ben bunu nasıl, ısırmak [to bite] yani, [Now, how am I going to...this...it is biting that’s to say]

Cagri: Bite, ısırmak [to bite]

Oner: Ney? [What?]

Cagri: Bite, bite [saying it according to the Turkish phonetics]

Oner: Bite? [saying it according to the Turkish phonetics], Bite. The dog is bite him.

Cagri: Bit, ikinci halı, past tense olarak diyeksen [past form, if you are going to say it in past tense]
Oner: Bit him. Bit him. The boy, düşürmek? [drop?]

Cagri: Drop.

Oner: Hü [Yup], drop.

Cagri: Dropped,

Oner: The boy dropped, dropped her, şey, her değil de [hmm, not her, his], his book, his book, so the boy...

Cagri: Missed,

Oner: Hü [Yup] missed, the boy missed the bus, miss the bus, the bus go to the anything, şey pardon [hmm, sorry] something, bir yere gidiyor, bir yer derken somewhere, somewhere miydi biyer, [when saying ‘bir yer’, was it ‘somewhere’?]

Cagri: Hü, hi, somewhere.

Oner: Somewhere, somewhere. The boy is very sad for the bus miss,

Cagri: Because

Oner: Otobüsü kaçırdığı için [because he missed the bus]

Cagri: Hü hı, because he missed the bus.

Oner: Because he, he missed the bus. He wait a new, sorry, he wait new bus at the bus station.

Cagri: Next bus,

Oner: Next bus, biz hayal edelim [let us imagine], Otobüse binip gitti, the boy...the boy...

Cagri: Got on,
Oner: Git-ti, git-ti [went, went]...The boy went, the boy went to the
school, on...at 10 o’clock, 10 o’clock but he, he, he came, he came
to late the class classroom, classroom. The teacher, teacher is,
bağırma neydi? [What did to shout mean?]

Cagri: Shouting.

Oner: The teacher is shouting

Cagri: At him,

Oner: At him. She diyelim buna, [let’s call this ‘her’] she says him, she
says him, you say, come late, geç kaldın demek istedim ama...sen
geç kaldın [You are late. I wanted to say ‘you are late’ but...]

Cagri: You have been very late.

Oner: Hah [A-ha], you have been very, you have been very late.

Cagri: Too late, ya da [or too late]

Oner: Too, too late

Cagri: Very late diyelim biz [Let’s say ‘very late’]. You have been very
late.

Oner: Very late, he says, he say, he say, I diyelim hani o söylüyormuş
gibi [Let’s use “I” as if he is saying]. I came, sorry, I missed, I
missed the bus. I missed the bus, so I’m late, geç kaldım. Enough.

Cagri: Güzel, hi-hi, yeter. [Good, hi-hi (uh-huh), enough].