Investment and Translanguaging: A Case of Nepalese Immigrant Women in Michigan

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Abstract

This research study investigated the learning and use of English by Nepali immigrant women from two theoretical perspectives: investment and translingualism. The research questions addressed what sort of investment the participants were making to learn English and to see how they used different translingual practices to co-construct their identity with both the target language and other transnational communities. Data were collected through questionnaires, observations, interviews, journal writings, and Facebook group chats. The key findings are that the Nepali immigrant women are not only motivated to improve their English but are also highly invested in doing so. They adopt different translingual negotiation strategies for the purpose of meaning-making among linguistically diverse groups of multilingual speakers. The study is significant for those connected to ESL classrooms composed of adult immigrants, as these immigrants constitute a substantial proportion of the US population.

Investment

It is self-evident that the learners who are motivated to learn the target language learn it better and faster than the less motivated learners. However, the psychological concept of motivation has been studied by second language researchers in terms of an individual character as it is the mental drive that forces him/her to learn a language. The earlier work on motivation can be traced back to the work of Gardner and Lambert (1959) in which motivation was “characterized by a willingness to be like valued members of the language community” (Gardner, 1991, p. 45). Though the studies on L2 learner motivation have attracted attention of second language researchers, what the learner faces when he/she interacts with people and how this interaction shapes his/her identity in a particular setting remains under-explored. Norton’s (1997) exploration of the notion of investment digs deep into the learner’s variable desires to engage in social interaction. Learners’ desire for recognition, affiliation, security and safety (West, 1992) makes them invest in learning and practicing the target language. The type of capital (Bourdieu, 1977) the learners make use of is of paramount importance to study this
complex nature of identity construction through real interaction. A learner may be highly motivated to learn the target language but if he/she does not invest in learning and practice it in different possible settings, there may not be successful language learning. In this study, I explored three immigrant Nepali women’s investment in learning English. How the gap between their imagined identity (Norton, 2013) and their perception of the self after coming to the US has impacted their investment in learning English was one focus of my study.

There are many research studies conducted to explore the notion of investment in the field of language learning. McKay and Wong’s (1996) two-year long qualitative study of four Chinese-immigrant students in California dealt with the multiple discourses which the participants were exposed to. The data were collected when they were studying in grade 7 and 8. This ethnographic study showed the investment of the participants in their schools and in the US society. Another very intriguing study by Skilton-Sylvester (2002) revealed that the traditional views of participation and motivation of adults are limited as they do not take into account the complex and dynamic nature of the adult interaction and how their investment in learning the language in the classroom and in their daily lives is constructing their identity. Collecting comprehensive data from four Cambodian immigrant women in the US, the researcher showed that their different roles as mothers, daughters, sisters, spouses and workers shaped their investment in learning English in adult ESL classrooms. Likewise, De Costa (2010a) conducted a critical ethnographic study of a designer immigrant student from China. With her exercise of agency and investment in practicing the Standard English language, the participant became able to identify herself as an academically able student. She wanted to invest in learning English because many big companies in China looked for good English speakers. In a similar vein, Kelly (2014) investigated the notions of identity, language socialization, investment and power dynamics in L2 English among Burmese women refugees. Over a period of three months, Kelly collected data from five participants using multiple sources of data: questionnaire, unstructured interviews and the participants’ journal writing. The findings revealed that the participants used English in different naturalistic settings such as while shopping, during medical appointments, at work and several other places. Due to their inability to communicate in English, the participants reported that they experienced different emotional states such as embarrassment, nervousness, sadness, etc. They also reported that they felt they were instilling low self-esteem in their kids because of their inability to help them with their homework. The overall finding was that the participants felt that their low proficiency created a barrier for their access to the American communities. They realized that the solution for this insufficiency was to study English more.

Transnational Identity and Translanguaging

In the present globalized world, the size of the immigrant population throughout the world is increasing day by day. The notion of transnationalism has attracted the attention of researchers mainly in the field of anthropology. Transnationalism is viewed as the “processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch, Glick Schiller, & Szanton Blanc, 1994, p. 7). The
migrant communities also referred to as transnational communities constitute a significant population in the host countries. “Transnational communities are migrant populations living in a country other than their country of origin but with ties to the country of origin” (Tsakiri, 2005, p. 102). They are the people who “have moved across geographical borders and immersed themselves in new cultural and linguistic environments” (Block, 2009, p. 75). The nature of their relationship with their country of origin may differ from group to group and may also be influenced by their use of technology and several other aspects. These types of communities engage in issues surrounding identity as they are connected to two different countries and cultures. They form different groups or associations due to their multiple identities and the sense of their connection to their country of origin. As they migrate to a new country, they may wish to identify themselves with the target language community but at the same time, they also wish to form such transnational communities to show their bond or connection among immigrants. As they migrate, they carry their own identity in terms of language, culture, religion, ethnicity, gendered ideologies, political beliefs, and so on. However, their identity is reshaped, negotiated and reconstructed through interaction in a new setting and through their changing beliefs. Research studies have shown that migrants have different types of relationships with their countries of origin and the new place where they migrate. According to Lam and Warriner (2012), these relationships are “multilayered and multisited, including not just the countries of origin and settlement but also other sites around the world that connect migrants to their conationals” (p. 193).

For example, many Nepali people have migrated to India and other Asian and Middle Eastern countries for employment, leaving their families behind. This type of migration has also created Nepali transnational communities. Even many Nepali women have moved to different countries for work. This kind of migration of women is related to Tsakiri’s (2005) idea of feminization of migration. Such associations and transnational communities provide the new immigrants with support and guidance. The present study attempted to look at how the Nepali immigrant women in Michigan maintain their transnational identity and how they are reshaping it. Transnational communities in turn have resulted in new linguistic practices called translanguaging.

Translanguaging is a term mainly used in discussing the use of languages in bilingual language teaching and learning practices. In its original sense, the term refers to the purposeful pedagogical alternation of languages in spoken and written, receptive and productive modes (Baker, 2001, Williams, 1994). The notions of translanguaging and transnational literacies are framed within the concept of ‘sociolinguistics of globalization’ (Blommaert, 2010). By sociolinguistics of globalization, Blommaert refers to language-in-motion rather than language-in-place which is related to the idea of using not only the multiple languages and sources but also the multiple varieties of those languages- vernacular, formal, academic, etc. The use of such multiple sources is highly influenced by such aspects as race, gender, ethnicity, and so on. The origin of the term translanguaging can be traced back to the work of Williams (1994) who first
used the term to describe a classroom practice in bilingual classroom where input (listening and reading) and output (speaking and writing) are in two different languages. Garcia (2009) extends this concept and clarifies that “translanguaging or engaging in bilingual or multilingual discourse practices, is an approach to bilingualism that is created not on languages as has often been the case, but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable” (p. 44). Garcia draws this notion of translanguaging from the long studied area of bilingualism/multilingualism and the practices of code-switching in which speakers mix some linguistic features from two or more languages (Gumperz, 1982). Gumperz’s discussion of code-switching was related to such issues as language interference, language transfer, and borrowing. Translanguaging “shifts the lens from cross-linguistic influence” to how multilinguals “intermingle linguistic features that have hereto been administratively or linguistically assigned to a particular language or language variety… translanguaging is thus the communicative norm of bilingual communities” (Garcia, 2009, p. 51). It not only focuses on the use of language but also other modes of communication. The main idea behind the notion is the global-local connections (Warriner, 2007). Collectively, all the above mentioned identities and relationships practiced by migrants make it an interesting area of identity study to explore what, how and why they are connected across national boundaries.

Learners often find it more comfortable to participate in the linguistic and cultural behaviors of their own communities. The social, cultural, political, and linguistic practices they are involved in make them connect to the transnational groups. In some research studies, learners are found to resist their new positions in different ways. Canagarajah (2004a) calls it ‘subversive identities’ when the learners maintain their membership in their vernacular communities and cultures while still learning a second language. However, if the learners really invest in developing their trajectory of identity, they engage themselves in transnational communities (Warriner, 2007) where they go beyond their own linguistic and cultural communities and widen their horizons of practices by participating in other cultures and communities.

In translanguaging, researchers do not look at the linguistic items only that the language learners or speakers use. They also look at other semiotic devices that are used to make meaning in a particular context. This idea comes from such models as integrationist linguistics, which was developed by Harris (2009), where the belief is that all the linguistic and any other types of resources that language users use for the meaning making process work integratively. Language users make use of multiple sources for meaning making in their “contact zone”. Contact zone is defined as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (Pratt, 1991, p. 40). Canagarajah (2013) mentions that Pratt’s modes initiate a useful shift from a “linguistics of community” to a “linguistics of contact”. It indicates that there has been a shift from the study of language of a particular group of people, which is ideally a homogeneous and fixed system, to how a language is actualized in a particular contact zone. Canagarajah (2013) also states that the
label translanguaging highlights two key concepts: “communication transcends individual languages” and “communication transcends word and involves diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances”. By the first concept, he means that languages “mutually influence each other” and the second concept means that “communication involves diverse semiotic resources … treating language as … a self-standing product, and autonomous in status distorts meaning-making practices” (pp. 6-7). This is a very helpful description of how translanguaging goes beyond the ideal perception of perfection in two or more languages. Even different varieties of the same language can be used by a multilingual consciously or subconsciously for the meaning making purpose. What is more important is that all the linguistic and other semiotic resources work in unison. There is also a lot of mixing of different codes within the same situation. Canagarajah (2013) presents the notion of English as being a translanguaging entity in the present multilingual world and states:

English is used … in contact situations….the type of mixing will differ from speaker to speaker according to their level of proficiency in English and according to their language backgrounds. So, speakers of language A and language B may speak to each other in a form of English mixed with their own first languages, and marked by the influence of these languages. Without looking for a single uniform code, speakers will be able to negotiate their different Englishes for intelligibility and effective communication. (pp. 68-69)

This shows that all the learners may not have the same linguistic repertoire at their disposal. However, they are engaged in making meaning and resort to mobilizing their multiple resources which results in translanguaging. In this sense, “meaning is an inter-subjective accomplishment” (p. 69) and “translingual practice therefore calls for a sensitivity to similarity-in-difference … and difference-in-similarity” (p. 9). Since learners make use of their multiple but not necessarily competent knowledge, they adopt different translanguaging negotiation strategies. The four types of translanguaging negotiation strategies he has presented are: envoicing, recontextualization, interactional, and entextualization. He has described each of these strategies as follows:

Envoicing strategies shape the extent and nature of hybridity, as a consideration of voice plays a critical role in appropriating mobile semiotic resources in one’s text and talk; recontextualization strategies frame the text/talk and alter the footing to prepare the ground for appropriate negotiation; interactional strategies are adopted to negotiate and manage meaning-making activity; and entextualization strategies configure codes in the temporal and spatial dimension of the text/talk to facilitate and respond to these negotiations. (p. 79)

Among these four types of translanguaging negotiation strategies presented by Canagarajah, I have chosen to focus on the “interactional” negotiation strategies while looking at my data. The
reason I adopted the interactional translilingual negotiation strategies was that I wanted to investigate how my participants make sense of the meaning being conveyed in a particular contact zone and how even their disfluency makes sense through negotiations. According to Canagarajah (2013), an interactional translilingual negotiation strategy is:

a social activity of co-constructing meaning by adopting reciprocal and collaborative strategies. The enactment of these strategies is also dynamic. Participants do not necessarily use the same strategies. They are reciprocal in the sense that interlocutors adopt strategies that complement and/or resist those of the other for negotiation of meaning or rhetorical and social objectives. These are largely strategies of alignment… ways in which interlocutors match the language resources they bring with people, situations, objects, and communicative ecologies for meaning-making. (p. 82)

From this definition of interactional translilingual negotiation strategies, what we can infer is that translanguaging is a social process that takes place in the contact zone of the interlocutors where they seek different interactional means to agree with or disagree with others but all the resources they resort to work mutually. Negotiation strategies can be explicit or implicit. They can be self-initiated or other-initiated during interactions. Kirkpatrick (2010) provides some examples of listener-initiated and speaker-initiated strategies. Listener-initiated strategies include: lexical anticipation, lexical suggestion, lexical correction, don’t give up, request, repetition, request clarification, let it pass, listen to the message, participant paraphrase, and participant prompts. Speaker-initiated strategies include: spell out the word, repeat the phrase, be explicit, paraphrase, and avoid local/idiomatic reference (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p.14). These strategies help the interlocutors make meaning of a particular piece of discourse through different means. According to Canagarajah (2013), these strategies are “dynamic” and “interlocutors make instantaneous and strategic decisions on how to reciprocate the moves of the other” (p. 83).

There have been a lot of research studies on translanguaging. Hornberger and Link (2012) gathered data from the US and international educational contexts to see the translanguaging and transnational literacies. They analyzed their ethnographic data from the perspective of critical sociolinguistics of globalization and commented that translanguaging and transnational literacies in classrooms are ‘not only necessary but desirable educational practice’ (p. 261). They mentioned that students’ multilingual repertoires could provide a rich source of practices in classrooms. Martin-Beltran (2014) conducted a research study in a high school program with the Language Ambassadors program in the Washington D.C. The aim of this study was to investigate how the students learning English and the students learning Spanish took part in translanguaging through their multiple resources. She collected data from the students with diverse background such as Latino/a, African American, White, Asian, and other race/ethnicities. The data were collected using different data collection tools such as participant observations,
student writing, interviews, and audio/video recordings of peer interactions. The researcher adopted sociocultural theory as the conceptual framework and used interactional ethnography and microgenetic analysis to analyze the data. The findings showed that the language-minority students used “more translanguaging and more of their target language than their language-majority peers” (p. 215). The study also presents some uses of translanguaging among the participants: translanguaging to invite others to co-construct knowledge; drawing upon funds of knowledge to defend word choice and deepen understanding; translanguaging to meet halfway between languages to co-construct meaning; translanguaging to recognize students as multilingual language users; and translanguaging highlights room for growth and future trajectories (pp. 217-223). All these studies illustrate that since multilinguals have different linguistic and other semiotic means at their disposal, they strive to negotiate interactions through those different means. They are not only invested in making use of the resources they already possess but also attempt to learn new ways to achieve communicative success. What follows next is the discussion and review of the notion of investment, which is also a theme of this research study.

**Nepali Immigrants in the USA and in Michigan**

The US Census 2000 reports 11,715 as the total number of Nepal-born Nepalese residing in the US, but the informal estimates made by Non-resident Nepali (NRNs) associations place that figure between 80,000 and 150,000 (Sijapati, 2009). This number has certainly increased since then due to the growing number of Nepali immigrants who came to the US through the lottery system. The Nepali Americans are primarily located in large cities like New York, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and so on. Beyond these areas that have historically received a large South Asian population including Nepalese, the Nepali community has also grown significantly in other areas of the United States.

According to the US Census Bureau (2010), between 2000 and 2010, the South Asian population became the fastest growing major ethnic group in the United States and has emerged in new areas of the country. Over 3.4 million South Asians live in the United States. Indians constitute the largest members of the South Asian community in the United States. However, comparing the Census results of 2000 and 2010, the South Asian community as a whole grew 81% over the decade. The Bhutanese community shows the highest growth exhibiting 82.55% followed by Nepalis, Maldivians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, and Sri Lankans. Though the Nepalese communities contain different languages, ethnic groups, cultures and social strata, the major lingua franca they use in the US is the Nepali language (Dhungel, 1999).

The American Immigration Council (2015) cites the American Census Bureau and states that the Asian population in Michigan grew from 1.1% in 1990, to 1.8% in 2000 to 2.5% (242,232 people) in 2011. They comprised 1.1% (or 53,000) of voters in the 2008 election. However, there is no specific data showing the total number of Nepalese in Michigan. In conversation with a Nepali resident who has been living in Michigan for the last 30 years and who has been a faculty member at Michigan State University, I learned that there are more than...
25 Nepali families in Michigan. Troy, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Holland, and Ann Arbor are some places where many Nepali immigrants are residing. According to the Migration Policy Institute (2014), in 2012, foreign-born Asians comprised 29.4% and US-born Asians comprised 0.8% of the total population of Michigan. There is no specific distribution of the Nepali immigrants in the Michigan demographics. However, the number of Nepalis in Michigan is growing as a result of childbirth, the electronic diversity visa or the lottery, student visa, and so on.

There have not been many research studies in the Nepali community although the number of Nepali immigrants in the US is growing day by day. Tamot (2008) examined the anthropological concepts of ‘self’ and ‘other’ to explore the marginalized identity of Nepali professionals in the US. He explicated the notions of identity and globalization to see how the professional Nepali cadre in the US compared their identities when they were in Nepal and their careers in the US. Through his narrative study and survey data, he showed that a majority of his participants had come to the US to pursue higher education and stayed here after the completion of their study as they were attracted by the opportunities they had seen here. In their view, Nepal could not create any situation to attract back home the Nepalese elite groups who pursued their higher education abroad. Very few of the research participants wanted to go back to Nepal to use the skills they had learned in the US.

Even though Tamot’s study looked at the Nepali community in the US, this study was limited to the elite group and did not explore their identity in relation to the English language learning processes. Many Nepalese women in Michigan were working in Nepal in different positions before their husbands came to the US. Then, they had to accompany their husbands along with their children. Their limited English language proficiency did not help them continue their study, nor could they maintain the professional status they had before immigrating. Therefore, many of them are struggling to improve their proficiency in English to continue their studies and/or their professional jobs. The present study is an attempt to look at the role of English in the construction of the participating women’s identity in the US.

**Research Questions**

The data collection process and analysis were guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the Nepalese women’s investments in learning the conversational skills in English and what impact do these investments have in their overall process of learning English?
2. What translingual practices are these women involved in and how are these practices related to their learning of English for daily communication?
Methodology

Participants

The participants in this research study were three Nepali women living in East Lansing, Michigan. I used the purposive non-random sampling procedure to select my population because it would be difficult to find women who are learning English through random sampling though there are many Nepali immigrants in Michigan. Since the research aimed to look into how their investment and their translanguaging practices determine their decision to enroll in ESL classes, I purposefully selected these three women: Bhoomika, Ranjeeta, and Shakuntala, who were enrolled in English language classes at the community college in Lansing. The reason only three women were selected was that my focus was on the depth of data collection rather than its coverage. Bhoomika and Ranjeeta were enrolled in level 2 and Shakuntala was enrolled in level 3 at the Lansing Community College when the data collection began.

I have used pseudonyms the participants themselves liked and chose. In the beginning of my communication with them, they had expressed their willingness to be addressed with their original names in the study. However, as our meetings went on, each of them at some point realized that they would not be comfortable being addressed according to their real names. During the meetings, I came to know through informal communication with them that their fear of being recognized by the people familiar to them made them feel uncomfortable, and therefore, they chose pseudonyms. The participants’ ages range from 25 to 35 years. All of them are mothers and their children range in age from 2 to 17 years. My main intention behind choosing mothers for this study was to see how multiple roles they play affect their investment in the English learning process. Most of the time, they use English to communicate with people just because they have to deal with several different issues related to their children, for example, at the hospitals, at their children’s schools, at the child care centers, and so on.

Table 1 summarizes the biographical information of the participants.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>L1</th>
<th>L2</th>
<th>Occupation in Nepal</th>
<th>Occupation in the US</th>
<th>Length of residency</th>
<th>Level of Education of children</th>
<th>Number (age) of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhoomika</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Doteli, Nepali</td>
<td>Hindi, English</td>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>Dollar Tree Store</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>High school (was enrolled in undergraduate course)</td>
<td>1 (3 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakuntala</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Nepali</td>
<td>Hindi, English</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Nanny</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Certificate in nursing</td>
<td>2 (15 and 17 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranjeeta</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Nepali</td>
<td>Hindi, English</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>3 (2, 6 and 17 years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tools for Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from multiple sources for the triangulation process. A questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, journal entries and participant observations were used for the collection of as rich a set of data as possible. Some informal group chats on Facebook were also analyzed. The participants mostly provided me with the journal entries but sometimes they were also engaged in a group chat, where they could share their experiences of communicating in English. The group chat occurred among the three participants and me. Sometimes they would ask me for help related to the incidents they encountered while communicating in English. These multiple sources of data were used to enhance the validity and credibility of the results (Chapelle & Duff, 2003).

Questionnaire. A questionnaire was used to collect the demographic information from the participants, information about their education background, and their family. The participants completed the questionnaire on the first day of my meeting with each of them.

Interview. There were 15 interviews altogether over the time period of three months. Each participant was interviewed five times and each interview session lasted for an hour. A semi-structured interview guide was followed initially. However, the subsequent interview questions were based on the participants’ responses. The medium of interview was Nepali. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and translated by me, that is, the researcher herself. Literal translation was the mostly used translation technique. However, some expressions were translated through free translation technique because the literal translation would not give the exact meaning that the participants wanted to convey. This was done to translate the proverbs they have used and to make an attempt to preserve the sociocultural meanings they expressed. There was a time gap of at least one week between two interviews with the same participant. The questions for the subsequent interviews with each participant were based on their responses to the previous interview. I would listen to the recorded interview two or three times and make a list of tentative questions to be asked in the subsequent interviews. Most of the questions were open-ended in the subsequent interviews, where the participants were asked to elaborate on the previously mentioned themes and to recall some examples and incidents they remembered from the time of their arrival in the US.

Journal. The participants wrote journals at least once a week (for three months – from December to February) in which they kept a record of their reflections on their interactions with their classmates, their teachers, children’s teachers, other native speakers of English, and so on. They were asked to write the most intriguing interactions that generated either a sense of success or failure regarding the (un)intelligibility in their conversations and how they felt about that. They were asked to write in any language with which they were most comfortable. They were asked to do so in a diary. After I talked to them and determined that they were comfortable, I created a Facebook chat group of four including me where they could share their ideas. The
portions written or posted in the Nepali language were translated by me. The journal entries were in English, Nepali and sometimes in both languages.

**Observation.** I made field notes of the behaviors or interactions that are related to the theoretical concepts in question. I spent at least a day with each participant to observe their behaviors in daily life. I called it ‘A Day in the Life of X’. I joined them in their household activities and also accompanied them to the grocery store. I observed their linguistic behaviors when they communicated with their children at home. This was mainly done to see if the responses elicited from interviews really matched their day-to-day behaviors and practices and to explore their real language practices. The participants gave me permission to do that.

**Procedure of Data Collection**

As mentioned, I purposefully selected three women from the Nepali immigrant community living in East Lansing. I visited the participants and explained my research to them. They were asked to sign the consent form. The questionnaire was given to them to answer on the day of my first meeting with each participant and I explained the questions to them, when needed. Then, the journal writing template was given to them and was explained to them. Looking at their time availability, the first interview date was scheduled and each subsequent interview was scheduled after the interviews. I met with each participant at their apartments. The interviews were rescheduled a couple times due to some conflicts in the participants’ schedules. The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and translated within one week after each interview so that the emerging themes would guide the subsequent interview questions. I spent at least one day with each participant at their homes and also accompanied them to the grocery store. I wrote field notes by hand. The incidents and the participants’ use of language related to the selected themes were written on the same day in the evening. Whenever I observed some interesting incident or conversational exchanges, I would type some words in my mobile message box and would save it in the draft folder to remind myself of the incident while writing about it later. Except for some special Nepali cultural terms and expressions they used, other things were written in English.

**Researcher Positionality**

Though a researcher is an important part of a research study, few studies have explored researcher identity. In an ethnographic case study of a male Hmong refugee, De Costa (2010b) found himself in three researcher positions: researcher as outsider or insider, researcher as resource, and researcher as befriender (p. 524). Similarly, in Norton and Early’s (2011) analysis of narrative data, they found four researcher identities most commonly recurring: researcher as international guest, researcher as collaborative team member, researcher as teacher, and researcher as teacher educator. In the present study, I find myself an insider in the community. Recently, I was appointed as the President of the Nepali Students’ Association of MSU and we organized three different Nepali festivals in the East Lansing Nepali community. I have also attended some ceremonies such as the rice feeding ceremony, worshipping the deities, special
festival dinners, welcoming the newcomers to East Lansing, and birthdays. They changed the term of address for me from ‘Hima madam’ to ‘Hima didi’ (Hima sister). The former is a very formal term that is used to address a female teacher in Nepal and the latter is used to address sisters, cousins or close friends. Since my participants are also a part of this group, I was able to elicit in-depth data over a period of three months.

**Analysis and Results**

The analysis of data started during the data collection process as qualitative data analysis is concurrent with data collection and management (Saldaña, 2011). The interviews were transcribed within a week of the interview schedule so that the recurring themes, patterns, and categories would be listed or merged according to their occurrences. Data analysis followed an iterative, spiraling, or cyclical process (Creswell, 1998) as there was the identification of the codes and categories, restructuring of them as the data appear and cross-referencing. Codes are defined as the “names or symbols used to stand for a group of similar items, ideas, or phenomena that the researcher has noticed in his or her data set” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 55). I adopted both deductive and inductive reasoning. In deductive reasoning, we draw from established facts and evidence whereas induction follows from particular to general and so we induce from the evidence available (Saldaña, 2011). The analysis was deductive in that the identification of codes and themes was guided by the theoretical notions of gendered identity, investment and translanguaging. At the same time, some recurring examples led to the discussion of related but new themes, and therefore, it was inductive too. In fact, I had expected patterns, categories, or themes to evolve as data collection proceeded rather than imposing them a priori (Chapelle & Duff, 2003, p. 175). I focused on the emic perspective (Chapelle & Duff, 2003; Friedman, 2012) to dig deep into the participants’ behaviors and practices. Pseudonyms of the participants were used to maintain confidentiality. After the analysis, ‘member checks’ (Duff, 2012; Friedman, 2012) were done to find out if any of the participants was not willing to share some data.

The data collected from different sources: questionnaires, interviews, journal entries, observations, and Facebook interactions were analysed. I translated all the data into English. The data were read and re-read to analyze them in line with the research questions. First, the recurring themes related to the research questions were located throughout the data. This recursive process was adopted to find the themes in terms of the words the participants had used, for example, the use of specific recurring adjectives, nouns, verbs, and adverbs because during the data collection process I had realized that they were always trying to find some content words to express their feelings. Similarly, the excerpts in terms of phrases, clauses, sentences, proverbs, and even small paragraphs were found to support the themes in research questions. The results of the study are presented in the following subsections in line with each research question.
Discussion

Investment

Research Question 1: What are the Nepalese women’s investments in learning conversational skills in English and what impact do these investments have in their overall process of learning English?

In the second language acquisition literature, it is said that silent period is a noticeable phenomenon (Ellis, 1985) and second language learners in the very beginning of their language learning process pass through a silent period although the length of the silent period varies from learner to learner. However, in this study, all three participants were not in the beginning phase of second language learning. Each of them had some prior knowledge of English and they had learned English in a formal setting in Nepal as they all had at least a high school degree before their arrival in the US. In Nepal, English is taught as a compulsory course throughout school starting from the primary level to the higher secondary level. Despite having some knowledge of English, they preferred to be silent on several occasions in the beginning. All of them recalled their earlier days in the US and stated that they felt blank even if they knew some English. Bhoomika said, “Sometimes I thought that it was better to be quiet and listen than to say something that people would not understand due to my Nepali accent.” Similarly, Shakuntala said, “I would just listen to people talk in the gatherings and would smile along with them but would not speak until they asked me some questions.” In a similar vein, Ranjeeta stated, “I used to try my best to avoid the situations where I had to talk… it was only in the beginning… maybe for some months… I did not want to be comic in front of people… maybe it was my fear only… people were always nice to me.” The participants’ resistance to participate in interactions in the beginning of their arrival in the US is similar to the silent period phenomenon, when they might have wanted to develop some confidence before they could communicate freely. Their fear of being humiliated stopped them from participating in interactions in the native English speaker settings.

The participants’ investment in learning English in the data collected could be traced to different sources. Each story they told me, every experience they went through directly or indirectly informed me that they were committed and dedicated to learn and improve their English. Two of the participants, Bhoomika and Shakuntala, had experienced free English classes at the community center. Shakuntala even showed me the flyer she had in her file for the last four years. She had a very organized collection of many flyers, brochures, and leaflets related to free English classes, insurance and health plans, free family counseling sessions, and so on. The flyer that was related to the free English classes at the community center read as:

Perfect my English
Bring your lunch or just yourself and engage in fruitful conversation with a native-speaker. We look forward to meeting you.
This sentence was followed by a picture in which two heads were shown (a native speaker and a non-native speaker) and the knowledge was flowing from the native head to the non-native head. Shakuntala told me that she had an emotional attachment to that flyer since it offered her the first free English sessions. Her response illustrated how invested she was in improving her English. However, she was not satisfied with the service provided. The following excerpt from an interview between myself (H) and Shakuntala (S) indicated her dissatisfaction. For all quotes, an ellipses (…) represents removed text.

S: I was so happy to join the free English conversation classes… I thought that was the time when my English would be polished. I would learn more words, more rules… improve my pronunciation … I don’t want to say that those classes did not help me at all, but they were just too informal … unstructured.

H: What do you mean by unstructured?

S: I mean it was just like meeting one person or two and talk on some random topics for half an hour or more… I could make good friends with the tutor and a couple other ESL learners but they did not tell me directly … how to initiate a talk … how to reply to different types of questions … how to say yes/no to the invitations, how to offer help like … you know? I respected the way they were providing free help … it just did not help me to improve my English … may be I had too high expectation … may be that would help me in the long run … I don’t know … I was so desperate that I wanted to start working as soon as possible as it was difficult for four of us to live only on my husband’s stipend.

In this excerpt, Shakuntala expressed her expectation of her English classes. Her desire to learn English explicitly might have come from her way of learning English in Nepal where the vocabulary items and grammatical rules are provided to the learners and they are told when to use them. All the examples she has provided in the excerpt indicate that what she wanted to learn was the communicative functions in English and take part in the real life discourse. At the same time, her desire to learn English in a speedy way and then start working immediately shows that part of her investment was still instrumental in nature. Her feeling at that time was more guided by her emotions to support her husband financially and to look after her two children. Similarly, Bhoomika had gone to attend the informal ESL classes offered by Friendship House, run by a Church, to improve her English. She remembered her first day there and said, “I was so nervous to enter the building … I had thought that the people there would think that I was not smart … I felt relaxed when I was warmly welcomed by the members there … the behaviors were in line with the name of the organization … Friendship House … more importantly, there were so many other ESL learners like me.” She enjoyed the informal conversations at the Friendship house. She also said that she would notice how other people start conversations. She made many American and international friends, many of whom are still in touch with her through Facebook and email. While Shakuntala did not benefit much from the informal conversational classes,
Bhoomika found them helpful. On the other end of the spectrum lies the third participant, Ranjeeta who did not even bother to attend such informal classes because according to her, she had to look after her daughter. When I told her that some of those types of classes also managed a childcare facility, she replied, “Maybe but I did not care … I was so lazy [smiles]. Instead I knitted the sweaters, scarves for my children and husband … and better excuse than that is … there was a Bhutanese woman nearby who spoke Nepali … I hang out with her … I know I should have taken initiatives to look for such free classes … but now I have even my third child to look after”.

Bhoomika and Shakuntala had joined the ESL classes at Lansing Community College in the fall of 2014, whereas Ranjeeta joined in the fall of 2015 only. Their investment in those classes is guided by similar purposes. They have all been learning English for both instrumental and integrative purposes. As noted by Shakuntala, “The unstructured informal classes did not help me much … more importantly, I want to go for my nursing degree in future so that I could be a certified nurse in the US … I need to pass certain level in the ESL classes … also I want to be more fluent so that I could be a part of American society because we are going to live here forever … so, we can’t always compromise with our lack of English.” Similarly, Bhoomika joined the ESL classes with the motivation of getting admitted to an undergraduate program in an American university and also wants to “feel like English speakers.” Although Ranjeeta’s experience has been different from Bhoomika’s and Shakuntala’s, she also has both instrumental and integrative motivation for joining ESL classes. She said, “I will enroll in an undergraduate program after I complete all five levels at the community college … now that we are living in the US for at least until our children graduate, I want to be a part of American culture … who knows? My children may have American spouse in future [laughs].” Regarding the continuation of their formal study, Bhoomika and Ranjeeta are not quite sure in which discipline they will major, whereas Shakuntala knows for sure that she will pursue nursing since she was working as a nurse in Nepal.

**Investment through different sources.** In addition to the participants’ investment in attending English classes either in an informal, unstructured setting or in the formal community college setting, the data also demonstrated their self-initiated investment in learning through several other sources such as YouTube videos on learning English, free English learning websites, television, email, and Facebook. Bhoomika seems to be relatively more invested in improving her communicative English. An interesting excerpt from one of her diary entries is as follows:

Today I searched for some YouTube videos to learn and improve my English … there were so many of them … I did not have an idea of what to watch … I chose the ones that were related to pronunciation … First, the speaker produced single words and then he put them into sentences … he was showing that same word can be produced differently when it comes in a sentence … I was surprised and then realized that’s why
it is difficult to understand American speakers … they speak so fast and the words also change their color in sentences … the speaker in the video was producing parts of sentences and then he would stop for some seconds for the listeners to repeat after him … I liked it and at the end, I subscribed to their channel to watch more videos.

I was always amazed by Bhoomika’s enthusiasm during the data collection process. Every time I met her, she would have a list of questions related to English. Her questions were either related to grammar rules or the meaning of vocabulary items. She would then write down the answers. One day after the interview, she asked me to stay a little longer with her and help her with the tense system in English. I helped her but just an hour was not sufficient to show her how the tense system works. She was not completely ignorant of the tense system but wanted to learn more about it. She came to my apartment a couple of times to continue our discussion on tense. Every time she would come with the same notebook so that she would not miss her notes. She would ask me to give her some sentences for practice and in turn I would ask her to which tense a particular sentence belonged. She was always full of questions. In an interview, she also stated that she looked for some free websites that teach English. However, she could not benefit much from them because she said, “First, they showed some short clips which looked very helpful … later they asked for money [smiles] … maybe I am not very good at searching for free websites.” Bhoomika frequently referred to the YouTube videos in her diary entries and interviews. She was not only motivated but also invested in improving her English.

On the other hand, according to Ranjeeta, watching TV is a good way to learn English. She mentioned that she could not understand anything while watching English channels and movies, but slowly she learned to understand. She stated, “It took me long time to be able to understand … maybe one year … now I watch and listen to English news … I am worried about what is happening in the world … I keep on changing channels … I don’t feel left behind anymore.” When I further enquired what she meant by “left behind”, she said that her son and her husband would understand the news and programs in English, and then would comment on them but she had to ask them what the news was about. However, the situation has totally changed now. She said, “I did not stop watching TV even if I did not understand … I had no option … I could not watch Nepali, Hindi channels on TV … but everything happens for good … since I had no other options, I kept on watching English programs.” However, it is not only Ranjeeta who thinks that TV is helpful; Shakuntala also thinks that TV has helped her develop her level of understanding native speakers of English. All three participants admit that watching TV helps them improve their receptive skill, especially listening, but none of them believes that it has a great impact on their productive skills, that is, speaking.

Regarding the participants’ access to native speakers of English and other ESL speakers, the participants have different views. Whereas Shakuntala thinks that it is easy to interact with other ESL speakers because they also encounter the same feelings and struggles. The following excerpt shows her feeling towards her perceptions of ESL learners:
I rent a small garden at the community center every summer and fall … I grow a lot of vegetables there … when I go to water the saplings, I meet many other ESL speakers there … we observe each other’s garden and give advice, if necessary … we share seeds of green leafy vegetables with each other … I feel comfortable talking with them … I always look forward to seeing them in the morning and in the evening so that I could talk to them in English … a Chinese told me that my English was easy to understand … he could speak only some words in English … I feel more secured to talk to them as they are also not perfect … they are not judgmental.

This excerpt shows that Shakuntala’s insecurity lies in her feelings that the native speakers would judge her lack of proficiency in English. Due to that fear, she prefers to invest her time and effort to interact with other ESL learners. On the other end of the spectrum lies Bhoomika whose view is totally different regarding her perception towards communication with native English speakers and other ESL speakers. She thinks that it is worth spending time with native speakers because in her opinion, they are the ultimate source of reference. The following excerpt shows her view about investing in learning English from native speakers:

I think it is more helpful for me to communicate with native English speakers than with other ESL speakers. The ESL speakers initiate the conversation abruptly … and they directly dive into the topic of what they have to say … otherwise there is just “hi” and “hello” stuff with them … whereas with the native speakers, it is so easy … they begin by saying “I liked the color you are wearing; wow what an adorable child,” like things which make me feel more comfortable to discuss the topic … they do not directly touch the topic … they do not stop the conversation abruptly … I have picked up so many expressions from native speakers which I try to use to start and end the conversations.

This excerpt indicates that one of Bhoomika’s many assets is her willingness to communicate with native speakers of English. Her perception is that native speakers make her feel more comfortable by “setting scene” to foster interaction. This idea is related to the listener-initiated strategies proposed by Kirkpatrick (2010).

Another illustration of Ranjeeta and Shakuntala’s investment is that they have the benefit of having high school children from whom they can receive assistance in some cases. Shakuntala said, “When I am reading for my ESL classes and doing homework, instead of checking the online dictionary, I turn around to my children … I ask them … they help me many times… I don’t feel small when I take help from my children.” Similarly, Ranjeeta’s eldest son has helped her many times with her homework and to overcome her confusion. He even helps her when her pronunciation is inaccurate. He does so, however, in a nice manner, according to her. She said, “My son always corrects my pronunciation of certain words.” On the other hand, Bhoomika’s daughter is too young to help her. However, she recalls the same story when she had to take help
from a nurse to figure out the problem when she and her husband could not understand their daughter’s first utterances. She smiled and said, “My daughter was born in the US… she will have a perfect American accent … she can’t help me now but maybe in future …. ” This statement shows that Bhoomika’s investment in learning English is also associated with her future dream where she sees her daughter helping her improve her English.

**Investment and participation: Enacting communication strategies.** One of the common themes that recurred in the stories my participants shared was their use of different communication strategies to make themselves understood on different occasions. Some strategies that I observed in the data are repetition, elaboration, and explanation, which will be addressed in the following discussion. Although the participants went through a silent period in the beginning despite knowing some English, over time all of them invested in communication through different modes. The interview data show that they had all co-constructed their participation and investment on different occasions. Shakuntala recalled an incident when she went to her Chinese neighbor to give him some fresh vegetables that she had grown in her garden. The excerpt below shows how she made him understand that she was not selling the vegetables to him:

I took some leafy vegetables, some pieces of pumpkin, a couple of cucumbers… went to the neighbor next door … I had talked to his wife a couple times … knocked at his door because you know in Nepal, we always share the fruits and vegetables that we grow in our field … he opened the door [laughs]… and I said to him, “I have brought some fresh vegetables from my garden” He said, “no no we don’t want to buy them” [laughs] I again said, “no no not selling … just giving …” the man looked at me as if I was going to ask him for something in return… I continued … I have a garden and there are lots of vegetables … this is fresh… no pesticides… [laughs] but he was too adamant to accept them … [laughs] only after sometime he took the vegetables … bowed down his head and thanked me. I had to repeat the same sentences so many times … I was worried if he would bring something to me in return which I did not want him to do … [laughs]

This excerpt indicates that Shakuntala was highly invested in making her neighbors understand that she was just sharing the vegetables she had grown and they were a gift. She could have left after her first and second attempts but she kept on explaining to the man the reason she had brought the vegetables to him. To further explain this issue to me, Shakuntala said, “You know it maybe because of cultural difference … when I give YOU something from my garden you just thank me and I don’t have to explain because we are from the same culture.” She had offered me vegetables and tasty dishes every time I went to her home. Her use of the stress on the word ‘you’ shows that she was explaining to me the difference between her and her neighbor’s culture. Her use of repetition and elaboration led her to succeed in communication, to make the neighbor understand her. The more interesting aspect is that following that incident,
Shakuntala did not have to explain the gift giving gesture to the man ever again. He or his wife would take the vegetables and thank her.

In a similar vein, Ranjeeta’s investment in improving her English is connected with her being able to communicate with the parents of her children’s classmates and friends. She said that since her son and daughter attended high school and pre-school respectively, she had different sorts of motivation to interact with them. In the excerpt from an interview below, she noted:

With the parents of my daughter’s friends, I would feel more comfortable since I had a lot to talk to them, for example, her playing behaviors, what she likes to eat and do, her mischievous behaviors and so on. However, with the parents of my son’s friends, I would not feel that comfortable since they would talk about the project works their children were involved in, their extra-curricular activities, their colleges for future, the disciplines they were interested in and so on. I felt so dumb … but I also wanted to share with them that my son has been good in his study and even in his extra-curricular participation … then, I started asking my son more about what he is doing at school, his aim for future, his strengths … and everything… my son wants to join the police force … serve the people … after talking to him so many times I came to know about his passion for joining the police … next time I met the parents of my son’s friends at school functions and parent teacher meetings, I proudly told them about my son… they appreciated it… I was so touched.

The above excerpt from my interview with Ranjeeta can be analyzed and interpreted from different angles. First, she was so motivated and invested in her son’s study and future plans. The motive behind that was her willingness to participate in the parent-teacher meetings. She wanted to be an insider in the group rather than a mere listener. Her expression “I felt so dumb” indicates how she was prompted to learn more about the subject matter and academic community of practice so that she could no longer find herself dumb. Second, her investment is also associated with her awareness of two different target groups (parents of high school students and parents of pre-school students). On the one hand, her confidence level is high enough to interact with the parents of pre-school children because they would talk more about the children’s playing, and eating behaviors. On the other hand, she has to invest some time and energy to learn about some aspects of her son’s life and his age group so that she could be a part of the discussion group. Her investment here is not only to communicate in English but also to learn something first and then communicate that through English.

All the above excerpts and examples support the fact that the participants were motivated and dedicated to convey the message they wanted to share with others. Bhoomika’s communication with her employer and co-worker; Shakuntala’s communication with her Chinese neighbor; and Ranjeeta’s communication with the parents of her high school and pre-school children led them to succeed in communication in those particular contexts.
Translingual Practices

Research Question 2: What translingual practices are these women involved in and how are these practices related to their learning of English for daily communication?

The data collected from different sources: interview, observation, and diary entries show some instances of translingual practices adopted by the three participants. The notion of translingual practices in itself is open to interpretation from different perspectives. Most of the translingual practice studies take into account the natural interactions taking place between interlocutors and study the collected data from conversational analysis, pragmatic analysis, and other frameworks. However, since I did not record the naturally occurring conversations between my participants and other ESL learners or native speakers, my analysis of the translingual practices of my participants is mainly based on what I elicited from them during interview sessions. Their diary entries about their experiences of particular incidents related to their use of English also provided me with some translingual practices they adopted. Likewise, there were several instances during my “A day in the life of X” observations that I found the participants making use of different types of negotiation strategies among other non-native speakers of English. I had made the field notes of those incidents. To make the data analysis related to translingual practices easier, I used one of four translingual negotiation strategies presented by Canagarajah (2013). Among the four strategies he has mentioned: envoicing, recontextualization, interactional, and extextualization, I have used “interactional” strategy to see how the participants made use of different reciprocal and collaborative strategies in different contexts for the sake of intelligibility and communicative success (Canagarajah, 2013).

Second language learners bring with them different linguistic and cultural resources. When they engage in an interaction with other non-native speakers, they try their best to negotiate so that their interlocutors understand them. Generally, a native speaker model of a language is regarded as the norm of accuracy and appropriateness of language use. However, the study of translingual practices goes beyond that norm of correctness and digs deep into how the second language learners make use of their multiple resources to communicate in the target language. In her diary entry, Bhoomika described how she achieved communicative success through negotiation with another non-native speaker of English. That woman was from Malawi, and Bhoomika had invited her to her apartment for dinner. In the following excerpt, Bhoomika recalls what happened after dinner:

She used to live next door … was a new international student … she liked the Nepali dinner I had prepared … she had also brought something typical of Malawi with her … after the dinner, she said that she would come back again whenever her food was finished … I was confused… what did she mean by her food was finished? ... I asked her if she did not have food at her apartment and offered her to go for grocery with us on Fridays … she smiled and said, “No, no I have food now, I will come here and request you to make extra food for me too because you cook very good … I understood
that she liked my food but still did not understand about her finished food … I continued … you have food now but when you finish that you can go with us for grocery ok? … she replied, “Thank you, but if there is no food before Friday … I will come here … then I understood that maybe she was talking about the situation when she runs out of food … I also did not know the expression “run out of food” at that time … but I understood her and she understood me … both of us were not English people … so it took both of us to understand the situation.

In this excerpt from Bhoomika’s diary, the translanguaging practice of negotiation is achieved through both parties’ strategies. On the one hand, Bhoomika told her that she could give a ride to the Malawi woman if she needed to go to the grocery store on Fridays. When the woman said that she had gotten food for that day, Bhoomika repeated the phrase “you have food now” as an indicator of a confirmation check to make sure that she had understood what the Malawi woman wanted to say. She further used a comprehension check “you can go with us for grocery, ok?” at the end when the woman used the term “if there is no food before Friday” to clarify to Bhoomika with the anticipation that she could help her if she ran out of food before Friday. Though none of them used the Standard English expression “running out of food” to express what they wanted to convey, they could make each other understand by using other linguistic means. As the translanguaging practices are regarded as the use of linguistic and other semiotic resources the interlocutors use to achieve the communicative aim in a specific situation, the above example shows how both the interlocutors translanguage for meaning making in that situation.

Shakuntala had also experienced a similar situation where she and her interlocutor had to optimize their disfluency and lack of knowledge of the exact English word but could achieve communicative success. This incident occurred during her interaction with a Saudi lady at her house, where Shakuntala was working as a nanny. According to her, the landlady was always a very calm and patient type of woman. She had to go to her restaurant to help her husband and other co-workers early in the morning and used to come back in the evening. So, Shakuntala had to be at the Saudi lady’s house from around 7 am to 6 pm six days a week. One day, the lady came home in the late afternoon to take some rest as she was not feeling well. Shakuntala was watching news on TV after she had finished her work and after feeding and putting the baby to sleep. The following excerpt from an interview with Shakuntala shows what happened after that and how both of them were engaged in a translanguaging practice:

She came home … I gave her a glass of water… she looked so tired … then I turned off the TV … because I thought that it would disturb her… but she said, “you can leave it open.” … I said, “Actually I had finished all my work so started watching the news and the baby is also sleeping … It will disturb you … you need some rest … so I closed it.” She lied on the couch, closed her eyes and continued, “you know I have to stand up the whole day, run here and there even inside the restaurant … sometimes to
the workers, sometimes to the counter… to the customers… I just get tired… but you
can turn the TV.” I said, “Yes I turned the TV… now you can take a nap for
sometime.” She said again to turn the TV and I said, “should I open it again?” she
nodded her head and I opened the TV again. We both listened to the news … I came
home and told my son about it and he said that we do not say close/open. Instead, we
say turn off/on the TV. Anyway, I and the lady understood each other that day… from
that day I don’t use the words open and close…. Turn is turn but what makes the
difference is off and on [laughs].

The above excerpt shows how the lack of the correct term “turn on/off” in both the
interlocutors’ repertoire did not impact their conversation. Instead, through a couple more
exchanges of the conversation, both of them could make it a successful conversation.
Shakuntala’s use of the expression “should I open it again?” helped the Arabian lady understand
that she was being asked for a confirmation. The literature on translanguaging shows that the
interlocutors can make use of other semiotic devices in addition to the linguistic cues to make
meaning in a particular context. In the above example, the Saudi lady’s nodding of her head
added to the intelligibility of the conversation and as a result, Shakuntala turned the TV on.
Shakuntala could recall this incident only after I asked her if she remembered any incident where
she and her interlocutor both did not know a Standard English word or structure. She used some
fillers and paused for a while and then she recalled the above incident and linked it with her
son’s telling her the correct words. When the second language learners translanguage, their use
of the target language may be influenced by their first language or their interlanguage. In the
above case, Shakuntala translated the words “banda garnu and kholnu”, which are translated as
“close and open” respectively. In Nepali, the same verb “banda garnu” is used to mean “close the
doors” and “turn off the TV”. Similarly, the verb “kholnu” is used to mean “open the door” and
“turn on the TV”. On the other hand, the Saudi lady’s use of the expression “turn the TV”
without the particle “off/on” may be a feature of her interlanguage. Despite the differences in
their linguistic repertoires, they could communicate successfully through negotiation strategies
within their contact zone.

Ranjeeta has a different negotiation strategy in her translingual practice with other non-
native speakers of English. In my “A day in the life of Ranjeeta”, I observed that she mostly used
gestures to make herself understood. She had also invited a classmate of hers from the
community college for lunch. Her husband had left for work. Her son and elder daughter were
watching some comedy program on a laptop in her son’s room because they had already eaten
lunch as they were hungry and could not wait until Ranjeeta’s friend came for lunch. It was
almost 2 pm. On the dinner table, when Ranjeeta, her friend and I were about to start eating our
lunch, Ranjeeta asked her friend if she wanted the soup in a separate bowl. This is a tradition in
Nepal that the hosts are supposed to give each variety of food prepared in different small plates
and bowls. She had already given me the soup in a different bowl. When she asked her friend
about it, the guest used a comprehension question, “in a ball?” Ranjeeta started explaining the
tradition and that lady was staring at Ranjeeta with her mouth open. She asked Ranjeeta how it could be possible to give the soup in a “ball”. She showed the gesture and asked again, “You mean ball”? Ranjeeta said, “Yes, ball… B-O-W-L ball… do you want the soup in that? [Pointing to the bowl of soup kept in front of me]. The lady thanked Ranjeeta for spelling the word for her. Both of them experienced a problem understanding each other because of their different pronunciation of the same word. I was surprised when I was later reviewing my field notes. Ranjeeta could have shown her the bowl immediately after she saw the sign of non-understanding from her interlocutor, which she did only at the end. Instead, she spelled the word “bowl” for her interlocutor, which is one of the speaker-initiated strategies (Kirkpatrick, 2010) for making his/her listener understand him/her. What is more interesting is that when I asked Ranjeeta about this incident in my interview with her in our next visit, she said that she did not do that very often. It was her instantaneous decision to spell the word for her interlocutor. It shows that when the interlocutors translanguage, they do not have a fixed set of tools to use for different situations. Instead, they make use of different strategies in different communicative situations and even the same person may use different strategies from the options she/he has at his/her disposal.

**Affinity to other transnational groups.** One interesting theme related to translanguaging that was found in the data collected from all three participants was their attitude towards other non-native speakers. They thought that they had the sense of solidarity with other non-native speakers of English because of their perception that both groups always lack something no matter how proficient they are. Recalling an international gathering at the community center where she lived, Bhoomika said to me in an interview:

*Bichara haru* [poor they], they are also like us … leaving behind their home, families, *afno mato* [own earth] … and *sabbhanda pani* [above all] with their incompetent English knowledge. There might be some more proficient speakers than others but still… we all are the same.

The use of the expression “*Bichara haru*” in Nepali shows one’s emotional feelings, like empathy towards others. Bhoomika’s use of this expression indicates that she feels bad for them for leaving their home country and coming to the US. She feels closer to them as she regards them to be like her and her feeling of proximity to them is due to the perceived incompetency of herself and that of those other international non-native speakers of English. Similarly, Shakuntala also expressed her opinion about other non-native speakers of English and said, “*Hami sabai eutai dyang ka mula hau* [laughs] [we are all in the same boat].” Like Bhoomika, she also admits that some of them are certainly highly proficient. On the other hand, Shakuntala has a slightly different way of looking at other non-native speakers of English. She thinks that they come from different cultural, religious, social, and economic backgrounds. However, her opinion towards them regarding the competency in English also makes her feel that it is the matter of who is in power. She said, “If Nepali was like English, then we would also feel the
same … jasko Shakti usko bhakti [surrender to the powerful]… rest of all are the same.” Her expression “jasko Shakti usko bhakti” indicates that she thinks that the status of English makes its speakers more privileged than others and therefore, the speakers of all other languages belong to the same category, with less power. All the above thoughts are connected to the idea of belonging to a group no matter what linguistic and cultural backgrounds people are from. If they are not proficient in English, they create a different group but find ways to build solidarity and establish successful communication within the group.

**Conclusion**

On the basis of data analyses and results, it can be concluded that the participants are invested in improving their proficiency in English and are also engaged in several translingual practices. The participants’ access to education and English was influenced by their instrumental motivation while they were in Nepal. However, there was a shift in their motivation from only instrumental to both instrumental and integrative. Their desire to achieve the required level of English to gain admission in the formal education system in the US, and their desire to work are related to their instrumental motivation, whereas being a part of the English speech community and getting the recognition of good language users prompted them to put their effort and time in improving their English, especially their conversational skills. They were not only motivated to achieve their target but also invested in doing so. However, the extent of their investment varied. More importantly, it was not static in all contexts. The level and nature of their investment was found to be fluid and context specific. It went beyond their desire to use language for utilitarian purposes. Instead, they believed that they were reshaping their identity and maintaining it simultaneously by preserving their linguistic and cultural values. They thought that every time they faced instances of intelligibility or unintelligibility, they experienced their dynamic and changing identity, which either encouraged them to perform better or left them with frustration. However, success and failure were evaluated by the participants in particular speech events only. This notion is in line with the idea of investment described by Norton (2013) where she states that “investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space” (pp. 50-51). The participants narrated several stories about how their household life and the social and religious beliefs influenced their quantity and quality of investment. They frequently referred back to their situation in Nepal and associated their present investment with their initial self of their gendered identity and the present situation. Looking at the investment in relation to the clothes they wore, the time when they ate food, the assistance they got from other members in the family in the household work, their ability to drive to work and several other related factors, the participants described their complex and dynamic identity. This finding corroborated the research on investment by Skilton-Sylvester (2002) which noted that investigating a woman’s investment is not complete without looking into her domestic and professional identities.

The participants’ use of different negotiation strategies indicated that their main aim was not to achieve the highest proficiency in the English language. Instead, their target was to satisfy
some specific communicative goals in different contact zones. In spite of their limited linguistic resources, they collaborated with their interlocutors to achieve intelligibility and communicative success. Each communicative situation was tied to their aim to understand and be understood. This phenomenon is in line with Canagarajah’s (2013) study of Siva, a vegetable seller and a native Tamil speaker, who was successful in translanguaging with an English speaker. He felt proud to have learned a few English words and structures through that translanguaging incident. However, he was “not aiming to develop competence in English” (p. 42). Similarly, the participants’ felt that all non-native speakers of English belong to the same group. Their use of the Nepali proverb “eutai dyang ka mula” [in the same boat] indicated that they identified more with the outer group of non-native speakers than with the native speakers despite being highly motivated and invested. This finding is consistent with the notion of non-native solidarity described by Canagarajah (2013), where non-native speakers strive to make use of different negotiation strategies to bridge a gap created among them due to diversity. The participants’ use of the expression “jasko Shakti usko bhakti” [surrender to the powerful] clearly demonstrates that they feel less powerful due to their lack of proficiency in English.

Finally, the participants’ use of several different Nepali proverbs helped them express their feelings and emotions. On the one hand, they believed that English had helped them empower themselves and reshape their identity. Therefore, they attempted to invest more in improving their English. On the other hand, they felt greater affinity with other non-native speakers due to their feeling of solidarity with them. This phenomenon illustrates the complex feelings and emotions often associated with language learning.

**Significance of the Study**

Although this study was conducted under certain limitations, it bears some pedagogical significance mainly for ESL teachers and for the people who are directly or indirectly related to adult ESL population. These people could be ESL program coordinators, curriculum designers, and even people who work in the immigration offices. The reason is that findings of this study provide insights into what varied backgrounds immigrants and ESL speakers represent. This will help the teachers and other concerned people in four main ways. First, immigrants and ESL learners may have different motives to learn the target language. Despite being motivated, they may not be invested in learning the language due to several restrictions such as their perceptions toward the target language speakers and other ESL speakers, their emotional feelings regarding their success and failure in achieving communicative success in a particular speech event, and their perceived attitudes of others toward themselves. Knowledge of their motivation for learning the language, and what types of investments they are employing to achieve success are of paramount importance for ESL teachers to help such learners.

Second, although the immigrants and ESL learners may come with a low level of competence in the target language, they have varied linguistic and other semiotic resources at their disposal, which they can mobilize in a particular speech event while interacting with other non-native speakers of English. Making use of the multiple resources the learners possess can
help both ESL teachers and learners. This study also presents the findings related to different negotiation strategies that the participants employ to bridge the gap caused by the lack of proficiency among other transnational groups. Finding out such strategies used by relatively successful ESL learners is beneficial as this could guide ESL teachers in formulating strategy training such as teaching learners how to solve problems of communication breakdowns. Fourth, the study showed that immigrants encounter different types of communicative situations in their daily lives such as communication in the hospital, at a supermarket, at their children’s schools, in their neighborhood, and so on, which is completely different from formal academic settings. This new knowledge can guide the design of the ESL curriculum for the immigrants and the teaching topics can be tailored to their immediate and day-to-day communicative needs. In sum, the in-depth data collected from the immigrants and ESL learners about their background, their emotions and affective factors, motivation and investment, their transnational identity and translingual practices provide a clear picture of their multiple, varied, and dynamic identities which could enhance the design and implementation of an ESL curriculum.

References


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