A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNERS' IDENTITIES WITHIN HELLOTALK

Uma exploração crítica das identidades dos alunos de língua de herança por meio do HelloTalk

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Abstract | There is a need for critical, inclusive analyses that uncover the constraints that reinforce monolingual ideologies and reject the expression of multilingual and multicultural identities that are evident in eTandem applications (ORTEGA, 2017; VOLLMER RIVERA, 2017; VOLLMER RIVERA; TESKE, 2018). One population that may be affected by these constraints are Heritage Language Learners (HLL), who make up a diverse group of learners that have varying linguistic and cultural knowledge stemming from language and cultural exposure generally stemming from a more familial and community context (POTOWSKI, 2005). Drawing on identity theory (CUMMINS, 2001, 2009), this study investigates how HLL (N = 11) construct their identities within the constraints of the dichotomous eTandem learning environment *HelloTalk* by examining participant-reported reflections. Vis-á-vis content analysis (KRIPPENDORF, 1989) informed by Critical Applied Linguistics (PENNYCOOK, 2001) the results showed that although some features promote collaborative relations of power, in general the design of the application fosters coercive relations of power.

Keywords | CALL. eTandem. Heritage. Identity. MALL. Spanish. Telecollaboration.

Resumo | Nas áreas de pesquisa sobre a aprendizagem de línguas e identidades, há a necessidade de uma análise crítica que desconstrua a ideologia que reforça identidades monolíngues e rejeita expressões de identidades multilíngues e multiculturais, as quais são evidentes nas aplicações de eTandem. Um grupo de aprendizes que pode ser afetado por estas restrições são os falantes de herança, que constituem um grupo diversificado de estudantes com diferentes níveis de conhecimento linguístico e cultural, com a exposição linguística e cultural originárias de um contexto familiar e comunitário. Com base na teoria de identidades, este estudo investiga como estudantes de língua de herança constroem suas identidades nesta dicotomia do espaço de aprendizagem de eTandem *HelloTalk* através de reflexões relatadas pelos participantes. Por meio da análise de conteúdo (KRIPPENDORF, 1989) da Linguística Aplicada Crítica (PENNYCOOK, 2001), os resultados demonstraram que, apesar de algumas características promoverem relações colaborativas de poder, em geral, a configuração da aplicação promove relações de poder coercivas.

Palavras-chave | CALL. eTandem. Herança. Identidade. MALL. Espanhol. Telecolaboração.

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Introduction

With the burgeoning access to mobile language learning tools at little to no cost, there is a growing need for a critical and inclusive analysis of such technologies (ORTEGA, 2017; VOLLMER RIVERA, 2017). Although these Web 2.0 technologies open up digital spaces to include otherwise marginalized populations, there still exist certain constraints, such as the registration processes, creation of profiles, etc., that perpetuate monolingual ideologies (SKTUNABB-KANGAS; MCCARTY, 2008) and reject the expression of a multilingual and multicultural identity. These features may inhibit the construction of identity for language learners that do not fit the pre-prescribed molds of native-speakers (NS) or second language (L2) learners. One such population that has been overlooked in the current literature is Heritage Language Learners (HLL). The purpose of the current exploratory study is to examine how HLL deal with these affordances and constraints to co-construct their identities within the dichotomous eTandem learning environment housed within the free application *HelloTalk*.

Literature Review - Computer Assisted Language Learning and eTandem

Since its start in the 1960s, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has branched out well beyond its humble beginnings which focused largely on individual, mechanic activities (SMITH, 2015) (for a more comprehensive overview of the field of CALL, see CHAPELLE, 2007; THOMAS; REINDERS; WARSCHAUER, 2012). The advent of Web 2.0 technologies in the 2000s brought about more opportunities for human-to-human interaction, offering affordances that previously were not available through tutorial CALL (BLAKE, 2013). We can see that these technologies have the potential to "[...] shift control to the learner by promoting agency, autonomy and engagement in social networks that straddle multiple real and virtual learning spaces independent of physical, geographic, institutional and organisational boundaries" (MCLOUGHLIN; LEE, 2009, p. 639).

One such example of a CALL platform is eTandem language learning. Tandem learning is based upon the practice of creating a partnership of expert and learner by connecting speakers of different languages who are interested in learning their conversation partner's first language (L1) as an L2 (BRAMMERTS, 1996). Historically, it has existed in a variety of contexts (e.g. holiday camps, language schools, email, etc.). Today the current version of tandem learning is eTandem which often takes the shape of mobile applications (e.g. *Tandem* and *HelloTalk*) or desktop platforms (e.g.*WeSpeke* and *italki*) that purports to create a digital environment that fosters these partnerships (CZIKO, 2004). Research in

eTandem language learning has shown that in addition to fostering the development of formal linguistic features (NATION, 2009; SMITH, 2003) and learner autonomy (MCBRIDE, 2009), these virtual environments also have the potential to promote the development of intercultural competence (BELZ, 2003; O'DOWD, 2007).

Despite its argued benefits, these platforms are problematic when we extend the pedagogical model of NS-expert versus non-native speaker (NNS)-learner to users that do not fall within this dichotomy. Although this technology opens up language learning opportunities for these "non-traditional" learners, we can see that the definition of tandem learning in and of itself reinforces a monolingual ideology (SKUTNABB-KANGAS; MCCARTY, 2008), perpetuating the promotion of NS as the holy grail of language learning. This is further supported by Shoshana Zuboff's assertion that "[...] computer-based technologies are not neutral. Rather, technology imposes as well as produces new patterns of information and social relations [...]" (MAJOR, 2015, p. 14). This further demonstrates that eTandem platforms may actually reinforce this dichotomous language learning environment and monolingual ideology, leaving little to no room left for learners with varying language backgrounds (VOLLMER RIVERA, 2017; VOLLMER RIVERA; TESKE, 2018).

Few studies have investigated how multilingual and multicultural users construct their identities in eTandem environments. The research that does exist focuses on the ways in which these users negotiate their identities. For instance, Tudini (2016) examined the role that repair and codeswitching play in the negotiation of identity of her two participants — a NS of English and a NS of Italian — within eTandem exchanges vis-à-vis MSN Messenger Sharedtalk. Through the analysis of nine text excerpts from these tandem exchanges, the author shows how the use of code switching in repairs allows the interlocutors to adjust to either the identity of expert or bilingual speaker. Specifically, the use of the participants' L1 affects the expert-novice relationship within the exchange. For example, the expert may choose to give feedback using the learner's L1 in order for both partners to maintain face within this interaction. Finally, she finds that the use of codeswitching explains that multilingual intercultural speakers hold great potential for language learning as they can help each other to co-construct reciprocity, understanding, affiliation and learning. This is key as it demonstrates potential resources that multilingual and multicultural users in digital spaces can employ to construct their identities.

Another study that illuminates potential resources for the construction of multifaceted identities comes from Yang and Yi's (2017) focal cases studies pulled from a larger investigation they had conducted. They specifically use qualitative analysis to examine the ways in which two speakers, one Korean and one Korean-American

HLL, negotiated and performed their multifaceted identities within their respective conversations. Both users, although one a NS and one a HLL, assumed the role of Korean language expert within their tandem partnerships that took place vis-à-vis blogs and *GoogleChat*. The researchers ultimately found that various factors fomented both users' ability to negotiate and perform their identities. These factors included taking on the role of Korean language expert, the reciprocity and relationship created between the users and their tandem partners, and the sense of community that they felt within the eTandem technologies.

The results of these studies suggest that eTandem technologies may indeed provide a space in which both traditional tandem pairs of NS/NNS (TUDINI, 2016) as well as non-traditional pairs of HLL/NNS (YANG; YI, 2017) can negotiate and construct multifaceted identities. The current study contributes to the body of research on eTandem by examining the ways in which HLL, non-traditional tandem learners, construct their identities based on identity theory (CUMMINS, 2001, 2009) within the dichotomous eTandem application *HelloTalk*. The results of this study provide further empirical evidence of both the resources and as such it is of special interest to both CALL researchers and HL practitioners.

Heritage Language Learners

HLL are a diverse group of individuals who have varying linguistic and cultural knowledge stemming, generally, from familial and community contexts (PARODI, 2008). Despite having a linguistic repertoire that may contain stigmatized features, such as extensions and borrowings (POTOWSKI, 2005), HLL tend to experience a deep cultural connection to the HL and their communities (POTOWSKI; JEGERSKI; MORGAN-SHORT, 2009). For many HLL, the first time that they were introduced to this term was as a label imposed on them via their classification within a language department at their university of study. The practice of "labeling" these learners extends beyond the four walls of the institution into digital spaces such as eTandem environments, in which the design features constrain the ways in which they can construct their multifaceted identities (VOLLMER RIVERA; TESKE, 2018).

Specifically, Leeman (2015, p. 104) notes that the term "[...] 'heritage language learner' is not simply an educational classification but also an identity, one constructed largely by researchers, educators, and administrators and assigned to a group of students, rather than by heritage language learners themselves". Although we note that this term is indeed a label that is imposed within a power structure (institution v. student), for the purposes of consistency with the university and the field of HL pedagogy, this population

will continue to be referred to as HLL in this study. We see the practice of "labeling" these learners extend beyond the four walls of the institution into digital spaces such as eTandem environments, constraining their construction of identity in these spaces as well. It is crucial to operationalize the term *identity* within a well grounded framework that aligns with the epistemological beliefs of this study.

Theoretical Framework: Identity Theory

In the study of bilingual and multilingual contexts several identity frameworks have emerged through the years, beginning with sociopsychological approaches (BERRY, 1980; TAJFEL, 1974, 1981) that suppose that identity is tied directly to the ethnic group in which they do, or would like to, belong. However, this framework has been criticized for oversimplifying the complex identities of individuals into a binary and often homogenous view of identity, perpetuating the hegemonic ideology of monolingualism and monoculturalism (HAMERS; BLANC, 2004; PAVLENKO, 2000; PAVLENKO; BLACKLEDGE, 2004). Working to move beyond these hegemonic ideologies, Interactional Sociolinguistics Interactionist approaches cite linguistic supports rooted in language contact, such as code-switching, as a resource for multilingual and multicultural speakers to express their social identity (FISHMAN, 1965; GUMPERZ, 1982). However, they continue to stress the connection between a language and specific national or regional groups, rather than acknowledging that a speaker may in fact utilize multilingual resources that do not originate from groups to which they explicitly belong (PAVLENKO; BLACKLEDGE, 2004).

The most recent theorization of identity that is most relevant to the present study are poststructuralist approaches (CUMMINS, 2001, 2009; PAVLENKO; BLACKLEDGE, 2004). They are based upon critical theories (BOURDIEU, 1977, 1982, 1991) that situate identity within relations of power in which "[...] languages may not only be 'markers of identity' but also sites of resistance, empowerment, solidarity, or discrimination" (PAVLENKO; BLACKLEDGE, 2004, p. 4). This specific critical conceptualization appropriately supports the population of HLL who were engaged in this study as they are speakers of a minority language that is often stigmatized in both academic and social spheres (PARODI, 2008).

Methodology

Researcher Positionality

Considering that the researcher's identity and social position is a crucial part of the design in qualitative research (MAXWELL, 2013), here we delve into how we confronted our own researcher positionalities within the present study. We both teeter the line between insiders/outsiders in a variety of capacities related to the HLL that were the participants of this study, and as stated by Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016), researcher positionalities are not binary but rather form a wide range of possible roles fulfilled by the investigator. On one hand, much like these participants, we are tethered to the Spanish section as instructors that both participate in and facilitate activities within this section. However, even within these descriptions we see ways in which we are distanced from our participants, not only due to a lack of direct contact, but also due to the positions of power designated by our status as language learners and positions within the Spanish section.

Not only are we instructors in the same department as the participants, but we are instructors of L2 Spanish classes which are often treated as a separate entity from HL classes. In addition, although we have educational training in HL pedagogy and focus on implementing a sociolinguistically and critically informed approach within our own teaching, we ultimately are privileged English/Spanish bilinguals (L1 English, L2 Spanish) (CASHMAN, 2006) who have learned Spanish in a formal and academic setting. Taking into account this rather distanced positionality, time ultimately did not allow for us to create a trusting relationship with these participants that we felt would make them comfortable in sharing authentic and candid reflections with us. For this reason, we asked the instructor of the class to play a very involved role as a liaison between ourselves and the participants, as he has built strong relationships based on mutual trust with his students.

With our guidance, the instructor implemented the tasks specifically designed for the present study as required assignments in the class. In addition, when it came time to actually implement the registration survey and assign the *HelloTalk* task in the language laboratory, the instructor still introduced the researcher but facilitated the class and assigned the task himself. One researcher was present to answer questions and observe the process of participant registration.

Participants

Eleven participants (males n = 1, females n = 10) were recruited from an undergraduate Spanish class (n = 25), entitled Advanced Spanish Conversation and Composition for Bilinguals, the third in a four class series for HLL at a large university in the Southwest of the United States. It is stated in the course description that students of this class are expected to have an advanced level of speaking and listening skills in Spanish and the course aims to improve both written and oral skills as well as expanding the student's range of registers in the target language. All students enrolled in the course were given the opportunity to participate in the study and no extra credit or compensation was given to those who chose to participate. All students completed the same homework assignment designed for this study as part of their coursework, but only the data from those who gave consent were used for the purposes of this study (n=11). A more in depth description of these tasks will be provided in the Data Collection Methods section to follow.

The participants ranged in age from 18-26 (mean age of 19.73). Ten participants were born in the United States and one was born in Peru. When asked to list their native language(s), five participants listed Spanish as their native language, four listed English, and two listed both English and Spanish. The participants were also asked what language(s) they heard and spoke while growing up. See table 1 for description of this information. It should be noted that while nine participants said they knew no languages other than Spanish and English, one participant said they knew French and one listed Italian as a third language.

Table 1. Languages heard and spoken by participants at home while growing up

	Spanish	English	Spanish & English	Tarahumara
Language(s) heard while growing up	5	2	3	1
Language(s) spoken while growing up	4	3	4	0

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative data collection methods that elicited participant-reported responses and reflections were used to align with our ontological belief of critical realism, or the belief that there only exist approximations of truth that are determined by the unique

experiences and interactions of each individual which are associated with the social relations, ideologies, and power positions that exist and may be imposed on them within the larger societal context. (FAIRCLOUGH, 2005). Based upon our institutions and previous literature regarding structures of power (MARTINEZ, 2003) and common misconceptions about HLL and the stigmatization of their variations (PARODI, 2008), we modified a demographic questionnaire and created surveys that elicited participant reflections related to the identity framework by Cummins (2001, 2009). Specifically, students were asked to complete three different surveys via *Google Forms* as well as a conversation task within *HelloTalk*. Transcripts from the conversation tasks were not collected in order to protect anonymity of users and foster opportunities for conversations more reflective of interactions "in the wild", or "... arenas of social activity that are less controllable than classroom or organized online intercultural exchanges might be, but which present interesting, and perhaps even compelling, opportunities for intercultural exchange, agentive action and meaning making" (THORNE, 2010, p. 114). Having said this, there is a great opportunity for further research inquiries that aspire to focus on identity through analyzing naturalistic conversational data. In the sections below, these data collection methods will be described in the order in which they occurred in the present study.

Language Contact Profile

After consenting to participation, participants completed a modified version of the Language Contact Profile (LCP) (FREED *et al.*, 2004), which elicits information from participants regarding demographic information, language exposure, and in what contexts and through which media they have/had contact with the target language. The LCP, which was modified to elicit information regarding specific common characteristics of HLL (e.g. languages listened to and/or spoke at home), was implemented digitally.

Registration Survey

After participants had consented to participating in the study and filled out the LCP, one of the researchers met them and their instructor in a language lab in the same building where their class met. Here, the researcher supported the instructor in the administration of a registration survey that guided students through downloading and registering for the *HelloTalk* application on their own mobile devices. As participants completed this process, they were prompted to reflect on their decisions throughout this registration process (i.e. their decision to make selections for: *I'm from*, *Native language*, *I'm learning*, and *Language*

level). At the end of the session in the language lab, they received instruction regarding how to use the app over the course of the following week for the assigned *HelloTalk* task.

HelloTalk Task

In addition, participants were required to complete three conversations through *HelloTalk*, each with a different conversation partner, outside of designated class time. Participants had to exchange at least 15 messages, excluding greetings and conversational closings, with each of their conversation partners. The assignment was based on one of the course reading, *Los puertorriqueños de aquí y de allá* (ROCA, 2011), which touches on issues of identity and discusses the turbulent relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Although they were free to choose their own topics of conversation related to this reading, participants were provided with some possibilities, such as creating and maintaining a multicultural and multilingual identity, ancestral and cultural pride, and relationships between the United States and other Spanish speaking countries. In the document containing the assignment instructions, participants were reminded to reflect on their experience throughout the conversations, specifically about their language use, perceptions of their conversation partners, and if they felt comfortable and/or confident during the conversational exchanges.

Reflection Survey

After participants completed the *HelloTalk* assignment, they were required to complete a survey in which they reflected upon their experiences communicating with their chosen conversation partners within this eTandem mobile application. The survey prompted reflections regarding patterns of interaction commonly found between NS and HLL (PARODI, 2008). Specifically the survey focused on information about their language partners, language(s) used, the role of grammatical feedback, the role of cultural feedback, language differences/variation, overall impressions of using the application, and design suggestions based on their experiences.
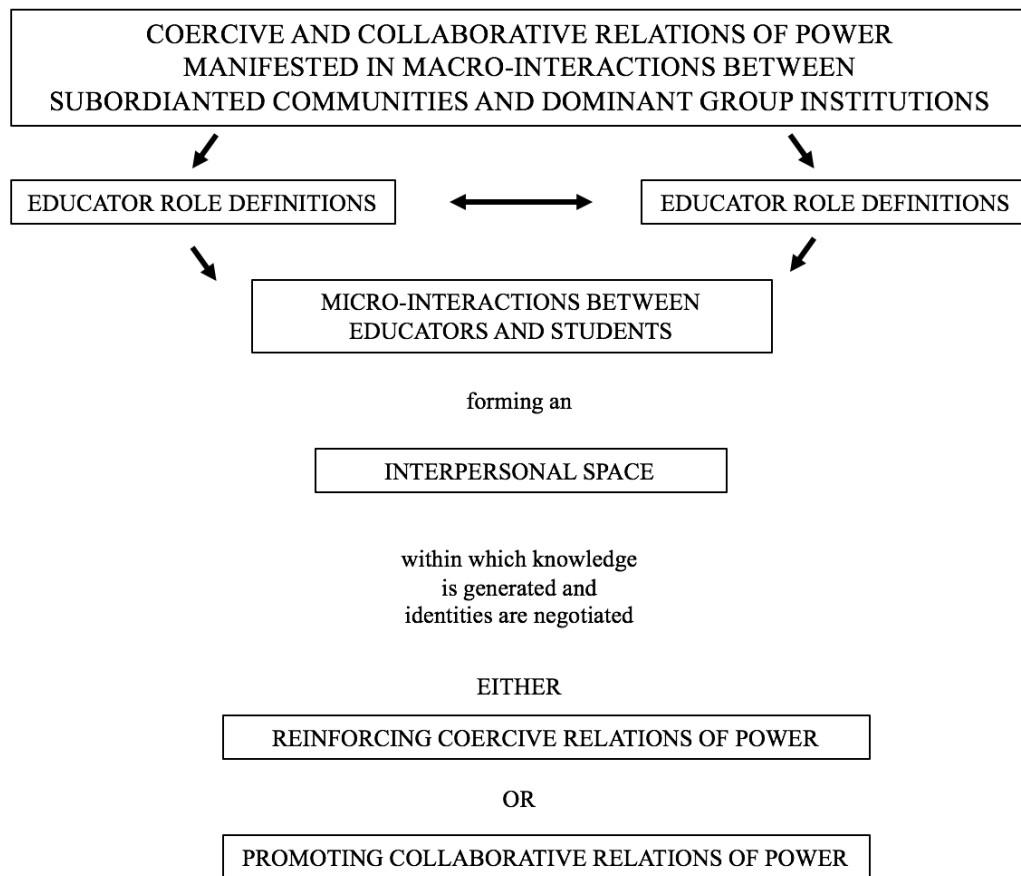
Data Analysis

Applying a poststructuralist framework (CUMMINS, 2001, 2009) originally from bilingual education, entitled *Coercive and collaborative relations of power manifested in*

macro- and micro- interaction, the participant-reported data was analyzed using Content Analysis (CA) (KRIPPENDORFF, 1989) in which HLL construct their identities within *HelloTalk*. This framework, as seen in Figure 1, takes into account the relations of power that exist at the institutional level between dominant and minoritized groups. Although it specifically outlines how educators generally hold positions of power over (minoritized) students in an academic setting, these coercive and collaborative relations are appropriate for the present study as *HelloTalk* specifically promotes itself as a language learning tool in which native speakers become "teachers" (HELLOTALK, 2017). Therefore, using the participant-reported data, CA was used to identify issues of identity and power resulting from the design features of the application.

In this model, relations of power are an always present component within the interactions taking place between dominant and subordinate groups and/or individuals. These relations of power can take the form of *coercive* or *collaborative relations*. Coercive relations refer to the "exercise of power by a dominant individual, group, or country to the detriment of a subordinated individual, group or country" (CUMMINS, 2009, p. 263). These relations manifest in *HelloTalk* in the form of application design features and imposed language teaching and learning roles. Whereas collaborative relations refer to spaces in which individuals are "'enabled' or 'empowered' to achieve more" (CUMMINS, 2009, p. 263), in the context of *HelloTalk*, "teachers" refer to conversation partners and "schools" refer to the application itself. These relations influence the roles of educators and education structures.

These power relations impact the educator roles, which refer to the "expectations, assumptions and goals that educators bring to the task of educating culturally diverse students", whereas *education structures* refer to a more broad context, including "policies, programs, curriculum, and assessment" (CUMMINS, 2009, p. 263). These definitions set the tone for the *interpersonal space* in which, as Ruiz (1991) explains, conditions can be created for individuals to empower themselves, via *knowledge generation* and *identity negotiation*. The interactions that take place in this space will either *reinforce coercive relations of power* or *collaborative relations of power*.

COERCIVE AND COLLABORATIVE RELATIONS OF POWER
MANIFESTED IN MACRO-INTERACTIONS BETWEEN
SUBORDIANTED COMMUNITIES AND DOMINANT GROUP INSTITUTIONS

EDUCATOR ROLE DEFINITIONS ⟷ EDUCATOR ROLE DEFINITIONS

MICRO-INTERACTIONS BETWEEN
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

forming an

INTERPERSONAL SPACE

within which knowledge
is generated and
identities are negotiated

EITHER

REINFORCING COERCIVE RELATIONS OF POWER

OR

PROMOTING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONS OF POWER

Figure 1. Coercive and collaborative relations of power manifested in macro- and micro-interactions (Adapted from CUMMINS, 2009)

Based on this framework, the following research questions were formed:

1. Taking into consideration that *HelloTalk*'s registration process only allows for users to indicate one native language and one L2, how do HLL position themselves, as "language learners" or "language experts" of Spanish, within the constraints of this language learning environment? How do they arrive at this decision?

2. What macro-interactions (e.g. design features) and micro-interactions (e.g. collaboration with interlocutors) affect the way in which HLL are able to create and present their identity in this virtual community? Do these interactions reinforce coercive relations of power or promote collaborative relations of power in this eTandem learning environment? If so, how?

Findings

In order to answer these questions, data packets were created for each consenting participant that included their completed versions of all three of the surveys to more easily facilitate data triangulation. This triangulation across the different data collection instruments helped to understand the participants as individuals as well as their choices within the application in a more holistic manner (MAXWELL, 2013). The packets were analyzed in two phases: (1) individually by each researcher to get to know the data and identify possible themes and (2) participation in dialogic engagement to report what was found and to discuss possible categories and subcategories. All themes, categories, and subcategories were drawn from the data; preconceived labels were not utilized. Our findings will be presented in the following subsections in conjunction with each of the research questions.

Research Question 1

One of the researchers was present in the class during the administration of the registration survey and helped to walk students through the process of creating their accounts in *HelloTalk* alongside the instructor of the course. As the participants arrived at the screen in the application that required them to select their L1 and their L2 (identified as *I'm learning* within the application) (see figure 1), several participants asked either the instructor or the researcher what they should enter into the two fields. The participants were told that they should put whatever they felt best reflected themselves. One student went so far as to assume that something was wrong with her application as it would not let her enter in Spanish for both her L1 and her L2. It was a common theme for the participants to act very hesitant when selecting their L1 and L2.
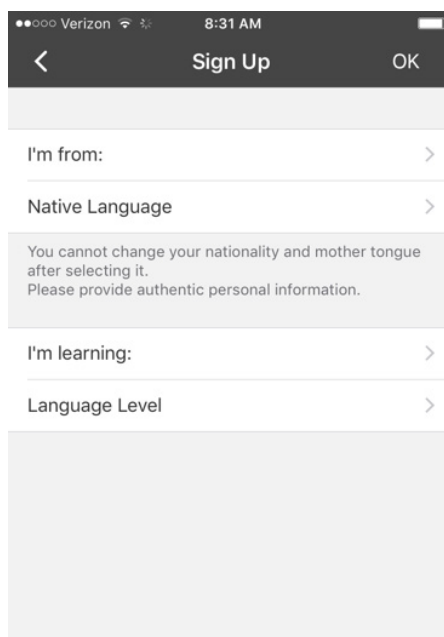
Figure 2. *HelloTalk* Registration Language Choices (HELLOTALK, 2017)

This conflict in selecting a single L1 and a single L2 is reflected in the results. Between the *LCP* and the *Registration Survey* in *HelloTalk*, a massive discrepancy was visible in how the participants identified their L1, as seen in table 2. When free from the application constraints and given the ability to report their L1(s) in short answer form, the participants reported a wider range of L1s, in contrast with the homogeneously reported L1 of English in *HelloTalk*. One explanation may simply be due to design features of the application restricting them from selecting more than one L1 or from selecting the same language for their L1 and L2, as seen in the example below:

> *What did you select for Native Language and why?*
>
> *"English because it didn't let me put Spanish."* (Participant #27)

However, it should be noted that one factor that may have influenced participants in choosing Spanish as the *I'm learning* option in *HelloTalk* is the simple fact that they were enrolled in a Spanish course, as evidenced in the quote below.

> *What did you select for "I'm learning" and why?*
>
> *"I selected that I am learning Spanish because I am taking a Spanish class."* (Participant #1)

Regardless of their reasoning behind their choices, by selecting English as their L1, these students appear to have positioned themselves as English experts and learners of Spanish within *HelloTalk*. This will be explored in more depth during the discussion of Research Question 2.

Table 2. Participant Reported Native Languages

	Native Language (LCP)	**Native Language (*HelloTalk*)**
Spanish	5	0
English	4	11
Spanish & English	2	N/A*

*Note. HelloTalk did not allow its users to input more than one native language. Therefore, none of the participants listed Spanish & English as their native language within the application.

Research Question 2

At the macro-level, *educator role definitions* (the presuppositions that instructors/ experts bring to the interactions) played an essential role in shaping users' opportunities to negotiate their identities within *HelloTalk*. Not only did the participants appear to choose to position themselves as experts of English, but through participant reflections it can be seen that this role additionally may have helped to define their digital identities as they strictly adhered to that role. One example comes from Participant 1, a female that had indicated in the LCP that she was born in Peru and her L1s were both Spanish and English but chose English as her L1 within *HelloTalk*.

> *Did you offer any feedback on your language partner's grammar or language use?*
>
> *"No because we only communicated in Spanish."(Participant #1)*

Although she reports herself as a NS of both languages, she appears to have stayed within her role of expert of English and only seems to have felt qualified to give grammatical feedback when her conversation partner used English, the language of which she had positioned herself an expert.

Educational structures, or the design features of the application, also appear to have an important role in shaping opportunities to negotiate identity at the macro-level. As mentioned in the discussion of Research Question 1, the application is designed in such a way that users are only able to select a language once, as well as input one NS and one L2. As participants indicated a wider variety of NLs in the LCP, it is possible that this feature actually coerced them into choosing a role and representation that they would not otherwise identify with in different circumstances.

As a product of these role definitions and structures, as seen in Cummins' model (2001, 2009), micro-interactions between educators and students served either to reinforce coercive relations of power or to promote collaborations of power, impacting the ways in which the participants negotiated their identities. These micro-interactions showed evidence of three prevalent themes: (1) the initiation of interactions, (2) the presence of male dominance and a dating culture within the application, and (3) reciprocity between users.

The initiation of interactions between users fell into two categories: opportunistic or seeking out conversational partners based on cultural and/or linguistic connections. The most common of the two by far was opportunistic interaction initiation. This most often took the shape of participants reporting that they simply conversed with whoever messaged them first. They did not actively seek out conversation partners based on any particular criteria. On the other hand, at times participants intentionally sought out partners based on a cultural and/or linguistic connection. For example, one user who stated that she was born in Peru selected other users from Peru for all three of her interactions.

> *Who did you converse with and where were they from?*
>
> *"I chose Billy because I saw he was from Peru." (Participant #9)*

This opportunistic or more selective choosing of conversation partners has the potential to either reinforce coercive relations of power or to promote collaborations of power. This will be largely dependent on the individual interactions.

The second theme in the micro-interactions was male dominance and a dating culture found within the application. Of the ten female participants, five reported feeling that the application was misused by other users at times and that the goal of other users may have not been to learn a language.

What was your overall impression of using HelloTalk?

"...but there were times when I felt uncomfortable with guys sending me messages or audio messages and I didn't like that most of the time they were older men."(Participant #4)

This misuse of the application as a dating site made several female users feel uncomfortable, as evidenced in the previous quote, which unfortunately served to reinforce coercive relations of power. Two other female users reported more general concerns about privacy such as being unable to turn off location settings or the use of profile pictures. With seven out of ten female participants mentioning some sort of privacy and/or security issues, it is assumed that this actively worked against these women being able to participate in collaborative interactions within the application.

The final common thread through the data in regards to the micro-interactions was the importance of reciprocity between conversation partners, a principle first connected to tandem learning by Brammerts (1996) and additionally identified as an important factor in the work of Tudini (2016) and Yang and Yi (2017). Although the participants appear to have strictly adhered to their roles as experts of English and learners of Spanish, the individual micro-interactions with other users often rested largely on unstated agreements about what was expected of each interlocutor in regards to giving and/or receiving feedback. In some cases this resulted in the promotion of collaborative relations as both users were open to receiving feedback and also gave feedback to their partner:

How did you feel about giving feedback to your partner?

"It was fine because we were doing it back and forth." (Participant #16)

However, in some cases this lack of an explicit agreement resulted in coercive relations of power. In these cases one user often felt that they were receiving too much feedback or in some cases that they felt exploited as they were expected to give feedback and received nothing in return:

Did you note any language differences between yourself and your language partner? If yes, explain.

"Yes, I have a higher level of Spanish than he has in English and he won't stop insisting that I am his new english teacher." (Participant #9)

The implications of these findings will be discussed in the following section.

Discussion and Implications. Security and Dating Culture

One of the most glaring, and frankly, unexpected preliminary implications from this study is in relation to the security and dating culture of *HelloTalk*. This may not be exclusive to this particular application but rather a caveat to applications of this genre. For example, there are other eTandem applications that have encountered this issue and are actively taking steps towards resolving it. One such application is Tandem (2017) that makes users sign a "social contract" during the registration process in which they explicitly agree to use the application for language learning purposes and not dating purposes. Although this may not completely prevent these issues, it is a positive step forward in establishing an environment conducive to the promotion of collaborative relations of power. Potential safeguards that may result in a step toward reducing or eliminating the coercive relations of power that are present in the current structures of applications such as *HelloTalk* could be the creation of an application meant solely for female users or a co-ed application that requires women to send the first message. In order to work towards creating change that is appropriate for the targeted community of users, manufactures of *HelloTalk* or similar eTandem applications could invoke the participation of its members by conducting surveys or focus groups for both men and women. This may probe what types of additional security preferences and settings would lead to an environment in which all users feel comfortable and collaborative relations of power are encouraged.

User Training

As it is crucial when implementing any CALL technologies in the classroom, user training is of paramount importance (BEATTY, 2013). In this particular context, we found three facets of user training to be crucial to student success: user training to (1) help HLL negotiate their identities within the present dichotomous environments, (2) foster positive micro-interactions between all users, and (3) guide users in setting expectations within their eTandem partnerships.

While it is our hope that the field of CALL technologies will continue to develop to include a space for HLL, in the present eTandem technologies available to these students, they are faced with the dichotomy of NS/L2. User training relating to educational roles can help these users to navigate the negotiation of their identities within these spaces. One such training would be to familiarize users with all the tools available to them within the technology. For example, within *HelloTalk* students are required to select only one L1, however they have the freedom to fill in information in their profile in whatever ways they see fit in order to represent themselves as multicultural and/or multilingual individuals.

In order to guide users to have positive micro-interactions, HLL need to be trained to value and know how to defend their linguistic variety (MARTINEZ, 2003), as these students often display stigmatized features in their language use. In addition, a quick tutorial that is required within the application to draw users' attention towards the concept of linguistic variation would be an additional positive step towards not only fostering positive micro-interactions within the application but also outside of this digital space.

Another step toward supporting positive micro-interactions within eTandem technologies is to train users in setting expectations within their conversation partnerships. As one participant explained, she and her conversation partner explicitly decided on their roles in giving and receiving feedback and which language(s) to use in their interactions. Encouraging users to be up front about these expectations may help them to avoid the feeling of exploitation that some other users expressed as well as give them the freedom to discuss a more fluid role of expert/learner within the partnership.

Limitations and Conclusions

The current study has attempted to further contribute to the research on the current state of eTandem by examining the ways in non-traditional eTandem learners, HLL, construct their identities utilizing a poststructuralist identity theory (CUMMINS, 2001, 2009) within the dichotomous eTandem application *HelloTalk*. Although a number of important conclusions and possible implications have been drawn from the current study, there are a number of limitations which should be addressed by future research.

For example, only participant-reported data from a relatively small number of individuals (n = 11) was used. In future studies, the conversation data from the micro-interactions between users should be examined in order to more fully explore the ways in which these HLL construct their identities within eTandem language learning environments. Collecting this type of data could potentially lead researchers to be able to examine other important components of construction of identity, such as the linguistic resources utilized by speakers during interactions. In addition, including a larger quantity of participants would be beneficial as all HLL have unique backgrounds that will shape the way in which they construct their identities in these digital spaces.

With all of these findings in mind, it should be recognized that language learning is not black and white nor has it ever been. It extends beyond the dichotomy of NS and L2 and is influenced by structures of power. Therefore, researchers and practitioners need to place the inclusion and advocacy of language learners of all types at the forefront of their scholarship and instruction.

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