A FEMALE REFUGEE’S INVESTMENT
IN MULTIPLE LITERACIES
POST-MIGRATION

by

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Abstract

As the immigration and refugee intake rates continue to rise in Canada, English Language Learning (ELL) schools, centres and programs strive to keep pace with the demand. ELL educators are being propelled to think and teach in new ways that meet the needs of learners living in a digital age. Some learners arrive with competency in English language literacies and/or digital literacies, while others do not. For learners who possess minimal traditional print based and/or digital literacies, integrating into modern Canadian society can prove extremely challenging. This case study explores one such learner’s engagement with ELL and other literacies in a multicultural, modern urban centre on the West Coast of Canada. Semi-structured interviews, informal observations and conversations were the methods used to provide a holistic overview of the participant’s language learning process. The findings of this research demonstrate how identity is linked to investment in ELL as a means to increase economic, cultural and/or social capital. When the dominant ideology positioned the participant as an outsider because of her low level of proficiency in spoken English, she was prevented access to meaningful employment and denied a sense of independence, leading her to be creative in constructing an “imagined identity” that would better her life chances. Similarly, she was silenced and excluded from online spaces and membership in a discourse community because of a lack of digital literacy. The participant also struggled to “read” the sociocultural literacy of her new environment and felt positioned as an outsider, unable to judge situations and people accurately. While her English language literacy development was limited, relative to her classmates, over the course of her two-year study, she did eventually develop the sociocultural literacy necessary to evaluate her life prospects and construct a new identity, which led to an increase in her symbolic capital and overall well-being.
Preface

This thesis is the original work of the author, Kathryn Crosbie. Ethics approval was required for this research and approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) on January 30, 2015. The BREB number is H14-02924.
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This study is dedicated to those who are forced to leave their homes, abandoning all that is familiar, and struggle against the odds to make new lives in countries with different languages, customs and social practices.

This is a tribute to their unbreakable human spirit.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Statement of Purpose

This research examined one female refugee’s engagement with different literacies upon relocating to a large urban centre on the West Coast of Canada from Mainland China. In this context, literacies refer to (1) reading, writing and speaking skills (language literacy) as a social practice rather than a static skill independent of context (Street, 2006; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) and (2) literacies as multiple and multimodal; for example, this could include online and digital competencies and be expressed and learned using different means of representation. The participant’s interactions with literacy practices are viewed through a framework based on Norton’s (2000) and Darvin and Norton’s (2015) concepts of identity and investment in Second Language Acquisition, which incorporates Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of symbolic capital, and Weedon’s (1997) poststructural feminist view of language and power.

I employed case study methodology for this research because in choosing one case I was able to delve deeply by spending substantial time with the participant on and off site, continually revising and reflecting on meanings of what was going on (Stake, 1994). I then employed reflexivity to help me to negotiate the tension between researcher and participant (Spivak, 1990). While several other studies of immigrant women and language learning have been conducted in Canada (Ng, 1981; Cumming & Gill, 1991; Goldstein, 1996), few have expressed female learners’ individual stories.

What is absent from all these studies, however, are the voices of particular learners, their distinctive histories, their unique desires for the future. Such biographical insights are important in understanding the relationship between identity and language learning. (Norton, 2013, p. 85)
A case study allowed me to delve deeply into the experiences of one female refugee, providing rich data. In addition, using multiple instruments (informal conversation, semi-structured interviews and participant observation) supported the validity the findings (Merriam, 2002).

The following questions guided this study:

1. What are the factors facilitating or impeding female refugees' investment in language literacy skills as a social practice in their new environments?

2. In what ways do female refugees invest in multiple and multimodal literacies as a social practice in their new environments?

I am not generalizing from my data that all female refugees share similar experiences or draw finite conclusions. I have, however, encapsulated the complexity of one female refugee’s experience. In doing so, Robert Stake (1994) describes how readers can “vicariously experience these happenings and draw their own conclusions” (p. 243). The conclusions I draw could potentially be representative, yet are not intended to profile all refugee women. I hope to add to the growing body of literature surrounding refugees, specifically females, who relocate to modern, urban centres and engage in the process of learning new languages and acquiring various literacies.

1.2 Research Context: The State of Refugees in Canada

With an annual immigration rate of 240,000 to 265,000, Canada is, on a per capita basis, one of the world’s leading resettlement destinations (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2014). Around the world, approximately 100,000 refugees are resettled each year. Of that, Canada resettles between 11,000 to 13,000 (CIC, 2014). With the current Syrian refugee crisis, Canada has committed to settling 25,000 Syrian refugees throughout 2016. While Chinese refugees do not figure as significantly, Statistics Canada reported that in 2011, 1,297 Chinese
“protected persons” were admitted to Canada, while that number dropped to 760 in 2013. Despite this seemingly low figure, in 2013, China still ranked #1 out of the 50 top countries for refugee claimants. Many of these refugees arrive illegally through human smugglers from the Fujian province of China to Western Canada (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1999; Curley & Wong, 2008). From 2006 to 2011, British Columbia’s major urban centre on the west coast has seen Chinese immigration grow to 24% compared to 8% for the rest of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011).

In Canada, linguistic competence has a direct effect on political participation (CIC, 2015). A working knowledge of either English or French is required for citizenship and landed immigrants (including those admitted as refugees) can apply for citizenship after three years in Canada. Canada is one of the 147 United Nations member states that have signed the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, as an undertaking to provide asylum for persecuted peoples. Canada is also part of a smaller group of 20 countries that offer the option of permanent resettlement. Prior to 1979, Canada had maintained a closed-door refugee policy, yet between 1979 to 1981 Canada admitted approximately 60,000 Southeast Asian refugees escaping from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in what came to be known as “The Boat Crisis,” accepting more people on a per capita basis than any other country. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees acknowledged Canada’s actions by awarding it with the Nansen Refugee Award, the first time the award had been given to a state rather than an individual. Since this time, Canada has maintained the reputation as a caring country and assumed a position of leadership in immigration and refugee resettlement.

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1985) states that the government will “promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing
evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to that participation” (3c). Refugees receive initial assistance from the federal government or private sponsors and if selected for the Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) program, they are provided with immediate and essential services as well as income support under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) for up to one year. Citizenship and Immigration Canada also funds a settlement program that helps newcomers adapt to life in Canada. This program includes employment, community connection and language services, such as the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program offering language instruction.

While these programs and policies are well meaning in theory, there is some debate regarding the degree to which they are being implemented. Canadian research indicates that immigrant poverty and social exclusion have been steadily increasing over the last 20 years (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Papillon, 2002; Saloojee, 2005). Li (2003) argues that the politics of diversity often advocate for conformity, cohesion and social assimilation rather than inclusion. Cadi and Allard (2005) argue that information provision is a key component of social inclusion. Newcomers must not only have access to information and communication technology (ICT), but also effective information literacy skills and education. Newcomers with low English literacy levels have even greater difficulty acquiring the digital and media literacies needed to access government documents, employment opportunities, and community and social networks primarily available online in digital format.

In 2013, there were 4,694 female refugee claimants compared to 5,654 male claimants in Canada and data reveals that all possess less education than they did in the 1990s (CIC, 2013, 2010b). Eighty percent of both male and female refugee claimants have little knowledge of English or French (CIC, 2010b). Research has revealed that refugees with limited previous
education, the elderly and women are those least likely to learn English (Beiser, 2009). Morton Beiser (2009), who conducted a 10-year longitudinal study, known as the Refugee Resettlement Project (RRP), of Southeast Asian refugees, found that a lack of English proficiency was linked to depression and unemployment 10 years after arrival in Canada. Alternately, Sun, Ehrich and Ficorilli (2012) found that among Australian immigrants with low levels of literacy, English language fluency increased well-being and self-esteem. Hou and Beiser (2006) further contend that learning the language of a new country allows for economic gain, access to social resources, and the opportunity to participate in the power structure of resettlement countries.

1.3 Brief Background to the Literature

Newcomers invest in learning a second language in order to maximize their symbolic capital, comprised of symbolic and material resources that increase an individual’s power (Bourdieu, 1986). As one’s capital changes, so does one’s identity, which may also be influenced by the dominant ideology (Bourdieu, 1987). This ideology, constructed by the legitimized authority of a given culture, positions leaners according to race, class or gender before they speak, resulting in social inclusion or exclusion (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Because learners are interested in increasing their symbolic capital, they often consent to these ideologies, without subscribing to them. Newcomers may have to resist or produce new social identities in response to the limited range of subjectivities validated within a community (Pavlenko, 2001). Speech communities produce gendered styles requiring individuals to accommodate to these styles and thus become gendered subjects (Cameron, 1996). Hence, identity becomes a site of struggle as an individual “is conceived of as both subject of and subject to relations of power within a particular site, community, and society” (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 15).
Information literacy has multiple definitions, however I will be using Lloyd’s (2006, 2010) definition that explains how information literacy is a socially situated practice and way of knowing an information landscape gained by developing skills which enable an individual to critically analyze his or her environment. Modern societies often offer information in digital formats, which presents problems to newcomers who lack digital literacies (Lloyd et al., 2013). However, multimodal mediums engage learners and support their investment in second language acquisition (Lloyd et al., 2013). Lack of proficiency in digital literacies can result in information poverty, which marginalizes newcomers (Chatman, 1991). Similarly, a lack of language and literacy skills is linked to social exclusion (Aspinall, 2007; Bigelow, 2010; Colic-Peisker, 2005). Refugee mental health is also dependent on social support networks, which betters refugees’ chances of successful integration into their new communities (Beiser, 2009).

1.4 Organization of Thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters. In Chapter 2, I offer a comprehensive review of the literature on the topic. I have divided this chapter up into sections based on theoretical concepts. Next, in Chapter 3, I support my choice of case study methodology with a brief review of the relevant literature. I then present the research context, the participant’s biography, followed by my choice of instruments. Chapter 4 reports my research findings, which are subdivided by research question and then categorized by themes that were drawn from the findings. Chapter 5 presents a discussion and analysis of the research findings presented in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I examine my findings in light of the literature presented in Chapter 2. I also offer recommendations for future English as an Additional Language (EAL) programs and other research studies on this topic, which I further elaborate on in Chapter 6. In Chapter 6, I
draw conclusions from my research, discuss the implications and limitations of the study and present directions for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This research will be viewed through a feminist poststructuralist lens of identity and investment in second language learning (Weedon, 1987; Norton, 2000; Darvin & Norton, 2015) and a current framework for refugee social exclusion (Beiser, 2009; Chatman, 1991; Lloyd et al., 2013). First, I review the current theory on identity formation and how it is combined with feminist poststructuralism to articulate a theory for identity and investment in second language learning. I then report on the literature regarding age and gender as factors in identity and investment. Next, I survey the literature surrounding multiple literacies and multimodalities in the context of refugee resettlement and language learning. Lastly, I review the current literature regarding social exclusion within refugee populations.

2.2 Identity and Second Language Acquisition

Second language acquisition (SLA) theory has been articulated over the decades in an attempt to account for the complex relationship between second language learners and the social world. Previous theories have described the learner as possessing affective filters that determine his or her motivation and self-confidence (Krashen, 1981), while the Acculturation Model focuses solely on the social, rather than the individual (Schumann, 1978 as cited in Norton Peirce, 1995). Norton Peirce (1995) argues that there was confusion in the literature because of these “artificial distinctions” drawn between the individual and the social. Similarly, there was no justification for why learners feel motivated or confident, or why there may be social distance between the learner and the social group in one instance and not another (Norton Peirce, 1995).
SLA theory also did not account for how power relations affect social interactions between learners and the target language group. Norton Peirce (1995) attempted to bridge these theoretical gaps by identifying the language learner as having a “complex social identity that must be understood with reference to the larger, and frequently inequitable social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction” (p. 13).

In this model, identity refers to how a person “understands his or her relationship to the world, how the relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2000, p. 5). Norton (2013) further argues that “SLA theory needs to develop a conception of identity that is understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable, social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction” (p. 45). An individual learner’s relationship with society is constructed through the micro level of everyday interactions and the macro level of institutions, such as the legal and education systems, and are continually being negotiated (Foucault, 1980). These language interactions are constituted by varying degrees of power inequities. Norton (2000) refers to power as “socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions and communities through which symbolic and material resources in a society are produced, distributed and validated” (p. 7). Here, Norton refers to symbolic resources as language, education and friendship, while material resources include capital goods, real estate and money. Access to material resources allows individuals access to power and privilege, inevitably influencing how they view their relationship with the world (Norton, 2000). Pavlenko and Piller (2001) agree that language is a form of symbolic capital, and is the locus of social organization, power and social consciousness (Bourdieu, 1991). Wenger (1998) argues that learning is a socialization process that involves the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context. It is
a person’s access to material resources that will dictate their desires - desire for recognition, affiliation and security and safety – and in this way, their identity will change according to shifting social and economic relations (West, 1992; Norton, 2000).

Doris Warriner’s (2004) framework combines the socially situated, gendered, and ideological aspects of second language learning and sociocultural literacy within the context of immigration and refugee resettlement. Warriner (2004) explains that sociocultural literacy is “a social process, located within social, cultural, and political contexts and influenced by relations of power and gender” (p. 182). She argues that this is necessary to avoid encouraging particular social positions and identities, thus “lowering the bar” at the expense of the migrant. Warriner (2004) found in her study of two refugee women in the United States that the ESL classes they attended did not promote increased social mobility. Instead, the classes encouraged maintenance of current social positions and basic entry-level jobs. These prescribed identities were challenged by the two women, who used other (sociocultural) literacies to help them negotiate their new worlds and create new identities, ones in which they felt more empowered to become who they wanted to be. Both learned how to “read” their situations and sociocultural contexts in order to act on their own behalf to achieve their goals.

2.3 Feminist Poststructuralism, Identity and SLA

Pavlenko and Piller (2001) explain that feminist poststructuralism is an approach that “strives to theorize and to investigate the role of language in the production of gender relations, and the role of gender dynamics in language learning and use” (p. 22). For them, the study of language and gender has two goals: to examine how gender is constructed in multiple discourses and how access to linguistic resources and possibilities of expression is affected by gender. Speech communities produce gendered styles and individuals make accommodations to those...
styles whereby producing themselves as gendered subjects (Cameron, 1996). Thus, when an individual transitions to a different society, it may involve a change in how the individual views and performs gender (Pavlenko, 2001). Pavlenko (2001) further argues that the range of subjectivities validated within a community or culture is ultimately limited. This assumption allows for an explanation as to why cultural transitions may result in ideological changes, discursive practices or gendered styles.

Immigrants may find themselves in a situation where their previous subjectivities are not legitimately produced or understood, thus they resist or produce new social identities. These identities are not entirely a product of their own free choice; they are co-constructed with others who oftentimes reject them or impose new ones (Pavlenko, 2001). For example, Pavlenko (2001) found in her study of 25 cross-cultural autobiographies written by female immigrants to the United States that some of the women chose to assimilate to United States culture in order to adopt a particular identity, while others chose to resist an undesirable positioning or lack of validation by the majority culture.

Norton Peirce (1995) asserts that feminist poststructuralism explores how “prevailing power relations between individuals, groups, and communities affect the life chances of individuals at a given time and place” (p. 15). Feminist poststructuralism, as drawn from Chris Weedon’s (1997) conceptualization, posits women as the subject of their experience, linking this experience to social power. Weedon (1987) defines subjectivity as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (as cited in Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 15). She further explains that language is the place where “our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity is constructed” (as cited in Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 15). Weedon’s concept of subjectivity has three defining
characteristics: the multiple nature of the subject, subjectivity as a site of struggle and subjectivity as changing over time. First, the individual, the subject, is diverse dynamic, and de-centred, rather than static and centred, as characterized by humanist conceptions. Second, the subject as a site of struggle refers to how the individual adopts different subject positions that are framed as both “subject of and subject to relations of power within a particular site, community and society: the subject has human agency” (Norton, 2000, p. 127). Norton (2013) expands on how subject positions may change.

Thus the subject positions that a person takes up within a particular discourse are open to contestation: While a person may be positioned in a particular way within a given discourse, the person might resist the subject position, or even set up a counter-discourse which positions the person in a powerful rather than marginalized subject position (p. 164).

Norton (2000) argues that this is a crucial element for second language educators as it elicits possibilities for educational intervention. In her 1995 study of immigrant females’ English language learning, Norton Peirce employed this framework. One of the women, Martina, demonstrated identity as multiple, a site of struggle and subject to change. Martina’s identity was multiple: she was a mother, an immigrant, a language learner, worker and wife. Although she referred to herself as an “inferior” English speaker, Martina created opportunities to practice English. She resisted her subject position as immigrant woman in place of mother and asserted herself in English conversation despite a poor command of the language. Another participant, Eva, initially accepted her subject position as immigrant and illegitimate English speaker. Over time, Eva began to accept herself as a multicultural citizen and developed an awareness of her right to speak. She resisted her subject position as immigrant woman and illegitimate speaker of English, thereby claiming the right to speak (Norton Peirce, 1995).
Norton Peirce’s (1995) other three female immigrant participants experienced similar identity struggles for different reasons, yet none of them resisted their positions as strongly as Eva and Martina. Mai initially adopted an identity of competent speaker in her workplace, but became marginalized because of her single status and eventually spoke less English. When she married, she adopted an identity of wife, which provided her with a sense of safety. Katarina wished to learn English in order to adopt an identity that would provide her with similar status to her previous position as a teacher, so she sought educated professionals with whom to speak English. Felicia’s identity was deeply tied to her country of origin and if her identity was validated, she felt comfortable speaking English. Each immigrant woman’s subject positions changed in relation to whom they spoke.

2.4 Investment and SLA

Research has demonstrated that (1) high levels of motivation do not necessarily lead to better language proficiency and (2) unequal relations of power between language learners and target language speakers is a common theme in SLA data (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton 2000, 2013; McKay & Wong, 1996). Norton Peirce (1995) argues that the concept of investment rather than motivation “more accurately signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of the women to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice it” (p. 17). Investment can be thought of using Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) economic metaphor cultural capital, the knowledge that characterizes different classes and groups in relation to specific cultural forms. Norton Peirce (1995) argues that learners invest in second language learning in order to gain access to greater symbolic and material resources, which increases their cultural capital. This model assumes that when learners engage in a process of language exchange, they are continually renegotiating their identities. Although a student may be
motivated to learn, investment can shift and change in relation to the varying power dynamics in a given speech event. For example, numerous studies have demonstrated that a learner may be motivated to learn English, but may feel discriminated against in the classroom due to race, gender, class or ability thereby lessening his or her investment (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Duff & Bell, 2002; Talmy, 2008).

Norton Peirce (1995) found in her study of immigrant women (mentioned above) that despite being highly motivated, all women felt uncomfortable speaking to people with whom they had “a particular symbolic or material investment” (Norton, 2000, p. 120). In their study of adolescent Chinese immigrant students, McKay and Wong (1996) extended Norton’s concept of investment and found that student investment in English was determined by specific needs, desires and negotiations. Most of the students positioned themselves in different subject positions and obtained various social identities, which decreased their need for investment in ELL.

2.5 Identity and Investment in SLA

Recently, a significant amount of research has focused on the link between investment in second language acquisition and shifting identities. After conducting a comprehensive analysis of research issues, Norton and Gao (2008) found that Chinese identity and investment are important considerations in understanding Chinese learners of English, citing De Costa’s (2010) study that revealed how Jenny, a Chinese student, embraced standard English to inhabit an identity associated with being a successful academic student. Carazzai (2013) and Silva (2013) studied how teachers construct their identities in Brazil through investing in English, where Portuguese is the majority language. They found that student teachers invested in imagined identities (Norton, 2013) through face-to-face and online interaction with other international
English speakers. Similarly, learners construct identity through a struggle between *habitus* and desire, competing ideologies and imagined identities (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Bourdieu (1990) conceived of habitus as an internalized system shaped by ideology where learners make sense of the world. Habitus provides an understanding of “what is reasonable and possible and a tendency to think and act in ways that correspond with a prevailing ideology” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 46). What learners desire can be shaped by habitus, yet this desire also necessitates learners to exercise their own agency. Learners express desire to achieve perceived benefits through their imagination “to re-envision how things are as how they want them to be” - as imagined identities (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 46).

Technology has facilitated more opportunities for learners to create imagined identities. Learners are able to traverse transnational spaces through mobile devices, the Internet and social media, changing how we communicate (Lam & Warriner, 2012). The online world has transformed our notions of public and private, citizenship and identity (Darvin, forthcoming; Gee & Hayes, 2011). Darvin and Norton (2015) argue that this online world has shifted how learners position themselves.
Beyond inclusion in a target community of speakers or the acquisition of material and symbolic resources, learners are able to participate in a greater variety of spaces in both face-to-face and virtual worlds and assert themselves to varying degrees as legitimate speakers”. (p. 41)

To reflect this changing global landscape, Darvin and Norton (2015) have articulated a new model of identity and investment (Figure 1). In this framework, the lens is widened to include systemic patterns of control that “go beyond the microstructures of power in specific communicative events and to investigate the systemic patterns of control that communicative events are indexical of” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 42). Together with identity, they have included ideology and capital.

Darvin and Norton’s (2015) concept of ideology draws on Bourdieu’s (1987) notion of ideology as a normative set of ideas constructed by legitimized authority that establishes “modes of inclusion and exclusion, and learners are positioned in multiple ways before they even speak” (p. 43). This positioning – by race, class or gender – allows or refuses learners the right to speak. Examining dominant ideologies facilitates a deeper understanding of how dynamics of power
within speech events work and how entry into these spaces is prevented by structures of power. In this realm, learners may appear to consent to these dominant ideologies, without necessarily subscribing to them. Sometimes learners’ previous capital can serve as affordances to their learning, however this capital may not be valued by the prevailing power structures, or dominant ideology. For learners to claim the right to speak, they must challenge established ways of thinking and negotiate power dynamics. This model seeks to answer these questions:

1. How invested are learners in their present and imagined identities? In what ways are they positioned by others, and how do they, in turn, position interlocutors in ways that grant or refuse power? How can learners gain from or resist these positions?

2. What do learners perceive as benefits of investment, and how can the capital they possess serve as affordances for learning?

3. What systemic patterns of control (policies, codes, institutions) make it difficult to invest and acquire certain capital? How have prevailing ideologies structured learners’ habitus and predisposed them to certain ways of thinking? (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47)

The concept of capital is threefold and draws on Bourdieu’s (1986) model of capital as power. Economic capital refers to income, wealth and property, while social capital refers to connections with networks of power. Cultural capital is related to knowledge, educational credentials, and appreciation of specific cultural forms (Bourdieu, 1986). An individual’s capital, and hence one’s identity, changes over time, and once it is deemed legitimate, is referred to as symbolic capital, as mentioned above (Bourdieu, 1986). Symbolic capital is important in understanding the immigrant and refugee experience, as what is valued in one culture may not be valued in another. For example, a learner’s linguistic capital is subject to what Bloomaert (2010) refers to as orders of indexicality, where their styles and registers are measured against a value system that reflects the biases of the majority culture (Darvin & Norton, 2015). An example is found in the case study of Henrietta, who lives in a rural community in Uganda with no
electricity or running water, and sought to learn computer skills (Norton et al., 2011). While Henrietta’s *economic capital* is limited, she wished to increase her *social capital* by engaging in transnational conversations, which if recognized, becomes *symbolic capital*. Her identity, as an inadequate and unknowledgeable individual, is influenced by the hegemonic *ideology* where the global is privileged over the local (Norton et al., 2011).

Many identity and language learning researchers stress the importance of social contexts in shaping an individual’s status or position. Menard-Warwick (2007) noted the powerful societal discourses that constrained identity formation amongst Latina students in a vocational English classroom. She indicated the need for teachers to be aware of how “students position themselves in classroom discourse and approach language instruction from a critical perspective to enable learners to name, and perhaps struggle against, some of the disempowering tendencies of the linguistic practices of their new cultures (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 418). Gee (1990) defines Discourses as ways of being in the world, which integrate words, acts, attitudes, beliefs and identities. Through participation in Discourses, individuals are identified as members of socially meaningful groups or networks (Gee, 1990). To derive meaning and understanding of certain literacy practices requires membership and participation in the respective discourse literacies.

Davies and Harre (1997) explained that “position” is the “central organizing concept for analyzing how it is that people do being a person” (p. 7). What this means is that speakers are constituted by discursive practices, yet these practices can also allow speakers to negotiate new, more desirable positions. When learners challenge their prescribed identities, they gain confidence and a sense of empowerment, leading to increased investment. An increased sense of personal power inside of the classroom enables individuals to gain insight and have “an
awareness of what is undesirable and unfavorable about her current situation” outside of the classroom (Lazo, 1995, p. 25). This awareness may entail a change of perception of the self, the environment and the relationship between the self and the environment. Anita Dige (1995) explains that an empowered individual “would be one who experiences a sense of self-confidence and self-worth; a person who critically analyzes his/her social and political environment; a person who is able to exercise control over decisions that affect his/her life” (p. 38).

Adult literacy advocates view language literacy as a means to challenging and developing an awareness of prevailing power structures. Functional literacy proponents see literacy in a causal relationship with development indicators, such as economic productivity, health and fertility rates (King and Hill, 1993). Functional literary theorists see literacy as a means to women’s increased power, however they do not examine gender relations or the structural causes of subordination (Prins, 2008). From a critical perspective, literacy is seen not as a source of power for increasing national economic development but for working cooperatively towards social and political transformation, including justice for women (Freire, 1973). Daniel (2000) sees literacy as enabling an individual to develop a critical consciousness with which to review the world and one’s place in it. She also argues that literacy has the potential to empower in three areas: personal, philosophical and political (knowledge and skills to influence change through direct action) (Daniel, 2000). This is similar to Oyitso and Olomukoro’s (2012) view that literacy empowers and is the most important means through which women can be developed socially, politically and economically.

While New Literacy Studies scholars view literacy as a social practice embedded in power relations between social structures and institutions, they recognize that literacy does not
have uniform effects on individuals, communities or societies (Robinson-Pant, 2004; Street, 2001). These scholars question whether literacy inherently causes empowerment and caution against this ideology. Betts (2003) found this ideology operating in a literacy program in El Salvador, where educators viewed participants as unmotivated, and viewed literacy as the key to social change and empowerment through a particular ideological lens. Robinson-Pant (2004) explains that education and literacy have traditionally been seen purely in terms of building up human capital known as an “efficiency” approach where the aim is to build up women’s efficiency in order to benefit the economy (Rogers, 2001; Robinson-Pant, 2004; Prins 2008). Prins (2008) contests the dominant functional literacy framework and advocates for a critical literacy model where literacy is viewed as working cooperatively towards social and political transformation. Likewise, Ruddy (2008) argues against transnational capitalism, which views literacy as a technical skill, with a transnational feminist approach, one in which women become “global citizens” who contest the impact of transnational capitalism on their lives.

2.6 Age and Gender Factors in Investment

Age is only one of the many factors that affect adult investment in second language learning (see Figure 2), however it is one of the more important factors. The literature suggests that younger immigrants learn a second language more quickly and easily than their older counterparts (Mesch, 2003; Remnick, 2004; Service & Clark, 1993). There are several reasons for this difference. First, language learning requires short-term memory, a skill that declines with age. The second reason involves investment in ELL for adults. Chiswick and Miller (1995, 2001) found that immigrant youth are willing to more readily invest in ELL as they have a longer payback time. What this means is that younger individuals will be able to use their new language skills to secure employment and interact with the dominant community for a longer period of
time than their parents or grandparents. Third, immigrant youth are immersed in majority culture schools, which provide them with a routine and intensive exposure to the dominant language. Adult language programs usually run once or twice weekly in the evenings and lack the continuity and full immersion of elementary and secondary schools. Fourth, older individuals tend to not invest as fully as younger learners because they lack education or literacy skills (Butcher & Townsend, 2010).

Gender is another important factor that affects investment. While females score higher in verbal tasks, male immigrants, on average, attain greater dominant language proficiency. The literature suggests the reason for this disparity is that women are disadvantaged prior to migration due to a lack of formal education and language skills (Watkins et al., 2012). Women are similarly disadvantaged post-migration due to unequal opportunities to participate in the labour market (Espenshade & Fu, 1997) and unequal access to language training (Beiser & Hou, 2000). Women are often caretakers of young children and are unable to work outside the home, as well as attend language programs. This unequal distribution of opportunity is referred to as the “feminization of poverty” where women migrate from one impoverished region to escape poor working conditions only to end up working in the low-paying service sector in countries with advanced economies (Maamouri, 2000; Cuban & Stromquist, 2009). Menard-Warwick (2009) found similar results in their research of Latin American immigrant women in the United States. These women struggled with participation in the English classroom due to factors such as poverty, unstable migrant status, childcare and schooling. Kendrick and Jones (2008) conducted research in Uganda using multimodal technologies to investigate girls’ perceptions of their participation in local literacy practices. They found that providing opportunities for girls to explore their worlds through alternative modes of representation “has immense potential as a
pedagogical approach to cultivate dialogue about the nature of gender inequities, and serve as a catalyst for the positing of imagined communities where those inequities might not exist” (Kendrick & Jones, 2008, p. 397).

Recent language research examining identity and investment within the poststructural framework seeks to explore how identifications such as race and gender may affect language learning. These researchers regard these categories as “socially and historically constructed processes within particular relations of power” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 424). Researchers such as Pavlenko et al. (2001), Norton & Pavlenko (2004) and Menard-Warwick (2009) have sought to conceptualize gender as not only a division between male/female, but also a system of social relationships and discursive practices that may lead to systemic inequality among particular groups of language learners, including women, the poor, minorities, the elderly, and the disabled” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 425). Kamada’s (2010) study of adolescent girls in Japan revealed that the girls were engaged in daily battles for respect in and out of the classroom as a result of marginalization marked by gender.

2.7 Multiliteracies, Multimodalities, Identity and Investment

Starting in the 1990s, the term literacy has been applied to a variety of practices in which one is considered competent or proficient. Lankshear and Knobel (2011) define literacies as “socially recognized ways in which people generate, communicate, and negotiate meanings, as members of Discourses, through the medium of encoded texts” (p. 33). The idea of literacy as a social practice concerns what people do with literacy, how they are situated in larger social practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Australian literacy researchers working with refugees have been instrumental in identifying a distinct category of literacy, essential to the country’s newcomers. Lloyd (2006, 2010) uses the term information literacy to define a socially situated
practice, a way of knowing an information landscape by developing practices and skills that will “enable an individual to critically analyze the source from which information is accessed, in addition to the information itself, and to recognize this practice as a catalyst for learning” (p. 124). This new umbrella term includes literacies such as health literacy, prose literacy related to the ability to understand narrative texts like newspapers, magazines and brochures, document literacy, the knowledge to read various formats such as charts and tables and digital literacy, the ability to locate and evaluate information from computers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

As a social practice, information literacy is understood to be “not only to be in the possession of an individual, but also as a possession of the community” (Lloyd et al., 2013, p. 126). Savolainen (2008) defines information practice as “a set of socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use and share the information available in various sources such as television, newspapers, and the Internet” (p. 2).

Defining information practice and information literacy as a social practice involves embedding it in the ontology and epistemology of a particular social site (Lloyd et al., 2013). Information practices reflect the social and cultural conditions of the setting:

an array of information related activities and skills, constituted, justified and organized through the arrangements of a social site, and mediated socially and materially with the aim of producing shared understanding and mutual agreement about ways of knowing, and recognizing how performance is enacted, enabled and constrained in collective situated action. (Lloyd, 2011, p. 285)

In modern societies, information is offered in many different formats and from various sources, which poses a problem for refugees when these are in conflict with their former country’s cultural values and ways of knowing (Palmer et al., 2009). Lloyd et al. (2013) found in their Australian study with refugees that the need for computers as a primary resource to access government information was a major barrier. They also discovered that refugees’ lack of
information literacy, computer and digital literacy skills limited their understanding of information and response times.

Lanshear and Knobel (2011) explain that digital literacy and 21st century literacies (described below) are currently two of the highest profile literacies in education policy, constituting core educational goals, often associated with fears of an emerging “digital divide” between those who are digitally literate and those who are not. Digital literacy includes computer/ICT literacy, information literacy and media literacy among others. Gilster (1997) describes digital literacy as the “ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide variety of sources when it is presented via computers and particularly through the medium of the internet” (as cited in Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p. 23). The 21st century literacies include a range of technological abilities, such as word processing, hypertext, LCDs, Webcams, podcasts, smartboards and social networking software (Collier, 2007). The complexity of this information environment combined with limited language proficiency is overwhelming for refugees who feel that there is simply too much to learn, which drastically affects investment in their new communities.

Lloyd et al. (2013) describe how newcomers engage in the “novel, complex, and multimodal” information landscapes of their new country (p. 130). These modes differ according to culture and context and have specific cognitive, cultural and social effects (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). These landscapes consist of a range of media that require new sets of information skills. Lloyd (2006, 2010) explains how information landscapes are intersubjective spaces:

Each reflects the taken for granted and agreed on modalities of information that are understood by people who are engaged in the collective practices and performances of that landscape. These modalities are constructed through epistemic, social, and corporeal experiences with information. The prominence of each modality within a landscape will reflect the ontological nature of the particular setting (p. 130).
Newcomers must develop an understanding of the affordances (modalities) of the information landscapes, as well as an understanding of the various discourses that accompany them. For example, Lloyd et al. (2013) found that refugees did not consider print sources (digital or paper) to be useful due to language barriers, however they found visual sources, such as charts, PowerPoints and board drawings helped in overcoming language difficulties. Many refugees found the local library useful, where they could look at picture books, listen to CDs, watch DVDs or listen to audiobooks and look at the book simultaneously. Another example detailed how interactive visual materials were used in a financial information session that used play-money when role-playing shopping transactions.

As noted above in the discussion on gender, Kendrick and Jones’s (2006, 2008) research in Uganda involved how different modes, such as photography, drama and drawing, could be incorporated into ELL classrooms. They found that these mediums were engaging and supportive of English language learning and students began to use English for expression and communication of students’ own meanings. Stein’s (2008) work in South Africa described how teachers used multimodal resources, including bodily, sensory, and linguistic modes to engage representational meaning with their English language learners. Learners became enthusiastic participants of multimodal texts that subverted the standard school texts. In the UK, Wallace (2003) worked with adult language learners using newspaper and magazine advertisements to critically analyze how power and meaning structure texts in order to reframe discourses that may subordinate them. This critical approach contrasts with dominant ELL methodologies that focus on activities designed to adapt students “to dominant practices rather than engaging them in the important work of critiquing disempowering discourses” (Norton & Toohey, 2011). These teachers demonstrated an understanding of language not as a static system, but instead as a social
practice where experiences and identities are negotiated (Norton & Toohey, 2011). They recognized that if students do not invest in their language practices, their learning outcomes will be limited. They also strived to create opportunities for learners to adopt various identity positions, take ownership of meaning-making and “re-imagine an expanded range of identities for the future” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 432).

Researchers who examine how multimodal ways of learning impact language learners’ identity recognize that there are many channels of communication through which people communicate. Coiro et al. (2008) notes that “meanings are communicated not only through text but also through music, sound, images, and a variety of digital media, thus ‘redefining what it means to be literate in the twenty-first century’” (p. 10). Lam (2000, 2006) has investigated how immigrant youth in the US construct transnational identities using technology. These new identities allowed the youth to reposition themselves in contrast to the stigmatization they received in school as incompetent immigrants to competent and multilingual individuals.

Similarly, Stewart (2014) found that while immigrant Latina/o teenagers did poorly in their in-school ESL classes, they engaged in multiple out-of-school literacies, such as Facebook and Spanish entertainment that provided them with meaningful connection to their home countries and maintenance of their identities. Most research on how digital technology affects identity and language learning has been positive, while Lam (2006) cautions against assuming that these technologies will provide the “necessary analytical tools that may empower youths to critique and change existing social structures in positive directions” (p. 186). Moreover, immigrant and refugee teenagers may possess more digital literacy than their parents, leaving the older newcomer population to face many challenges affecting their investment in second language
learning, such as difficulty forming social networks and finding employment (which will be discussed in greater detail in the section below).

### 2.8 Social Exclusion

While no universally accepted definition of social exclusion exists, Vinson (2009) suggests that each definition identifies a “lack of connectedness” and “limited support networks, inability to access the labour market, alienation from society and poorer educational outcomes” (p. 123). George and Chaze (2009) report that affective factors such as, loneliness and stress influenced by an inability to find work, loss of social support and mental health issues contribute to feelings of social exclusion. Elfreda Chatman’s (1991) theory of information poverty is important in understanding how social exclusion operates. She argues that there is a class of “information poor” characterized by their difficulty to obtain necessary information. Chatman (1991) further argues that the information poor are often marginalized members of society and “therefore the knowledge they possess is generated at the periphery of society” (Caidi & Allard, 2005, p. 306). Furthermore, Britz (2004) defines information poverty as a situation where individuals or communities do not have skills or abilities or financial means to obtain access to information, interpret and apply it accordingly.

Additionally, a lack of ability to independently and effectively connect with the information landscape due to language or literacy competency requires refugees to use mediators. Oftentimes, refugees hold deep mistrust of institutions or political practices (Hynes, 2009). Cadi and Allard’s 2005 study of Canadian immigrants found that a lack of access to information created barriers to securing employment, and participating in educational activities. Lloyd et al. (2013) argue that refugees may face additional problems related to trust arising from trauma caused by departure from their home country. In fact, research has demonstrated that
refugees have lower psychological and socioeconomic well-being than other immigrants and the
general population (Bach & Agiros, 1991). This is due to the fact that refugees must overcome
past traumas in addition to facing the new trauma associated with settling in a new country; for
example, daily economic concerns can oftentimes be a greater source of stress than previous
traumas (Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998). If these stressors are prolonged, refugees are at
greater risk of remaining on the margins of society. Fazel, Wheeler and Danish (2005) claim that
stressors may be related to survival, loss of community and social support, and loss of
meaningful social roles. They found that refugees that live in western countries are 10 times
more likely to have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared to the age matched general
population. Porter and Haslam (2005) further emphasize that psychological disorders among
refugees are often a result of environmental barriers that could be lessened by some form of
community support.

Hou and Beiser found in their longitudinal study (1981-1991) of Southeast Asian
refugees, termed the Refugee Resettlement Project (RRP), that mental health was not determined
by the resettlement process itself, but by contingencies surrounding it. Beiser (2009) recently
articulated this in a model (Figure 2) based on stress process theory, which focuses on three key
resources: self-esteem, mastery (personal control), and social support (Pearlin, Menaghan,
Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981). Beiser (2009) notes that the model does neither include all
possible pre and post- migration stressors, nor all possible personal and social resources. He also
emphasizes that this model, while appearing static, actually reveals a dynamic process, which
occurs over a significant period of time. This model reflects the multiple factors that contribute
to refugees’ mental health. While language fluency plays a part, it is only one amongst many
other aspects, such as social resources, unemployment, discrimination, socio-demographic
characteristics, like age, gender and education, and pre-migration stress that must be accounted for.

Beiser (2009) advocates for a translation of research about resettlement into policy and practice to promote socioeconomic integration. While many countries favour assimilation or “immigrant absorption,” Canada’s resettlement policy is based on the principle of integration.

The process, clearly distinct from assimilation, by which groups and/or individuals become able to participate fully in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the country. (Canadian Task Force, 1988)

Newcomers who retain their own cultural identity while incorporating elements of the new are more likely to be successful than those who assimilate completely, or who reject the new (Beiser, Collomb, & Ravel, 1981). The RRP measured success by three factors: employment, language fluency and general health. By 1991, 86% of refugees were working, feeling healthy and speaking English with moderate proficiency. Beiser (2009) found that successfully integrated refugees continued to value their heritage, yet were also willing to incorporate Canadian culture into their everyday lives.

Social exclusion also results from a loss of or inability to form social networks. The concept of social capital is also used in the immigration and settlement studies field to underscore the importance of social relations. While Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of social capital refers to connections of power, Lin (2001) conceptualizes social capital as “resources that are embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions” (p. 12). Social capital is thought of as an asset or a “public good” present in relationships between members of society. When individuals access social networks and increase their social capital, “the better one’s chances of integrating into society, and by extension the better one’s chances to live the good life” (Caidi & Allard, 2005, p. 307).
A lack of reading and writing and digital literacy is viewed as a significant barrier and is deemed by many scholars to be the underlying cause of social exclusion (Aspinall, 2007; Bigelow, 2010; Colic-Peisker, 2005). Yu (2010) found that low literacy levels create barriers especially for newcomers in communities that primarily use information and communication technologies (ICT) and digital technology. Government information and employment opportunities often come in digital format, but some immigrant groups prefer print resources either because of a distrust of the internet, lack of access and/or lack of internet literacy (Borland & Mphande, 2006).

Research has found that participation in one’s community can be an empowering process for refugees (Zimmerman, 1995). This process is important because they can acquire cultural knowledge, language skills and connections. Participation facilitates integration into the community (Tomeh, 1974). It can also lead to empowerment, where individuals and communities can gain power, resources and decision-making influence (Speer & Hughey, 1995). However, there are only a small percentage of refugees who do participate in local community activities. Goodkind and Foster-Fisher (2002) found that 94% of Hmong refugees in a mid-western United States city did value local community participation, however only a small number actually joined local groups due to barriers, such as having a lack of resources or legitimate voice.
Figure 2: Stress, protective factors and refugee mental health (Beiser, 2009).
2.9 Summary

Learners possess complex social identities that are reproduced in daily interactions, often influenced by varying degrees of power inequities. Some female immigrants challenge identities prescribed by the dominant culture, while others assimilate, sometimes against their will. Language constructs subject positions that change over time; sometimes individuals become subjects of and subjects to relations of power. A learner’s investment in SLA can change based on the power dynamics of a given speech event and is affected by identity, ideology and capital. When refugees and immigrants feel their cultural capital is not valued by the dominant society, feelings of social exclusion and isolation may result. Additionally, newcomers are at risk of information poverty as they may lack the information literacies deemed necessary to successfully integrate into modern day Canadian society.
Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the methodology used in constructing and carrying out the research in this thesis. I then describe the research context, including the site, participant recruitment and the participants. Next, I give a detailed biography of the case study participant. Lastly, I present a brief description of my data collection and analysis methods. I conclude with the limitations of this study.

3.2 Case Study Method

This research consists of a detailed case study, involving personal interviews and participant-observation. Sharan Merriam (2002) describes case study as an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit. It is a bounded, integrated system and will have patterned behavior with common features within the boundaries of the case (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). The unit of analysis, not the topic of investigation, characterizes the study and defines the case (Merriam, 2002). Case study is the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning (Stake, 1994). It is characterized by the researcher “spending substantial time on site personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on” (Stake, 1994, p. 242). Reflexivity is a key characteristic of case study. Stake (1994) suggests choosing a case from which we feel we can learn the most. Often it is better to learn more from an atypical case rather than a little from a “magnificently typical case” (Stake, 1994, p. 243). Knowledge is socially constructed and “case study researchers assist readers in the construction of knowledge” (Stake, 1994, p. 240).
Case study was the best method for this research because this study is a clearly bounded, atypical case, bound by the participant’s experience. According to Stake (1994), a case should exhibit typicality, but lean towards the opportunity to learn (original emphasis). Because Irene came to Canada alone, knowing no one, in her mid-life, she could be considered atypical, as she did not arrive as part of a larger family unit or in her youth. However, Irene’s case also meets the criteria for generality, as Chinese newcomers studying ELL are common in this city. In this study, the unit of analysis is one female refugee’s experiences with literacy. I spent time on-site interacting with the participant, her teacher and other students in a participatory-observer role. During this time, I gathered observations, which allowed me time to reflect on and revise my ideas.

3.3 Self-Reflexivity

I adopted a “hyper-self-reflexive” participatory stance to this research and attempted to “learn to learn from below” as outlined by Spivak (1990) who argues that westerners working with participants from vulnerable populations tend to believe that they are culturally superior, and must unlearn the urge to always be the speaker and speak in all situations. Spivak (1999) cautions against assuming solidarity because we are women, claiming that this neglects the historical, socioeconomic and cultural differences. Furthermore, I heeded Norton and Toohey’s (2011) warning that “Poststructural researchers must be reflexive about their own experiences, recognizing that their perspective on that which they are observing or analyzing is not the only one, and that their conclusions will inevitably be ‘situated’ and partial” (p. 426). Researcher reflexivity is an important aspect of microethics, or ethics-in-practice, in research practice. Microethics, as described by Guillemin and Gillam (2004), details ethical concerns that may arise when working in the field, where there is an unforeseen possibility that wrong may be
Reflexivity can help mitigate the ethics of interaction and representation of minority cultural communities (Milner, 2007). It helped me to raise awareness and consciousness of my own racial and cultural backgrounds and understandings so that I could engage in processes that reject the exploitation, misinterpretation and misrepresentation of other cultures (Milner, 2007). Similarly, I was forced to think about myself in relation to others, “work through the commonalities and tensions that emerge from this reflection, and negotiate [my] way of knowing” with the participant (Milner, 2007, p. 396). I also drew my awareness to “master narratives,” social narratives that operate to normalize oppressive conditions within society by telling stories from the perspective of the dominant social group in order to sustain their racial and class privilege (Dixson & Rousseau, 2007).

I documented my findings in a researcher’s log, noting ideas, questions and observations about how to make the process more equitable. This enabled me to maintain a hyper critical stance so that I was continually revising strategies and reflecting on how to make our relationship more equitable. For example, at our initial meeting, when Irene realized that I would be writing a paper with her as the subject, she became uncomfortable. Assuming that she would want to ensure she was being accurately represented, despite the anonymity of the research, I suggested that she attend the final presentation of the paper, to which she quickly responded, “No, I don’t want.” From this response, I understood that she was uncomfortable being in the spotlight and this understanding informed my research practice for the remainder of the study. I knew that she was shy and being in any way made to feel exposed would cause her to tailor her responses or shut down completely. Our meetings together were very informal, sitting side-by-side, oftentimes sharing food and drink, laughing and talking about our lives, so that when I took out my iPhone to record a conversation or pen to jot down notes, she did not feel like I was
“researching” her. I felt that our relationship became one of friendship, rather than researcher and participant, however I understand that this may not have been true for her.

Once the study was completed and data transcribed, I began the process of coding and analyzing the data. During this process, I was confronted with many instances where I was unable to impartially analyze the findings and felt conflicted in how to interpret the data. Because of this, I was tempted to reduce the data to only one interpretation rather than allow multiple possibilities to surface. I used my journal to note these impartialities, conflicts, associated thoughts and feelings. This facilitated a deeper understanding of the data and helped me to acknowledge and validate my own conflicts. For example, Irene described a situation when she was unsure if a male classmate had acted inappropriately. I felt that the man had been inappropriate and assumed Irene lacked the sociocultural literacy to accurately judge the situation. Upon reflection in my journal, I realized that perhaps there was more than one legitimate reaction to the man’s comments and that perhaps his comments were unclear. This led me to reflect upon my assumptions, that a Canadian born woman would immediately judge the man correctly and simply would have deemed his comments inappropriate. Yet, examining my reaction closely revealed that my judgment was based on my own biases and personal history. Using a reflexivity journal was very important to maintain the objectivity in my analysis and present Irene’s experience as clearly and impartially as possible. I was able to offer more than one possibility and note my apparent contradictions, leading to a richer analysis that was not limited to reductionist assumptions.

3.4 Research Context

This study was conducted in Western Canada at a non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to assisting refugees. This organization is one of the oldest refugee
serving agencies in Western Canada. It serves as the first point of contact, providing essential services like emergency housing, weekly food bank, and clothing. It also offers an English as an Additional Language (EAL) program, which aims to provide refugee claimants with a “practical understanding and usage of English in a Canadian context.” The EAL program helps refugees “function in society by providing the language and skills necessary to fulfill their daily needs.” In 2013, this organization supported refugees arriving from 74 countries and speaking more than 30 languages.

3.5 Participant Recruitment

I began volunteering at the organization in September of 2014 as a teacher’s assistant in one of the EAL classes. The teacher indicated that one of the students was having a difficult time progressing due to poor pronunciation and suggested that one-on-one tutoring could benefit her. This student differed from other Chinese EAL immigrant learners I had worked with: she was a refugee, in her mid-30s, single and living alone in the city. I was very intrigued by her and felt that her unique situation would offer a profound contribution to the field of language research. After receiving a letter of permission from the organization (See Appendix A) and ethics approval from the university, I approached the student and asked if she would like to take part in a study that would involve tutoring sessions once a week, where I would occasionally record and/or take notes of our conversations, two interviews at the end of the study period and observation in her EAL class. I had the consent form translated into Cantonese to ensure that she understood the parameters of the study and offered her some time to discuss her decision with her family and friends. She agreed and after signing the consent form, I began tutoring lessons and class observation in February of 2015 (See Appendix B and C). The program coordinator and EAL instructor were asked to participate in separate interviews at the end of the study.
period. I offered them time to consider, yet they were both quickly willing to participate and given consent forms (See Appendix D and E). I also asked for permission to continue not only assisting in the classes, but also observing for the purpose of this study. They agreed and information forms were distributed to the students in the EAL class (See Appendix F).

3.6 Ethical Procedures

Ethics approval was sought through UBC’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB). Consent forms detailed confidentiality and anonymity through the use of first-name pseudonyms according to British Columbia’s Freedom of Information and Privacy regulations. Participants were advised that their responses would be stored on my password-protected computer and after submission, on UBC’s secure network drive.

3.7. Case Study Participant Background

3.7.1 Biography

Irene* was a 36 year-old Chinese female with refugee status living in a large metropolitan city in Western Canada. Irene arrived alone in Canada four years ago and began studying EAL at the refugee organization two years ago. Irene was raised in a working class family in a small town in Southwestern China. After high school, she left for the large city of Guangzhou, to pursue her college education. After completing her diploma, she found a job as an accountant’s assistant, and after many years, was able to buy an apartment, with a down payment of $30,000 (Canadian equivalent). After a short time, the building owners exploited a loophole in the

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* A pseudonym has been used to protect the participant’s identity
tenants’ contracts in order to evict them, resulting in a violent standoff involving the police. After resisting arrest, and fleeing the city, Irene lived as a fugitive for several months, knowing that if she returned to Guangzhou, she would be imprisoned. Eventually her sister found a “snakehead,” an individual who illegally smuggles people to western countries, who would help her get out of the country and to Canada. When she arrived, she knew no one and very little English. She owned no cell phone or computer and with minimal government assistance, found a room to rent. After six months, her government case-worker told her that she must find a job, so Irene independently found a job as a cashier. A year later, her case-worker told her that she must learn English, so Irene enrolled in EAL classes.

3.7.2 Current Situation

Irene has had many jobs over the last three years, all at Chinese-run grocery stores. Her current position also involves stocking shelves, from which she has injured her back - she is now unsure if she can return to work. After work, Irene attended EAL classes in the evenings, usually at least two to three days a week. She often had to request permission to leave work early in order to make it to the class on time. Her earlier jobs were in a suburb of the city and required her to take a train downtown, where the classes were held and then return home on the train, often arriving home past 11:00 pm.

3.8 Data Collection

This study employed three methods of data collection: informal conversation, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. It was important to use more than one method of data collection to enhance the validity of the findings (Merriam, 2002). Triangulation refers to the employing of various procedures to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation (Stake, 1994).
3.8.1 Informal Conversation

Because I am an English teacher, I was able to tutor Irene. We met once a week for approximately 1.5 hours at a central public library, where I assisted her, primarily with her oral pronunciation. Sometimes, I recorded our conversations using my phone as a recording device, while other times I took notes, depending on my sense of Irene’s comfort level, which changed from week to week. Generally, the phone seemed to generate the least discomfort, however at other times she did not mind my note taking. This was usually because she was focused on her own narrative and our dialogue. Our conversations were friendly and casual and after some time, she told me personal details about her struggles, her dreams, her fears and her past. I was able to garner details about her private life that neither her EAL teacher nor program coordinator knew. Although I was still an outsider and in a position of power, these disparities lessened over time and I came to view her as a friend.

3.8.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Two semi-structured interviews with Irene were held towards the end of the study period. The reasoning for waiting until the end of the study period was because I needed to establish a trusting relationship with her before asking such personal details. Interviews with the EAL teacher and the program coordinator were held around the same time. These interviews were conducted based on a constructionist conception that captures the importance of social interaction, as well as examining the resources individuals use to describe their worlds to others (Roulston, 2010). For example, a researcher may include gestures, utterances, smiles and pauses, which emphasize the socially situated nature of the interaction and provide greater insight into the interviewee response than simply raw text. Semi-structured interviews are “flexible,
accessible and intelligible and, more important, capable of disclosing important and often hidden facets of human and organizational behavior” (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 246). I used open-ended questions, avoided leading questions and let the participants lead. I used probes that drew “out more complete narratives from the interviewees” (Qu & Domay, 2011, p. 246). I also followed the principles outlined by Shensul et al. (1999, p. 141):

(1) maintaining the flow of the interviewee’s story;
(2) maintaining a positive relationship with the interviewee; and
(3) avoiding interviewer bias.

3.8.3 Participant Observation

I attended the EAL classes in a participant-observational role, assisting Irene, other students and the teacher as needed. The class I observed occurred once a week and consisted of approximately 10 students, with one regular teacher. The class composition varied slightly each week, yet the regular students consisted of 4-5 Iranian women (aged 50+), one Iranian man (50+), a Chinese man, (50+), one Mexican man, David*, (50+), who moved levels after about 1 month of observation, one Chinese man, Stephen*, (early 30s), who also moved levels after about 1 month of observation, and other rotating students.

By becoming a participant rather than just an observer, I was able to reduce “the problem of reactivity “ (Guest et al., 2013 p. 80). This means that if the students were familiar with me, they were less likely to change their behaviour. Participant-observation also helped me to understand if my interview questions were relevant and appropriate by forming a deeper relationship with Irene. I gained an intuitive understanding of the meaning of my data, which enhanced the validity of the research (Guest et al., 2013). For example, Irene told me that in class she is “very quiet” and “feel[s] inferior.” While she told me that this was because “from
childhood to now, I don’t like talking,” by observing the class dynamics, I noticed that she was overshadowed by some of the other more dominant women who spoke better English, resulting in her “feeling inferior.” Because she was reluctant to tell me this, it was necessary for me to observe her in the classroom in order to facilitate a better understanding of her situation.

During the observations, I focused on the setting of the classroom including who Irene talked to, and if her opinions were respected (DeWalt & DeWalt, 1998). I observed where she stood or sat, if she felt in a position of power (men versus women, those with greater English skills) and how she interacted with the teacher. Shifting from wide to narrow perspectives was important, focusing on a single person, interaction, then returning to a view of the overall situation (Merriam, 1998). I observed her behaviour and looked for recurring themes or patterns, action or inaction (Wolcott, 2001). I also looked for key words, first and last remarks in conversations to trigger later recollection (Merriam, 1998).

3.9 Data Analysis

I recorded the interviews on a personal recording device and transcribed them exactly as they were spoken. I did this shortly after the interviews were complete as my memory would be more accurate. I attempted to include gestures, smiles, laughs, facial expressions and pauses in an attempt to convey the rich data the interviewee conveyed (Roulston, 2010). I then combed through the data, looking for similar themes. I used my journal to reflect on the common elements, highlighting key comments and then categorizing into charts. For research question #1, I found that there were two distinct categories: 1) facilitating factors and 2) barriers associated with the participant’s English language learning. Within each category, I found common themes into which I sorted the common data through a “series of assertions and interpretations” (Roulston, 2010). For research question #2, the data was much easier to categorize, as I was able
to organize it by different types of literacy. I present these findings in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I elaborate on the findings: categories and thematic groupings by discussing how these relate to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the study’s theoretical perspectives.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this section, I introduce the relevant findings according to each research question. The interview results are presented according to themes and illustrated with interview excerpts. The themes for research question #1 are subdivided into 2 categories as will be described below. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the data was collected though several informal conversations and observations and two semi-structured interviews with the central participant (Irene)*. As well, two interviews were conducted with the EAL teacher (Mark)* and program coordinator (Brian)* of the refugee organization.

4.2 Research Question #1

*What are the factors facilitating or impeding female refugees’ investment in language literacy skills as a social practice in their new environments?*

4.3 Introduction

To answer the research question, the data corpus was analyzed by repeatedly reviewing what the participants said and what I observed noting, while taking into account, the context (Creswell, 2007). I employed structural analysis to identify common patterns, themes, similarities and dissimilarities to generate categories and subcategories as well as respective quotes that supported the categories (Creswell, 2007). These are illustrated below using subcategories in form of themes under two broad categories: 1) facilitating factors and 2) barriers associated with the case’s English language learning process. First, I present the facilitating factors by categories, and second, present the barriers to learning English, also using categorical
groupings. Some findings confirmed literature regarding refugees’ trust processes (Hynes, 2009; Lloyd et al., 2013), refugee pre-existing and new trauma (Lloyd et al., 2013; Bach & Agiros, 1991; Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998), SLA and age as an affective factor (Riggs et al., 2012; Butcher & Townsend, 2010), and female empowerment (Lazo, 1995). Other findings confirmed and extended Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of social capital, Norton’s (1995, 2000, 2013, 2015) theory of identity and investment, refugee loneliness and the benefits of community support (Vinson, 2009; George & Chaze, 2009; Lloyd et al., 2013), literature regarding refugee psychological distress (Porter & Haslam, 2005; Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998; Bach & Agiros, 1991). Select findings contested the literature regarding English language literacy leading to empowerment (Daniel, 2000), refugee trust processes (Hynes, 2009; Lloyd et al., 2013), refugee trauma and its effects on integration (Lloyd et al., 2013; Bach & Agiros, 1991), and SLA investment (Norton Peirce, 1990; Warriner, 2004). In-depth interpretations of the findings in context of the literature will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.4 Facilitating Factor #1: English Language Learning Progression

While Irene thinks that her English is “bad,” both her teacher and the program coordinator acknowledge that there has been progress. Mark reports that from his observations, Irene has progressed.

M: I think that she has definitely learned things. Brian has started doing level testing and that’s fairly recent. I don’t test; I just make general observations. Irene is harder to notice because she is one of the quieter students. Just over time, I have realized that she is learning, over time she is learning. It just takes more observation with her.

Brian agreed that she has progressed.

K: Has the participant improved her English skills since she first began classes?
B: On the most recent speaking test, yes. Because it’s a graded placement test, I noticed that she better understood more complex questions and gave me more relevant detailed answers that actually make sense, whereas prior she had to essentially pass on a lot of questions.

Due to the nature of the relationship both Mark and Brian had with Irene, they didn’t know much about her life outside of the EAL classroom. Mark told me that he is cautious about probing too deeply.

K: How do you think the participant has benefited from the EAL classes? Has it helped her in her life?

M: I honestly don’t know. I don’t know about her life. I am really kind of shy about digging too deeply because of the population I’m working with here, so it’s different than working with daytime international students. I tend to be a bit more shy because I never know where I might hit a raw nerve.

4.4.1 Facilitating Factor #2: Positive and Friendly Attitude

During our tutoring sessions, even when Irene was feeling sad, she still put a smile on her face. In class, although she was hesitant to raise her hand and speak out, she did speak to the other students during partner work and break times. She tried to speak as clearly as she could and when she was misunderstood, she smiled and repeated herself again. Mark noted how she is well liked by other students.

M: She actually seems like really friendly person. She seems like the kind of person, well, that wants to talk to people. It appears that she certainly tries and I see her socializing. I don’t see her sitting off by herself. I think that everyone had a good feeling about her cuz she is a friendly person.

Each week in class, a student was chosen to present on a topic of their choice, usually relating to their home country. Before Irene’s presentation, she was extremely nervous. Yet after it was over, although she felt it was “not good,” she did acknowledge the other students’ support.

K: Your presentation was very good!
I: Not good, not good.

K: I think everyone in the class understood. They asked questions.

I: The older students, they all care for me. They care for me. They like me, so if I speak good or not good…

K: They’re very encouraging…

I: Ya ya.

K: Everyone there is very kind.

4.4.2 Facilitating Factor #3: Investment in Learning English

Irene displayed great enthusiasm for her studies during our tutoring sessions. She was punctual and if she wasn’t going to be on time she always let me know ahead of time. It was clear that she really wanted to study, despite her busy work schedule.

I: I like study. I can study from Monday to Thursday. I can study 4 days. And speak.

K: That’s good! But you have to participate in class to get your pronunciation better.

I: No problem. I continue study.

K: That’s good, you’re motivated. Do you know what that means? Motivate?

I: Motivate?

K: It means um…determined…to do something. Does that make sense?

I: Determined? I don’t know the meaning.

K: Determined? It’s like um…[pause]…like you set a goal. Do you know what this means?

I: Set a goal, set a goal…oh oh…I know!

Irene was motivated to learn because she wanted to make friends and be able to go out shopping at English speaking, instead of Chinese-only speaking stores.

K: Why do you want to learn English? How do you think it will help you?
I: I want to make a little friends. In Canada, maybe, for English you can do anything.

K: Do what?

I: You go to buy something or go to the department store.

K: So English would help you with shopping?

I: Shopping. I always shopping for myself.

She also knew it was important to learn English if she was to move to a rural region of the province, where English is predominantly spoken.

K: Would you move to live with your boyfriend?

I: I hope, but finding a job is difficult and the interview speaking.

K: The speaking is difficult?

I: [laughs] No Chinese on the island, so I keep learning English but my English is bad.

K: It’s not so bad. You just need to keep trying.

I: Keep trying.

4.4.3 Facilitating Factor #4: Perseverance and Resilience

Irene reported feelings of anxiety at the prospect of having to go from door-to-door in Burnaby’s Chinese shopping district, yet she persevered.

I: No, I found my first job going door-to-door, go to lots of Chinese businesses, ask the boss and ask the worker. “Do you need a worker? I want to do the job.” It was very difficult and before I am in China maybe we go to the office job and through the interview face to face not door to door and ask the people. I very scared and very nervous. And very shy. I can’t open my mouth to ask the job [laughs].

Irene looked for whatever labour work she could find, despite being qualified for an office job. She explained to me how she even tried to get a job in a kitchen after she had not heard back from a potential grocery store employer.
I: I called [the potential employer] and at first the girl picked up the phone and said she was very busy and after she will reply me so I wait for a reply and I very sad, so several days later I always go to the Chinese store from door to door and I asked for a cook’s helper. I never do this job [laughs]. Because it’s very fast and I tried to work in the cooking room and the boss asked me to cook the noodle, but I very slow.

K: You did it slowly?

I: [laughs] Ya, and cut the large cabbage and no energy to use the knife. Very strong. I finish the boss said you didn’t get the job so I was very sad.


After this, Irene was determined to get the job she wanted, so she went to the shop in person to inquire about the position and subsequently got the job.

4.5 Barriers

4.5.1 Barrier #1: Lack of Participation

I observed Irene’s reluctance to participate in her EAL classes over the course of a four-month period. The Iranian women tended to dominate class discussions, offering quick answers to questions and asking questions without raising their hands. Irene would participate only when called on or when it was her turn. Both Mark and Brian confirmed this.

K: What was the participant’s participation level?

M: Um…Not terribly high and I think that was…well 2 things: cultural reasons. My Asian students just in general tend to be quieter than my other students, I don’t mean to be like prejudicial or anything.

K: No, it’s just your observation.

M: It’s just my observation and I don’t mean anything good, bad or indifferent about it and actually I have to remember to [pause] you know, specifically call on certain students to make sure that they don’t, you know, get lost. When it was her turn, she would take her turn. She generally doesn’t volunteer much, or speak out of turn or ask questions [pause] ya, just by herself. It strikes me as a shame because I’m sure that she has had questions.
Here, Mark notes that Irene’s lack of participation was due to her Chinese cultural background. I asked Irene whether this was a factor that hindered her participation. When she and I discussed her participation, she didn’t mention her Chinese heritage as a contributing factor, however she did comment on her quiet and shy nature.

I: I very quiet.

K: Why do you think that is?

I: In my childhood, I’m not happy until now. My family not good and my father and mother often argue and from childhood to now, I don’t like talking. I like write. So why my English doesn’t improve. Maybe as me, I don’t like talking.

K: Now, if you’re happier you can talk more?

I: If I talk to the stranger…if we are friendly I will talk to you. If I don’t know you and you don’t know me, I don’t like to talk.

K: But that’s the same with most people. I don’t like to talk to strangers either [laugh] It’s normal, I think.

Through my observations, I felt that Irene may have felt intimidated by the more dominant students, and Brian agreed that this might have been a factor.

K: When I was in the class, I felt that she didn’t participate because there were a lot of stronger personalities who were at a higher level…the Iranian women… who would give their answers freely and she was very quiet.

B: In that context, that was definitely a factor, but to be honest, a lot of students were affected because there were those very dominant students in class that demanded a lot of attention and would answer very quickly and would say a lot. But um…that was an issue and understandably she was more affected compounded with her other issues.

Mark agreed that this may have been a factor, but conceded that her lack of participation would have been an issue regardless.

K: And the majority of the other women were Iranian and there was an Iranian man as well. I was wondering if you felt that she felt overrun or a little bit shy and if she felt pushed aside?
E: It would have been the case regardless. And it’s always an issue whenever there’s one particular group that’s dominant.

I asked Irene about her lack of participation in class. While she didn’t specify that she felt intimidated by other students, she did mention that she felt inferior because of her pronunciation.

K: I noticed in your ESL classes, you are quiet, why is that?
I: I always quiet.
K: Are you afraid to speak because of your pronunciation?
I: Ya and I feel [uses translator to find word] inferior.

4.5.1 Barrier #2: Busy Work Schedule

After work, she had to take the bus and skytrain and after running from the skytrain to the class site (then at Terminal Ave) was able to make it by about 6:50pm, most days, although the class began at 6:30pm. Mark commented on how this affected her participation in the class.

M: She really has a difficult time getting to class on time and I know it’s not due to lack of desire. I think that she really appreciates the classes. But I know that the work is really far so I know that it’s REALLY common to have her come in like 20 minutes late. And we only meet together for a couple hours minus a break, so anyways, 20 minutes is significant, so that’s been a challenge, you know for her, and you know for us.

She told me that she had little time to practice her English speaking because of her busy work schedule, but now has a bit more time. Brian noted that Irene was frustrated with her slow progress, citing her busy work schedule as a problem. Yet, he commented that Irene is now making English more of a priority in her life.

K: How did Irene do on her placement tests?
B: She’s a bit frustrated. She mentioned that the reason she hasn’t had a lot of progress is she just hasn’t had a lot of practice outside of class. She did mention your one on one tutoring and she said that was very helpful but outside of that she hasn’t had the chance to do much. She said she had a job and she had to focus on that, which I understand…But
now she says the situation is different. It sounds like she has on a personal level, learning which has become more of a priority than before.

4.5.2 Barrier #3: Oral Speaking Skills

When I first started this study, I began tutoring Irene, focusing on her English pronunciation. Progress was slow, but Irene was a diligent student, committed to improving. I asked her how she felt about her progress.

K: So you wrote the test with Emil and you didn’t move levels?

I: The test speaking….I can’t speak clearly to Emil but I test the paper. I do very good. Maybe 60 questions I got 50 right.

K: That’s good! So what was the problem then? The grammar is good, but the main difficulty is speaking. Do you think that is it?

I: Yes, that is it, so he test me and I can’t talk to him clearly.

K: I know we’ve been working on that. Your pronunciation.

I: Ya, my pronunciation.

K: It’s hard because we can do some in our class, but then when you go home you have to practice [laugh] but I know you’re very busy, right?

Among other potential factors affecting Irene’s participation, Mark confirmed her difficulty with pronunciation.

M: Another thing that I don’t know, but I’m not somebody who’s qualified. It’s always seemed to me that she has some sort of speech impediment But I honestly don’t know because I you know I don’t have that kind of background and I know that people who have speech impediments tend to be very shy about speaking.

When I asked Mark about her communication with other students, he went on to further say that Irene’s English was difficult for both he and other students to understand.

M: I mean I think all of us, teachers and students have difficulty understanding her and we all feel bad about it, it’s not like we just dismiss her or anything like that. It’s just really challenging.
Brian agreed, stating that her pronunciation was what was holding her back from moving levels.

B: Her grammar was fine but it was simply her listening and speaking skills, specifically pronunciation that were holding her back. Even if a student makes a lot of progress in terms of vocabulary, grammar and reading, writing, if they can’t understand the teacher and if the teacher can’t understand them, that can be enough to not allow them to benefit from the class.

4.5.3 Barrier #4: Lack of Friends

While Irene noted that the older students seemed to care for her, she also mentioned that she only had 2 friends in the EAL program, Daniel and Justin. When one moved to a higher level and the other to another program, she felt that she didn’t have any friends. When I suggested she make new friends in the class, she reacted with shyness.

I: Daniel is like an older brother.

K: That’s good. It’s nice to have a friend in the class. So now that he is gone, do you have another friend in the class?

I: Ah [pause] no. Before, last year, you remember an African boy, Justin?

K: Ya, Justin.

I: Ya, he was my friend.

K: And he went to another school, right?

I: Ya, I don’t connect, but maybe he is very busy. He work and in evening he go to school for Monday to Friday. He is very busy.

K: I see. Well, you have to make a new friend in the class.

I: No, no new friend [pause] because they older than me. Even I want to make friends, I must make…ah…the same age.

K: But Daniel is older, isn’t he?

I: Ya, he’s older so I ask him as my older brother.

K: What about some of the women (in the class), they could be your older sister?
I: [laughs] Ya, ya.

K: Maybe not the same?

I: Actually, I don’t like talking. I very silent.

She also told me that she felt having a friend in the class was important for her learning.

K: Do you need more friends in class? Would it help you to learn if you had friends?

I: I need friends. I want to make friends with my classroom.

K: Why do you think that’s important?

I: [Here Irene describes a different class from the one that I observed] My class has 4 students and a woman has 3 babies. She is older. And a man he is same age as me but the man he is a little bit…I never told to him I have husband. And the student make a joke, if you know me, you can find me, I will massage you [laughs].

K: Ew! He made you feel uncomfortable?

I: Maybe he bad guy so I can’t make friends with him and the little girl, she is in my neighbourhood. I often talk to her and I told her I live near your home and every evening we can go for a walk and learn English and she said I go to bed early. So, she reject me.

While Irene knows that making friends is important for practicing English outside of class, she also values connecting with other people. Despite being a happy and friendly person, fostering friendships has proven difficult for her.

K: Have you been able to make friends outside of class?

I: No, no friends, just me and my boyfriend.

K: There is a strong Chinese community here, have you been able to make other Chinese friends?

I: I can’t make friends because they are very busy because they have jobs.

K: Who?

I: Before my job I know a girl, maybe she is 27 year old. She often told to me about her family but I don’t have baby so no topic to talk.
K: You had nothing in common?

I: Ya, we can’t connect.

K: Do you have any friends at work?

I: No friends. At work the people not very good. They speak Chinese to other people. They [pause, looks up on translator] gossip.

Safety was another issue for Irene when making friends; she felt it necessary to keep her distance from people for her personal safety.

K: Do you think that life is harder for you as a single woman? Do you think things would things be different for you if you were a man?

I: I don’t know what you mean.

K: Did you feel safe or scared being alone because being a woman sometimes it’s more dangerous for us than for men because men are bigger and stronger [motion to my arm muscles].

I: I keep quiet and keep silent and I don’t make friends a lot because I think maybe the men and women are nice or not nice, such as I studied with my classmates and the man talk to me “if you know me you can find me” [she is referring here to a man in her class who made her feel uncomfortable by offering to meet her and give her a massage]. I don’t know if he is good or not.

K: No, in fact, I don’t think that is ok. Maybe you could tell the teacher?

I: Maybe he made a joke. I think he may have…[laughs]

K: No, you are right to feel that way.

4.5.4 Barrier #5: Loneliness, Isolation and Fear

When Irene first came to Canada, she told me she was very lonely and depressed.

K: It must have been very difficult for you to come here alone… How was it when you first arrived?

I: I very sad because different people, yellow hair, red, Africa, many people here.

K: You felt sad because you were lonely?
I: Yes and often I cry. I was all alone.

Not only was Irene lonely, she was extremely frightened being in a new country, unable to speak the language and far from her family.

K: What did you think your life would be like here?

I: No, I don’t think anymore since I leave China. I came to Canada I feel [pause to look up on translator]… let me check… I feel at sea.

K: When you came to Canada, you felt at sea?

I: Like I lost my way. I feel…when I came here my eyes were closed. I never saw clearly how to go into the future.

K: So wait, you closed your eyes?

I: Because I can’t look more ahead.

K: You can’t look more ahead in the future?

I: Ya.

K: Why?

I: [laughs] Maybe I’m afraid, scared, frightened.

K: You were frightened, why?

I: Scared, frightened, no friends, no family.

Through observation of Irene over the course of 4 months, I witnessed her loneliness resulting in mild depression. While she is generally a happy and positive person, there was still an underlying sadness. After only a year of arriving in Canada, Irene got married to a man who she hoped would father her children.

I: Before I got {when I was married} married, the guy maybe a playboy so I very sad.

K: He was a playboy?

I: Yes, I very sad. So, a month later I very sad. I always want to build my family. The other man maybe he is older than me. I feel he is very nice. He want a wife and I want a
family. We fall in love in little time so he ask me get married to him. After I got married, I found the man have little problems. He don’t take care of me. To get divorced you must go to the lawyer office and pay money. So I [laughs and hangs her head] pay $1400

K: Oh no!

However, Irene’s desire to have a family was not the only reason that she sought a husband. She was collecting meager support cheques each month, so Irene wanted to partner in hopes of finding emotional and financial support.

K: You were sponsored by the government when you first arrived. They gave you money, right?

I: Ya, one year [here she means month] $600 rent house, buy food.

K: And after the one year, they said you needed to learn English and get a job?

I: When I get a job I don’t take the sponsor money. Because I find a husband, the first one, I want him to take care of me, find a job, rent a house and live with him, so at that time I didn’t take the sponsor. I want to find a job and I want to have my new life but everything changed.

K: Why?

I: Because the man, he didn’t give my safety, he didn’t take care of me and at that time I stopped the sponsor cheque because we rented an apartment. We live $780 and every year [again she means month here] it $600, so I not enough money so I try and look for the job so if I working I don’t take the sponsor cheque.

After Irene left her first husband, she began dating a Vietnamese man whom she had met when she first came to Canada in 2012. During the time that I tutored her, she was experiencing difficulty in her relationship with this man. She was feeling very lonely and anxious and it was affecting her concentration during our lessons and her classes.

K: How are classes going?

I: I don’t like talking these days. I don’t know why.

K: Why is that? Are you tired?
I: Maybe tired. My boyfriend and I are very far distance. I want to go to his place but he did not agree.

K: Why?

I: I think it is not good timing. I want to marry and have baby but to stay together it is difficult. He don’t give me satisfy.

K: Satisfaction?

I: Yes, in February he give me a ring. Four years ago, he got married and he divorced. He found a lawyer to divorce, but it isn’t finished. His wife don’t want to sign the paper.

K: Is the ring so that you can get married when he gets divorced?

I: Ya, he don’t making his divorce. I feel terrible. I must recognize that he is my husband. So I must go to his place to live with him. I’m very old. I’m 36. I think too much [hangs her head]. My emotions very complicated. About love. Can you give me advice?

K: Can you live together and wait until his wife signs the papers?

I: We must legally marry. My relationship with my family. If I live with him not legally marry, they think I break up other family. In China, it’s very bad. I always wait wait wait. My mother wants me to have baby because my sister can’t. She wants me to have happy family, baby and children. I want to be a mother.

Several months later, in our formal interview, when I asked her about her future with this man, she seemed much more optimistic. Her demeanor had changed. She was happy and smiling.

K: Do you want to go back to China?

I: A little bit…but in China I’m single, but now I find my husband here. I want to belong to a family, so I want to stay here.

K: Are you going to stay with him? I know you were worried about his divorce.

I: Last week he come over and I heard him on the cell phone and I heard he said his ex-wife signed the papers.

K: Wow, this is good. So now you can get married?

I: All the paper, yes.

K: Would you move with him?
I: I hope, but finding a job is difficult and the interview speaking.

K: The speaking is difficult?

I: [laughs] No Chinese on the island so I keep learning English, but my English is bad.

K: It’s not so bad. You just need to keep trying.

I: Keep trying.

Later on in the interview I asked her about her feelings of loneliness and isolation and if those had changed.

K: Do you feel sad, lonely still?


K: Now you don’t?

I: My life, in future…. [pause]

K: So you feel happy now because….

I: Before I feel lonely, now I happy. I getting used to right now…I think now I belong to family.

K: With your boyfriend?

I: How do you say? [looks up on translator]

K: [reading translator] A sense of belonging… I see! With your boyfriend? Or in Canada?

I: Ya, He and… both.

K: This is good!

As program manager of an organization devoted to helping refugees, Brian was able to comment on how refugees adapt to a new culture. When I asked him about how English had benefited his students, he commented that being socially involved (through employment opportunities) makes them feel happier.

K: Why would they be happier?
B: Because they have a social life. There were certain cases where that was clearly the problem. They were complaining about feeling isolated, not having friends, having lost touch with people, and being surrounded by speakers and not understanding what they are saying and being able to communicate in any meaningful fashion. It can have severe psychological effects. And this is coming, you know from our clients and also from my experience as a teacher, where the students say that they feel either depressed or isolated or some will say that they are forced to be children because the things that they can express as extremely basic and in no way represent who they are as a person, full of depth and complexities, so it can be frustrating. So, yes, it can lead to a happier life through better human connections.

I wanted Brian to comment on refugees arriving to Canada alone and Chinese immigrants and refugees feeling more comfortable in a city with such a large Asian population.

B: I don’t know what extent she is involved with the Chinese community here. I know she works for a Chinese employer but her friends, I’m not sure if she spends time with Chinese community. I might be making an assumption here, but a lot of the Chinese immigrants that come here come from very wealthy families, and that’s not the same situation as a refugee, different status, etc. so that might also be a factor that prevents connection or is at least intimidating, for her.

K: As a whole do you see that refugees who arrive alone have more of a sense of isolation?

B: It’s obviously a factor. If their families are here, it can also be a source of stress because their families may still be in their home country and they are working on bringing them over and, there is a lot more stress about children. Some people are naturally positive and ready to take on whatever life throws in their way.

4.5.5 Barrier #6: Chinese Language Immersion

Irene told me several times that she did not speak English outside of class. This was due to several factors. The first reason was that she did not have friends to practice with, as noted above. The second reason was living in a Chinese neighbourhood and working for a Chinese employer.

K: Are you using English at work?

I: No.
K: What about when you go shopping?

I: I don’t go out. I stay at home.

K: Where do you buy your groceries?

I: Victoria Drive. It’s cheaper.

K: Do they speak Chinese there?

I: Yes. I always speak Chinese [laughs].

K: You never practice?

I: [smiles]

In June, Irene found a new job downtown. The population there is more diverse, so she seemed excited about the prospect of speaking more English.

K: How is your new job?

I: Ya, now I working right now have lot of [pause] I talk little bit of English. A lot than before. Before all Chinese, but now has foreign (foreigners). They speak English. They come to my shop to buy something, so sometimes I talk English.

K: This is good because the last shop was all Chinese and you spoke Chinese all the time.

I: Ya ya.

The third reason was the lack of time she had to spend practicing. In my interview with Brian, we discussed her lack of practice time, yet how her priorities seemed to be changing due to two factors: her poor results on her speaking test and her new job, which allows her more free time. He had discussed the possibility of adding a social aspect to the EAL program that would facilitate more speaking practice.

K: I’ve been working on her pronunciation and I’ve asked her to take home exercises to do in front of the mirror, watch her lips, her tongue. She is reluctant because she does work 6 days a week and gets home late. Where she works, it’s predominantly Chinese, so she doesn’t really speak English at all. In my opinion, this is hindering her progress.
B: In my opinion as well and she is beginning to recognize this and she seems committed to changing her priorities.

K: I wonder how that could work, if she could meet up with another student and speak English?

B: Oh, so we were recently thinking of adding more social aspect to our program. So we’ve had ESL classes the past couple of months, life skills, job search etc. and more recently we want to have a conversation group because one of our students happens to be a café owner, so I’ve been talking to him and our volunteers about having a conversation club outside of regular class hours and meet with other volunteers and other native Canadians. That would be one way. Another suggestion was to have electives that would focus on specific skills that would require a bit more work and organizing but it’s a good idea. Having a speaking class or a listening and pronunciation class to focus exclusively on that.

4.5.6 Barrier #7: Age and Gender

Irene repeatedly told me that she was “almost 40,” although she was only 36. She also felt that her Chinese diploma would not be transferable, as it was from a technical college. Also, she felt “too old” to upgrade her skills, as her friend Justin, a 22-year-old refugee from Ghana, had.

K: Did you think of trying to get a similar job here as an accountant’s assistant? Or is the speaking English the hard part?

I: [laughs] I don’t think I can do the office job in the future.

K: Why?

I: Maybe no…like Justin came here, he study with me but after he changed the school from Monday to Friday because he must through the examination. He wanted to move forward. He told me he want to do the study English and bring the paper to find the good job.

K: So, he wanted to get a diploma to get a good job?

I: Ya, so he through the examination. The teacher said he can go to the level 9, so now he go to the school. Maybe now he study at high school. Through the course, he will finish and take the diploma, he will move later.
K: What about you getting a diploma?

I: I want but I think my age is the old. He is 22 but now I am almost 40 [chuckles] so the age is a problem. We must think logically [has trouble pronouncing]…think more.

K: I see. But your diploma you got in China, you couldn’t use that here?

I: No because in my country, in my college. My college maybe [pause] my college is not famous college, like VCC, just learning technical. Maybe just can find a simple job, which has sales, cashier, use the energy [she’s referring to the stocking component of her job]. If the office job, I don’t think so [laughs].

Because of her age, she felt she may have trouble having a baby and wanted to start this process as soon as possible. Irene did concede that after she had a baby, she might pursue her high school diploma.

I: If one day, if I have baby I can study at high school and take the paper.

K: The high school diploma?

I: Ya, diploma. It’s ok.

K: If you have a baby, you can study at home because right now you’re so busy working, you don’t really have much time to study?

I: To upgrade.

K: I see.

While Irene was not as old as many of the students served by the organization, Brian agreed that the older immigrant and refugee population were less motivated to learn English.

B: Age is a factor. If they feel that they can find a job, they are more optimistic. If they are older, they don’t feel as optimistic. It affects their motivation for learning English. They’ll smile and take a bitter pill.

4.6 Research Question #2

*In what ways do female refugees invest in multiple and multimodal literacies as a social practice in their new environments?*
4.7 Introduction

Similar to research question 1, I employed structural analysis to identify common patterns to generate themes as well as respective supporting quotes (Creswell, 2007) associated with the case’s English language learning process. The data revealed that some of these literacies were pre-existing for Irene, yet not being used to their potential capacity. Other literacies were similarly in the process of being acquired, so again, measurable benefits were not possible at this stage. Some findings confirmed and extended the literature regarding insider/outsider positioning and notions of Discourse membership within digital media (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, Gee 1990), lack of information literacy (Lloyd et al., 2013) and information poverty (Chatman, 1991). Again, in-depth interpretations of the findings in context of the literature will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.7.1 Digital Literacy - Texting

I observed her using a cell phone from the time that I met her. She recently acquired a new iPhone, given to her by her boyfriend. During our tutoring sessions, she would use a Chinese-English translator application for words she couldn’t articulate or words that I couldn’t explain to her understanding. The other cell phone texting Irene did was in Chinese. She accessed WeChat, an application for mobile text and voice messaging, however did not participate in the discussions, only observed her old friends from China communicating.

K: You have a cell phone…what do you use it for? I know you use your translator.

I: Yes, my translator.

K: So you use this a lot?

I: If I don’t know the word, I will translate it, write it down in Chinese and translate to English.
K: That’s very good. It’s helpful?

I: Ya, very helpful. Also, I don’t know a lot of English words.

K: So, all the rest of the stuff on your phone is in Chinese? You text in Chinese?

I: Ya, my boyfriend give me the cell phone.

K: So you keep in touch with him on the cell phone?

I: Ya, all in Chinese. You know WeChat?

K: I think you told me about that! [laughs]

I: [laughs] I no friends. Everyday I saw my old classmates chat on WeChat with other, but not me.

K: Oh, from China?

I: Ya

I asked Mark how he felt about texting as a way to learn English. While he didn’t have a specific reference point for Irene, he did feel that texting could be helpful.

K: Do you see other literacy skills (texting, internet, media, visual) as impacting students’ progress in learning English?

M: The classroom is best for listening and speaking, so yes I believe that texting is absolutely helpful, any kind of life skill, but I would want Emil or someone to determine what people want because, for example, I don’t do any texting at all in my life. It’s not a part of my life, so for these folks, I don’t know if texting is something that would be useful in the lives of OUR particular students, which are not generally young people.

4.7.2 Digital Literacy - Internet and Computer

Irene reported that there were no computers for student use at her high school or college in Guangzhou. She did use a computer in her position as an office administrator, however there was no internet access.

K: Did you use the computer in college?

I: No. No cell phone, the students no cell phone.
K: So when you came to Canada you didn’t know how to use the computer?

I: My college maybe the computer very expensive, not everyone have computer. I went to the college the teacher will have one computer. The teacher taught me to use the computer but basic. If you learn about computer knowledge, you must have more experience but no wifi, very expensive.

K: But Guangzhou is a big city…

I: 17th century [she means the 70s decade]. I was born in 1979, but in my century it is very simple, no computer, no wifi.

K: Well, same with me, when I was younger.

I: China is different than other countries.

K: I understand. So, when you were working in the office did you use computers?

I: I use big computer.

K: Did you know how?

I: [laughs]

K: Was there internet?

I: No, and I write the words on the computer.

K: So, when you came to Canada and used the internet, it was very new to you…

I: Ya.

K: That must have been hard.

When Irene first arrived, she did not own a computer or have access to one. She had to go door-to-door looking for a job, which was extremely challenging for her.

K: You found a place to live and a job all by yourself. No one helped you? Did you go on the internet?

I: I looked in the newspaper.

K: The paper newspaper?
I: Ya.

K: Not the internet?

I: No! I no this one [pointing to my computer]!

K: Oh so you bought your computer later?

I: Ya ya. I didn’t buy it - my husband [boyfriend] gave me an old one and my phone. At that time he asked me as a little sister. No one helped me.

K: So maybe if you didn’t meet him, you wouldn’t have a phone or computer?

I: Ya.

Since then, Irene has learned of a Chinese website called Vansky [http://www.vansky.com] which offers employment listings, news and culturally relevant information for Chinese newcomers.

K: So the job you have now, you found that job on the internet?

I: Ya, on internet.

K: On what website?

I: On internet, information…Vansky.

K: Vansky? Oh what is this? It’s for Chinese looking for jobs in the city?

I: Ya, ya. I keep going on Vansky [she is afraid that her job may not last]

K: But there are no jobs?

I: No.

K: How did you find out about Vansky?

I: I heard the people say, I don’t know who tell me but a long time ago.

K: What people?

I: I forgot. Chinese information. I didn’t understand so I only look for the job from Vansky.
Irene also now uses her computer for watching movies on the internet. Many months ago, she had asked me for some English movie suggestions, specifically romantic comedies, so I sent a list to her, hoping that she would either watch in English or Chinese with English subtitles. She reported that the subtitles were too distracting.

I: I watch movies on the internet.
K: In English?
I: [smiles] In Chinese
K: With English subtitles?
I: I don’t know what they say. I try to go to Yahoo but I didn’t understand.
K: I sent you some movies and you can watch them in English with Chinese subtitles to hear the pronunciation.
I: I try to watch it a little bit, but my eyes always focus the English subtitle, so I don’t know what’s happening in the movie.

She also uses the internet to communicate with her mother and sister using WeChat and www.qq.com, a Chinese news website that offers an email service.

According to Brian, internet literacy is extremely important for new immigrants and refugees because it facilitates social networking.

K: Did you see other literacy skills (texting, using internet, media, visual) impacting the participant’s progress in learning English?

B: She was asking me about Conversation clubs…where and how she could get more speaking practice. I kept saying to her, you know these words that you’re saying to me just type them into Google and you’ll find something and it’s not that I didn’t want to help her but she was asking more and more and I said I’m sure if you Google any of these key words - conversation club, ESL, you will find something. This is not an issue just with her but with a lot of refugees - the issue is a lack of internet literacy, limits them, not just in language development but in social opportunities. There was another case of another lady and another man, actually a lot of cases who were complaining about feeling lonely and not having friends, which is understandable and I showed one of them how to
use Meetup and we set up an account and she went to a few of them and she seemed quite happy about it.

K: This is your other client?

B: Yes, I did tell Irene too about Meetup…but so internet literacy is an important factor because I think especially here in Canada people do organize their social lives online and its moving more and more in that direction. I think a lot of them are not familiar with that style of connecting so yes it is a factor and perhaps something that we will put more emphasis on in the future.

Irene told me that after her conversation with Brian, she did go to the Meetup website and tried to create an account, but gave up when the process became too difficult.

K: So, what about Meetup? You tried to make an account but it was difficult. Is this because it is in English?

I: Internet there are a lot of questions. I must do the questions.

K: I don’t like those either, but do you understand the questions?

I: Maybe one question ask my name.

K: So that’s easy.

I: Ya

K: Some others are difficult to understand?

I: Ya I write down my address, and my number….but [pause]

K: It was too confusing?

I: Ya ya.

4.7.3 Sociocultural Literacy

Irene’s difficulty in understanding and speaking English has proven difficult for her in social situations. One example (noted above) of this involves the male classmate who commented to Irene, “if you know me, you can find me, I will massage you,” which Irene found difficult to interpret. She was unsure whether he was joking or whether he was “maybe…bad
Due to this inability to discern people’s honesty, she told me that she must “keep quiet and keep silent and I don’t make friends a lot” because she is unsure if people are trustworthy.

4.7.4 Other Literacies - Photography

When I first met Irene, she told me how much she enjoyed photography and would travel around the city to take pictures. She says now that is not possible due to her busy work schedule.

K: I know you like to take pictures… What do you like about taking pictures? Do you take pictures still?

I: Now, no because before I ever went to park and beach UBC, mountains, to take picture. Now, I can’t discover the new place because everyday I off work I feel tired.

I suggested that she join a group or club for taking pictures on her days off. This way she could meet other people interested in photography, learn English and take pictures. She was hesitant at this suggestion because she felt that nobody would understand her English. I assured her that people would be interested in taking pictures, not in judging her English. Her lack of internet skill was also a factor in preventing her from finding a photography group, so we decided that I would help her create a Meetup account so that she could join a group.

4.7.5 Other Literacies - Music

Irene told me that she likes to listen to music to help her learn English. In fact, she has an extensive playlist of love songs in English on her cell phone.

K: What helps you to learn English?

I: I think listen to the music.

K: You like to listen to music - English music?

I: I like the classical music, maybe the melody.

K: How would that help you learn English?
I: The classical music, the old music [looks up the playlist on her phone and plays it for me].

The words of the songs she played for me were clear, simple and repetitive, making them easy to understand and remember. When it was Irene’s turn to present in front of her class, she chose to report on a famous piece of Chinese classical music called “High Mountains and Flowing Water” played on a stringed instrument called the Guzheng.

4.8 Summary

There were four main facilitative factors and seven barriers to her ELL. Within the seven barrier categories, the participants’ responses indicated that Irene’s experience with ELL was fraught with more difficulties and challenges than positive experiences. A lack of friends and feelings of loneliness and isolation were the categories with the richest data. While Irene experienced obstacles to acquiring and thus investing in digital and media literacies, she acquired texting literacy in order to use a translator application on her iPhone. She was not able to invest in her photography literacy post-migration, as she did not have the same amount of free time that she did in China, yet she did invest in her music literacy to learn English.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The data clearly revealed that there were many facilitating factors involved in Irene’s English language learning. However, there were also many barriers. As Irene was still engaged in acquiring the various literacies, it was difficult to determine conclusive benefits. Instead, the data revealed a process-oriented, dynamic language learning experience. My discussion is organized by research question and follows the same thematic categorizations as presented in Chapter 4. Under each category, I offer an analysis of the data in reference to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. I note whether the relevant findings were confirmed, extended, or contested by the literature. Some findings led me to speculate on potential situations that could have alleviated barriers to Irene’s ELL progression. These speculations are based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and some will be elaborated on and presented as recommendations in Chapter 6.

5.2 Research Question #1

What are the factors facilitating or impeding female refugees’ investment in language literacy skills as a social practice in their new environments?

5.2.1 Facilitating Factor #1: English Language Learning Progression

Irene’s English skills slowly improved over the two years that she spent studying at the organization; however, I did not witness a noticeable sense of empowerment, as I had expected, resulting from this progression. While she was invested in learning, I found that Irene experienced a great deal of frustration with her inability to more rapidly progress through ELL
levels. While she was generally happy and maintained a positive attitude, she expressed frustration with her slow progression many times, albeit with a smile on her face. Because I had anticipated her English language learning to lead to a more empowered position (Daniel, 2000; Oyitso & Olomukoro, 2012; Stromquist, 2015), I had to use my reflexivity journal to reflect on my bias and develop a more nuanced understanding of her experience. Having only known Irene for a few months, I did not have a reference point for measuring her empowerment. Perhaps she was now in a better position than she once was? It was hard for me to accurately judge this; a longitudinal study would have better reflected her progression. Now that there has been some point of reference established in this study, a follow-up study with Irene would be of benefit.

From my observations, I felt that a participatory model of ELL instruction would have benefited her. Certainly, it would have promoted a deeper connection with her teacher, a key component of a participatory model. Her teacher’s comment that he was “kind of shy about digging too deeply because of the population I’m working with” indicates that he felt it was necessary to maintain a superficial teacher-student relationship in order to prevent “hit[ing] a raw nerve.” While his concern is valid, a detached relationship with his students maintained a distinct teacher-student divide. According to Auerbach’s (1992) ESL participatory model, educators are facilitators rather than teachers who control the learning process, instruction is personalized and facilitators create an informal and friendly atmosphere. In this model, student and teacher are co-creators of the curriculum; learners are involved in all stages of its development so that it acts as a “microcosm” of the outside world (Cervatiuc & Ricento, 2012). The New London Group (1996) also believes that educators must change in order to address language diversity and the effects of globalization to promote learning among English language learners. They state that teaching and the curriculum has to “engage with students’ own experiences and discourses,
which are increasingly defined by cultural and subcultural diversity and the different language backgrounds and practices that come with this diversity” (New London Group, 1996, p. 88).

Instead, Irene’s external life was distinct from her ELL experience. Her attempts to foster friendships with other immigrants or Native speakers outside of the classroom in order to practice her English were mostly unsuccessful and she found employment and housing on her own. If some of the challenges Irene was facing in the “outside world” were addressed in the ELL classroom, perhaps Irene’s learning would have been accelerated or more meaningful. Cervatiuc and Ricento (2012) argue that it would be helpful if instructors embraced the “role of motivational facilitator in order to give learners the confidence needed to interact with English-speaking people in authentic situations” (p. 28). They differentiate between a transmission and a transformational approach to EAL instruction in that a transmission approach is one that is teacher-fronted, repetitive and mechanical, while a transformational approach includes activities that are geared towards learners’ lives, issues and concerns. A transformational instructor would help students by referring them to or mediating contact with various organizations, encouraging participation in community organizations and inviting guest speakers, such as government officials or potential employers to class (Cervatiuc & Ricento, 2012).

I am not suggesting that Mark knowingly subscribed to the transmission approach. In fact, he promoted class participation, having students present on different topics each week and encouraged group work and student interaction. His classes were friendly, informal and engaging. I am, however, suggesting that the transformational approach is not well-known to ELL instructors and should be emphasized in ELL instruction courses and programs. Select studies have found that the transmission approach is the predominant method of ELL instruction in Canadian ELL centres, such as LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) and
that this approach is failing to meet the needs of Canadian immigrant adults (Curry, 2001; Khalideen, 1998, Cervatiuc & Ricento, 2012). Because this study did not directly address this issue, there is a need for more current research of other language learning schools and programs within schools to determine which approaches are being used and with what degree of success.

5.2.2 Facilitating Factor #2: Positive Attitude

Irene is a very friendly, kind and conscientious person. She felt supported by the other students in her class and I never saw anyone laugh at her because of her poor pronunciation. Irene definitely noticed this - it increased her comfort level, so that while she still felt shy, she wasn’t paralyzed by her shyness. She did not have many friends or any family in the city, so the only meaningful social interaction that she experienced was in class. In order for Irene to overcome her fear and give an oral presentation, she needed to feel that she trusted her classmates and teacher. Research has found that refugees have a difficult time trusting others due to trauma faced in their home country (Hynes, 2009; Lloyd et al., 2013). My findings question the literature, as Irene did not struggle with trusting others in her EAL class, yet in other instances, Irene did have difficulty in trusting strangers, which corroborates the literature (as will be discussed below). My findings confirm the research regarding the beneficial effects of community support needed to overcome psychological barriers (Porter & Haslam, 2005). In fact, this was the only “community” of which Irene was a part and had made friends. If other students were feeling similarly nervous, Irene’s friendliness was disarming and made her approachable. This combination of the psychological factors associated with refugee trauma and SLA to better understand the learning needs of refugees and immigrants would be an area well worth further study.
5.2.3 Facilitating Factor #3: Investment

Irene was motivated to learn English because she wanted to make new friends, shop at English-speaking stores and move outside of the city, where English is predominantly spoken. Her investment in English in order to make friends was driven by her desire to alleviate her loneliness and isolation – to increase her social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and integrate into society by forming social networks (Caidi & Allard, 2005). Her second motivational factor, shopping outside of her Chinese neighbourhood, was driven by her desire to be independent and “do anything.” Irene felt that English would enable her freedom to move fluidly about the city without language restrictions. She would be able to shift her identity from a “bad” English speaker to a bilingual member of the city, enabling her to interact with others previously inaccessible to her, thereby increasing her symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001). This ability to communicate would inevitably boost her self-confidence, allowing her to enter into new spaces without the fear of her English being interpreted as “bad.” This sense of self-confidence is clearly reflected in the literature as an important element contributing to individual empowerment (Dige, 1995; Rowlands, 1997). While this increase in symbolic capital and self-confidence is supported by the literature, it is only speculative, as the findings were not confirmed.

The third factor, investing in English so that she could move to a more rural area, was driven by the desire to move in with her boyfriend, marry and start a family. Irene realized what she did not like about her current situation and made an attempt to change it. Lazo (1995) argues that empowerment arises when a person gains awareness of what is undesirable about her current situation. Irene clearly identified what she wanted (to get married and start a family) and what she needed in order to create her new identity as wife and mother. Similar to Warriner’s (2004)
refugee case study participants, Irene used her sociocultural literacy - understood the city’s job market, assessed her prospects, acknowledged her limitations and made a decision to leave the city to join her boyfriend. In this case, she knew that she needed to have a better command of English if she were to move to an English-only environment. Irene invested in ELL in order to position herself accordingly so that she could achieve her desired outcome, thus increasing her symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Norton, 2000; Darvin & Norton, 2015). In this scenario, empowerment resulted from Irene’s sociocultural literacy, not her language literacy.

5.2.4 Facilitating Factor #4: Perseverance and Resilience

Through tutoring Irene and our interviews, I came to realize that she was extremely determined and independent. As detailed in Chapter 3, Irene experienced severe trauma before leaving China, affecting her resettlement in Canada. The refugee literature confirms that pre-existing trauma, in addition to new trauma caused by a challenging resettlement process, can affect how refugees integrate into their new society (Lloyd et al., 2013; Bach & Agiros, 1991; Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998). Even though she was “very scared and very nervous. And very shy” and couldn’t “open [her] mouth to ask the job,” Irene still persisted in going door-to-door looking for a job. Despite having never worked in a kitchen, she applied for a job as a sous chef, yet she was “very slow,” and did not get the job. The resilience she exhibited under duress is a testament to her strong character, and is what I believe continued to propel her investment in English. In this sense, these findings did not accord with the literature, as Irene was able to move beyond the trauma caused by her past. Although “very scared and very nervous,” she was able to “open her mouth to ask the job.” This illustrates that some newcomers are able to persevere despite suffering from multiple disadvantages. However, despite her perseverance, Irene’s trauma did seem to affect her integration process, which confirms the literature. Her fear and
anxiety coupled with her difficulty speaking English made it hard for her to seek out new experiences and meet new people.

Irene constructed her identity as a potential wife and mother which helped her to survive the hard times knowing that she would have a better, more secure and happier future ahead. This was confirmed in Warriner’s 2004 study of two female immigrants who constructed “potential identities” which gave them the freedom to envision different futures for themselves. This is similar to Norton’s (2013) concept of imagined identities, where learners imagine who they want to be based on perceived benefits. Irene imagined an identity of wife and mother, which would benefit her by providing the security she desired and reducing her sense of isolation. Her desire was shaped by habitus, her understanding of what was possible according to the prevailing ideology, yet the desire also required her to exercise her own agency and invest in second language learning to achieve those perceived benefits, as will also be discussed below (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

5.2.5 Barrier #1 and #3: Lack of Participation/Oral Speaking

I have included Barriers #1 and #3 together here because Irene’s reason for her lack of participation was a fear of oral speaking. Mark’s speculation that Irene’s lack of participation was due to her Asian background is a prevalent stereotype. While Irene was quite reserved and quiet, she reported that this was due to her unhappy childhood. She blamed her dislike of talking as the reason for her English not improving, however, she also mentioned that her lack of participation was due to feeling “inferior” because of her poor pronunciation. It is well documented in the literature that both native and non-native speakers judge foreign accents negatively (Nesdale & Rooney, 1996; Sato, 1998). In fact, listeners were found to judge non-native speakers to be less intelligent, educated, or wealthy (Bradac, 1990). Yet, studies have
shown that individuals who begin learning a second language over the age of 12 will maintain a detectable accent (Flege, Munro & MacKay, 1995; Long, 1990; Scovel, 1988, 2000). I suspect that Irene was aware of this stigma, which resulted in her hesitancy to speak. While, her accent was definitely more noticeable than that of other students, the other students seemed supportive of her when she spoke. Brian’s idea of having an elective class specifically focusing on speaking/pronunciation would likely build Irene’s confidence so that she might invest more in class and in community activities.

I had also suspected that Irene might have some sort of jaw misalignment or teeth overcrowding, preventing her ability to correctly pronounce words. Even with deliberate instruction on tongue placement and lip formation for each sound and continuous repetition of difficult words during our sessions, she still had difficulty with pronunciation. I also observed that her dental hygiene was also poor; she had complained occasionally about tooth pain, so I recommended a dentist who works with refugees. She did go to see a dentist, however she didn’t report anything abnormal, just that she had had a cleaning and her tooth didn’t hurt anymore.

Irene’s command of English was a symbolic resource that was “produced, distributed and validated” in the ELL classroom by her peers and teachers (Norton, 2000). Power was “socially constructed” and continually being negotiated by Irene in relation to those around her (Norton Peirce, 1995, 2000; Weedon, 1987). Irene’s confidence, motivation and participation was directly influenced by other students in the classroom and changed day-to-day, yet was also affected by other more static factors, such as her “quiet and shy” nature (Brown, 1987). Irene felt distanced from the other students and disempowered because she was not able to participate in the class. This may have been mitigated by a more participatory approach to ELL instruction. As discussed above, this approach lessens the distance between student and teacher, creating an
informal atmosphere, which in turn decreases student anxiety. In addition, this model incorporates students’ real lives into the curriculum, which validates learners’ experiences. In this way, Irene may have felt more invested in class discussions if she saw herself as a “partner” in the learning process. There appears to be some contradiction regarding investment here as Irene was invested enough to attend her English classes regularly, yet her limitations prevented her investment in participation. This is a very grey area for a researcher because who am I to judge her lack of participation as a lack of investment instead of simply just fear of speaking? Or, more accurately, was it her fear that led to her lack of investment? These were questions that I was grappled with in my journal during and after the observation period. Since the transformational approach was not a focus of this study, these speculations are merely hypothetical. This area regarding observable increases in student investment resulting from a transformational approach merits further investigation.

5.2.6 Barrier #2 and #6: Busy Work Schedule/Chinese Language Immersion

Barriers #2 and #6 have been grouped together because Irene’s busy work schedule and work environment contributed to her being immersed in Chinese and not having the opportunities to speak and practice English. When I first met Irene, she worked 6 days a week at a Chinese-run grocery store in Burnaby. She had requested special permission from her boss to leave early 2 days a week in order to attend class, which began at 6:30pm. Irene recently found a job closer to the organization’s new location, so she is not late for class any longer.

The first reason that Irene did not speak English outside of class was a lack of social network, which will be discussed in detail under Barrier #4. Brian’s suggestion to start a
conversation club outside of regular school hours would be a beneficial way to get Irene involved with her community, while also having an opportunity to practice speaking. The second reason is that she lived and worked in a predominantly Chinese neighbourhood. Due to the high number of Chinese immigrants in this city, certain regions are almost completely Chinese. It is common for Chinese immigrants to interact solely with Chinese speaking individuals, which reinforces a sense of isolation. I believe that Irene’s lack of investment in speaking English outside of class was due to the fact that she could communicate in Chinese at her workplace, grocery shopping, and with her boyfriend. She did not have children, so was not required to communicate with teachers or navigate the English school system. Unlike Martina, in Norton Peirce’s 1990 study, who invested in English in order to “defend her family against unscrupulous social practices,” among other reasons, Irene did not have this added pressure to invest (p. 22). Another participant in Norton Peirce’s (1990) study, Eva, a young, single immigrant female, also developed this “right to speak” as she embraced more of an “identity as a multicultural citizen” (Norton Peirce, 1990, p. 25). This illustrates that it is possible for a young, single woman to claim the right to speak, which leads me to question my findings about Irene. I see three possible distinct, but likely interrelated, reasons for Irene’s silencing. There is a possibility that Irene’s “quiet and shy” personality positioned her as an introverted learner, who was not able to overcome her feelings of inferiority and shame (Brown, 1987). Another possibility is that she simply needed more time to overcome these barriers. And yet another possibility is that the barriers (as will be discussed below): loneliness, fear, isolation, and age all contributed to her inability to overcome her silence. A follow-up study would be extremely helpful in answering these questions.
Hou and Beiser (2006) found in their 10-year study that elderly Chinese who arrived to the west coast of Canada between 1979 to 1981 were the least likely to learn English. The large number of Chinese offered a degree of “institutional completeness,” a safety net, providing a psychological advantage (Breton, 1964). Yet, over time, Hou and Beiser (2006) discovered that unless the elderly made some attempt at integration (i.e. developing a working knowledge of English), they were at risk of isolation from their grandchildren and larger society. Since their study, there has been little research regarding Chinese immigrants who immerse themselves only in Chinese language and culture, specifically in this city, as Chinese immigration continues to rapidly increase.

I had suggested that Irene practice the English sounds that she had the most trouble with at home in front of the mirror. She told me that when she got home from work, it was late and she then had to cook dinner and clean. Often she would email me after 12:00 am telling me that she had just finished her chores and could only then answer my email. Clearly Irene’s busy work schedule also factored into her lack of practice time. In fact, she had requested special permission from her employer to leave early 2 days a week in order to make it for class. Again, there appears to be a contradiction in Irene’s investment. She lacked investment to speak English outside of class, yet invested the time to attend class in the evenings, likely because she knew she would not learn English otherwise. After much reflection, I concluded that Irene’s lack of investment was a result of her life circumstances. After getting to know Irene and journaling about this, I believe she wanted to make English more of a priority, yet was both overwhelmed with work and immersed in a Chinese-speaking environment, making that investment a challenge.
5.2.7 Barrier #4: Lack of Friends

Irene noted that her two friends had left the class and she expressed hesitation about making new friends with some of the older women. However, she expressed a “need” to have friends in the ELL program and her desire to become friends with a woman in another class (that I did not observe). When Irene discovered that the woman lived in her neighbourhood and suggested that “every evening [they] can go for a walk and learn English,” she interpreted the woman’s reply that she “go to bed early” as rejection. Initially I viewed Irene’s interpretation of the woman’s comment as positioning herself as “inferior,” an identity that she constructed due to her perceived social position in relation to the woman (Norton Peirce, 1995). However, upon reflection, again using my journal, I understood that Irene’s reaction was warranted and that perhaps the woman was rejecting her. It was very brave of her to ask the woman this question in the first place. If this were the case, then she was positioned by the woman as someone not worthy of her time, for whatever reason. Regardless of the cause of the positioning, Irene still felt like an outsider, inferior and unwelcome. If the woman had accepted Irene’s invitation, a positive language learning experience would likely have lead to the development of Irene’s self-confidence (Gardener, 1985), and increased her symbolic capital: language and friendship (Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001). When the woman declined her offer, Irene’s potential for symbolic capital was dashed instantaneously, and hence she felt “rejected.”

Although Irene described herself as “quiet and shy,” her identity as an introvert was not fixed (Weedon, 1987). If her suggestion had been accepted and evening walks did occur, Irene would have increased her symbolic capital and her self-confidence. A lack of self-confidence was a major barrier for Irene’s language learning progression. When Irene did feel confident, her mood shifted and she became more animated and comfortable speaking English to native
Canadians, her classmates and teachers. While I only observed this a few times, it is suggestive of her shifting identity in relation to her comfort level with those around her and her English speaking ability. This aligns with the feminist poststructuralist view that identity is multiple, a site of struggle and subject to change (Weedon, 1987) and has been confirmed in multiple studies of immigrants and their experiences learning English (Norton Peirce, 1995; Warriner, 2004; Ollerhead, 2012; Pavlenko, 2001). A follow-up study would be better able to assess her identity formation and add to the body of research on this topic.

When the man in Irene’s class commented, “If you know me, you can find me. I will massage you,” Irene was unsure if he was joking yet suspected that he was “maybe bad guy, so I can’t make friends with him.” She was unable to assess whether the situation was safe. From what she told me, I judged this man’s comments to be inappropriate. But upon reflection, I realized that perhaps other women would have had similar difficulty in discerning the man’s motives. Is there a possibility that he was a massage therapist and a language barrier misinformed her understanding? Yet, she acknowledged that he “maybe bad guy.” This uncertainty in social interactions has led Irene to “keep quiet and keep silent” and has prevented her from making new friends, as she does not know if “the men and women are nice or not nice.” This inner conflict as to whether she could trust other people and her own self-judgment was one of the reasons she experienced feelings of social exclusion, which will be discussed in greater detail below. While some studies have been conducted in this area (Abrahams, 1973; Worthan, 2005), more research is needed addressing this topic. This research study only touched on this area briefly and is worth further examination.
5.2.8 Barrier #5: Loneliness, Isolation and Fear

Irene’s feelings of social isolation, which she described as being afraid, frightened and “at sea,” losing her way, walking through life with her “eyes closed” are consistent with the literature (Vinson, 2009; George & Chaze, 2009; Lloyd et al., 2013). Several research studies have confirmed that refugees like Irene face psychological distress as a result of social exclusion (Porter & Haslam, 2005; Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998; Bach & Agiros, 1991). I believe that Irene’s intense sense of isolation led her to seek out a man to marry soon after arriving in Canada. I believe that this was also due to the immense pressure of living in a financially inflated city. Irene stated that she wanted “him to take care of me” and “give my safety.” This contrasts sharply with the independent woman Irene described herself to be when she lived in China. After her marriage ended and she became attached to a married man, she was very unhappy because of the complications involved.

While Irene did express a desire to learn English, her desire to marry, have a baby and start a family outweighed her investment in any higher education. The pressure she felt from her family in China to find a husband and legally marry also contributed to her depressed mood. Her comment that her family would think that if she “break up another family” it is “very bad” confirms this point. Once it became clear to her that a legal marriage would be possible, her mood shifted; she became happier and more optimistic. Once her sense of isolation diminished at the prospect of having a family, she was able to invest in her studies - she felt that she “belonged to a family” and had achieved a “sense of belonging.” Irene expressed this desire through an imagined identity that was constructed by both habitus shaped from her Chinese family’s ideology and also habitus formed through an understanding of Canadian ideology. She re-envisioned how she wanted things to be based on her desire and she used her agency to fulfill
this desire (Darvin & Norton, 2015). These findings also align with the feminist poststructuralist view that prevailing power relations between individuals, groups and communities affect the life chances of the individual (Norton Peirce, 1995). In this case, Irene felt powerless to change her position due to the societal expectations of her new country, and hence her limitations, which diminished her chances of success. Social exclusion and isolation led her to make partnership her primary goal. Only once this goal had been reached could she then consider another goal - learning English, thus confirming Weedon’s (1997) view of women as subjects of their experience: her subjectivity was a site of struggle and changed over time.

Irene’s boyfriend (and former husband) became her “community support.” It is possible that this was partly due to her age, as she commented many times that although she was only 36, she was “almost 40” and “too old” to get pregnant. While older refugees and immigrants struggle more than younger learners with SLA due to factors such as lack of literacy in the first language and family obligations (Riggs et al., 2012; Butcher and Townsend, 2010), I feel that a lack of community support played a greater role in Irene’s lack of investment. If she had become involved in a community support group or participated in social excursions, she would have had more experiences to speak English in addition to forming friendships. When refugees become involved in their communities, they feel supported and empowered, eventually integrating into their new environments. This is well documented in the literature (Vinson, 2009; George & Chase, 2009; Porter & Haslam, 2005; Zimmerman, 1995; Speer & Hughey, 1995; Tomeh, 1974). For Irene, her husband supplanted a social network, thereby increasing her social capital, which bettered her chances of integration into society (Cadi & Allard, 2005). As Brian noted, isolation can have “severe psychological effects” for refugees, so in a sense, Irene’s moves to secure a husband was a tactic for psychological self-preservation. While there is literature documenting
the exclusion of refugees from their new environments, as noted in Chapter 2, there is a need for more research into the specificities of solutions to prevent this exclusion, as well as more case studies that provide a deeper understanding of the psychological implications of refugee migration.

5.2.9 Barrier #7: Age and Gender

Irene was resigned to the fact that she could not obtain an “office job in the future” and would work in simple jobs, as a cashier or grocery store stocker. Her reasoning, that she did not have enough time to upgrade her skills due to her age and the fact that her Chinese diploma came from a school that wasn’t a “famous college like VCC,” was to her “logical.” She reasoned that she would have to upgrade her high school courses before she could even apply for college. It is understandable that this would seem an overwhelming task for her. The literature confirms that individuals who are older tend to not invest as fully as younger learners because they lack education or literacy skills (Riggs et al., 2012; Butcher & Townsend, 2010). When Irene commented that she wanted to get a diploma, but “age is a problem,” this confirms Chiswick and Miller’s (1995, 2001) findings that older immigrants are more hesitant to invest in ELL due to the shorter payback window.

While Irene’s investment must not be equated with “smil[ing] and tak[ing] a bitter pill,” she was clearly invested in learning English slowly and at a pace with which she was capable. Her comment that she may pursue her high school diploma after she had a baby indicated that she was considering it as an option. Logistically this option made the most sense for her, as she would not have to work outside the home and would have more time for study. This extends Pavlenko’s (2001) notion that when an individual transitions to a new culture, it may involve a change in how one views and performs gender. In China, Irene was validated as a single female,
able to live and work independently, whereas in Canada this subjectivity was not validated due to her lack of English skill, so she was forced to adopt a new identity, one of potential wife and mother. Irene had to shift her ideology in order to adapt to her new community. This supports Darvin and Norton’s (2015) notion of ideology as a set of normative set of ideas constructed by the legitimized authority, which positioned Irene as an inferior English speaker.

5.3 Research Question #2

_In what ways do female refugees invest in multiple and multimodal literacies as a social practice in their new environments?_

**5.3.1 Digital Literacy**

Irene did not own a cell phone prior to her arrival, so she was unfamiliar with cell phone literacy, such as texting and applications like WeChat. Irene quickly invested in learning how to use the Chinese-English translator application, which involved drawing Chinese characters on the screen and then tapping the screen for the English translation. Irene used this feature many times during each tutoring session and it became a valuable part of our communication. While Irene mostly texted in Chinese to communicate with her boyfriend, she and I did keep in touch via text message in English. She did not participate in the WeChat discussions with her old Chinese classmates, but only liked to observe. Irene did not feel like she was a legitimate member of the WeChat discourse and hence chose not to invest and remain silent rather than risk exclusion. By remaining silent, she was able to maintain her anonymity as an “outsider,” but also feel like she was part of a “socially recognized” literacy (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011).

Irene did not own a computer or know how to navigate the Internet when she first arrived, so she was unable to search online for employment, resources or community support.
Irene read print newspapers to find jobs and when that did not work, she sought employment in person. This lack of access to information is what Chatman (1991) refers to as “information poverty.” Irene lacked information literacy – she did not possess the skills or abilities to obtain access to information and this sustained her position at the periphery of society (Lloyd et al., 2013; Chatman, 1991; Britz, 2004; Hynes, 2009; Cadi & Allard, 2005, Borland & Mphande, 2006). Once Irene did obtain a computer, her low English proficiency also contributed to her inability to access and understand government information, resources and employment opportunities. This was confirmed by Yu’s (2010) recent study, which found that low literacy levels create barriers for newcomers who migrate to areas of the world that rely on information and communication technology (ICT). The concept of information poverty is well documented in the literature and this study adds to that body of research. The field regarding barriers that prevent refugees’ access to and investment in ICT and digital technology and solutions to overcoming these barriers is one that is worthy of further exploration.

Once Irene discovered other Internet sites (from fellow employees and family), she gained more confidence in traversing online spaces (Vansky and qq), while others like Meetup proved more difficult for her. Mark had to explain how to type in keywords to Google in order to locate information. When she did find Meetup, she wasn’t able to get past the account set up. Most website’s account activation requires creating usernames, passwords and entering extensive personal information. This is something that those who live in paperless, digital societies do frequently and with familiarity. For newcomers, this process can be extremely daunting and halt investment in online practices. For Irene, the technology itself was too “confusing” and created a barrier to her accessing the site, thereby preventing her investment in her community and making
new friends. These findings were confirmed in Lloyd et al.’s (2013) study of Australian refugees who experienced the information landscape as huge and overwhelming.

The stress of being “digitally illiterate” in a society where as Brian noted, “social lives are organized online,” added to Irene’s feelings of social exclusion and isolation. Digital and media literacy is a social practice that differs from one culture to another and membership is limited to those who possess certain sets of knowledge or skills (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). As Irene noted, “China is different than other countries” and that when she grew up in the 1980s, things were “very simple, no computer, no wifi.” She did not have the knowledge or skills to successfully navigate cyberspace, nor did she possess the Discourse required to acquire membership in Meetup or WeChat (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). This exclusion prevented her membership in other online social networking spaces important in Western Canadian culture like Facebook and Instagram, among others. As mentioned above, these findings add to this growing body of literature regarding newcomers and investment in digital literacy.

5.3.2 Photography and Music Literacy

Irene was not able to pursue her passion for photography because she was too tired after work to “discover the new place” and take pictures. However, she did enjoy listening to music as a means to learn English. Generally, the ELL model follows a traditional approach to reading and writing based on a western cultural framework, through emphasis on graphic representation of letters and speech sounds (Kress, 2000). If Irene’s ELL instruction had included more emphasis on the visual and aural modes of representation, she may have been more invested in her learning. If this had been combined with a participatory approach to learning (Auerbach, 1992), where Irene’s reality outside of the classroom was incorporated into the curriculum, perhaps she would have been more willing to invest, had more success, and more fun.
and Ricento (2012), as noted above, recommend a participatory transformation curriculum meta-orientation for adult English language learners to better reflect their real lives and interests, however more research addressing the effects of this type of curriculum in practice is needed.

5.3.3 Sociocultural Literacy

As discussed above, Canadians place great priority on online social networking sites to organize their personal lives. Because Irene was not “digitally literate,” it presented a barrier to her social networking opportunities, and therefore her sociocultural literacy. When Irene’s classmate made a comment she was unable to interpret (discussed under Barrier #4), it was likely in part due to her lack of English proficiency, yet possibly also due to her unfamiliarity with Canadian social norms and/or fear stemming from her traumatic past. This confusion surrounding social appropriateness and cues proved difficult for Irene when putting herself “out there” in social situations and so she constructed her identity as an “outsider,” someone who is unable to decide whether people are “good or bad” and therefore must remain quiet. This extends Pavlenko’s (2001) research on immigrants who produced new social identities against their own free will – Irene’s identity was co-constructed by herself and others around her. Yet, I would argue that it was not technically “others” who constructed her identity; it was indirectly constructed by modern societal practices. Her inner conflict led her to adopt an identity of one who “keep quiet and keep silent” and decreased her investment in the community. Her desire to invest did not decrease; it was the co-construction of her identity that decreased her investment.

5.4 Summary

The findings demonstrated how identity is linked to investment in English language learning as a means to increase both social and symbolic capital. While Irene invested in her
language learning quite readily, she was prevented from further investment due to external circumstances, such as her Chinese work environment and social exclusion. The dominant ideology positioned Irene as an outsider, preventing her entry into certain speech events. Irene’s lack of sophisticated information literacy also silenced her and prevented investment in her new community, despite her desire to do so. Because of a lack of digital literacy, she was also silenced and excluded from online spaces. This silencing led her to construct a new imagined identity, one that would increase her symbolic capital. Initially, Irene positioned herself (and was positioned) as an “inferior” English speaker, which led her to call upon her previous cultural capital, unvalued in Canadian society, in order to construct a new identity as potential mother and wife. On one hand, Irene experienced difficulty with sociocultural literacy in certain situations, while on the other, her understanding of how she was positioned in Canadian society was a form of sociocultural literacy that allowed her to effectively “read” her environment and alter her identity accordingly.
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

6.1 Conclusions

6.1.1 Investment Driven by a Desire for Independence and Community Inclusion

Irene invested in her English language learning because she wanted to be able to move about the city freely and independently. She sought to regain the independence that she had once had in Guangzhou. She also yearned for friends and a community to provide her with a sense of belonging. Her English classes provided her with a sense of community twice a week, so she was willing to invest in her learning, yet this investment was temporary. She did not maintain the connections outside of class, nor did she have other friendships or alternate community support to sustain her investment. In addition, she was unable to ascertain whether strangers were “good or bad” and did not trust her judgment of other people. She positioned herself as an outsider, so her investment in her community decreased. This was likely a result of her lack of English proficiency and possibly some fear associated with the traumatic conditions that brought her to Canada.

6.1.2 Positioning as an Outsider in Both Real-Time and Online Spaces Led to Adoption of New Identity as an Imagined “Insider”

Irene felt “lost” and “at sea” when she first moved to Vancouver alone, knowing no one. Due to her lack of English language skills, digital and information literacy, she was positioned, but also positioned herself, as an outsider. This caused her a great amount of distress and she suffered from depression. Understandably, Irene found a man with whom she felt safe and
provided her with a sense of security and belonging so that she no longer felt “lost” and “at sea.” She positioned herself through an imagined identity of wife and mother, which led to an increase in her symbolic resource. While this resource had yet to materialize, acknowledging its possibility was enough to sustain her investment. Her new imagined identity provided her with the motivation and mental strength to endure the long workdays and evening ELL classes. It also gave her a sense of confidence and boost to her self-esteem, elements that had been diminished since her arrival in Canada.

6.1.3 Chinese Language and Community Immersion Resulted in Lack of Communicative Success

Irene had a Chinese roommate and Chinese-speaking boyfriend, lived in a majority Chinese neighbourhood and worked at a grocery store where only Chinese was spoken. Her only opportunities to speak English were limited to her ELL classes two evenings a week and from February to May, her two-hour tutoring sessions with me once a week. Under these circumstances, it was very difficult for her to improve her language skills. It was inevitable that her investment in speaking English outside of class decreased because she simply was not provided with occasions to practice. Despite the challenges in her life, she continued to invest in her English classes, rarely missing a class even after working long hours and living far from the school. Due to the Chinese immersion, her investment may still result in success, yet take longer to pay off.
6.2 Implications

6.2.1 Theoretical Implications of the Findings

This case study countered findings of other research studies on immigrant women’s experiences (Norton Peirce, 1990; Warriner, 2004; Pavlenko, 2001). The women in these studies challenged their prescribed identities and created new ones in which they felt more empowered to be who they wanted to be. Norton Peirce’s (1990) participants, Eva and Martina, challenged their identities as illegitimate speakers of English, thereby claiming the right to speak. Warriner’s (2004) participants used their sociocultural literacies to challenge their current social positions in order to achieve their goals. Pavlenko (2001) found that the female immigrants in her study assimilated to the dominant culture and adopted new identities, while others resisted their lack of validation by the majority.

The case study participant of this study did not challenge her prescribed identity as an inferior English speaker for various reasons detailed in Chapter 5. She did, however use her sociocultural literacy to “read” the situation, as Warriner’s (2004) participants did, and created a new identity for herself in order to achieve her goals. Alternately, this new identity was not used to challenge her current social position (Norton Peirce, 1990), nor did she assimilate to the dominant culture like Pavlenko’s (2001) participants, she adopted an identity of potential wife and mother in order to better her life chances. This strategy was similar to Norton Peirce’s participant, Mai, who was positioned undesirably by co-workers because she was single, so she married to assure a more desirable identity. Irene assessed her situation and determined that her prospects would be better if she married and started a family. She knew that given her social positioning, she would have to continue working long hours and attending ELL classes, with
little time to practice. Strategically, she positioned herself so that she would have more time to invest in language learning after starting a family. The theoretical implication of these findings is that newcomers may adopt new identities not to challenge their prescribed identities or assimilate, yet simply to better their life chances.

6.2.2 Implications for Practice

In this section, I describe the implications of this study based on my analysis of the data presented in Chapter 5. These implications may prove useful for ELL instructors, governmental agencies working with immigrants and/or refugees, or non-governmental organizations that assist immigrants and/or refugees with resettlement processes and integration. Next, I elaborate on the speculations made in Chapter 5 and from recommendations for ELL instruction in both adult learning centres and secondary school programs.

Firstly, the notion of how a newcomer’s investment in SLA and identity is important for all those working in the field of refugee and immigrant resettlement. Understanding that newcomers possess complex identities that are reproduced in daily interactions is key because identity affects how an individual will view possibilities and set goals for the future (Norton, 2000). Similarly, field workers must be aware of the power dynamics and inequities that mediate access to learners’ symbolic capital. It is important that encouraging particular social positions and identities be avoided as this unfairly categorizes newcomers and promotes maintenance of current social positions and basic entry-level jobs (Warriner, 2004). It is also important to note that newcomers arrive with cultural capital that could and should be utilized. Refugees may possess skills that could be harnessed in multiple ways within communities and community programs. For example, an English language program may include individuals’ music, artwork, crafts or story telling in their home language. This mitigates the power dynamics of dominant
ideologies of a given community and avoids positioning newcomers based on race, class or gender.

When newcomers’ cultural capital is valued, feelings of social isolation, loneliness and stress are less likely. Social inclusion is essential to newcomers’ sense of well-being. Government agencies must ensure that newcomers are able to access information about employment resources, community programs and social support services. Oftentimes, newcomers do not possess the digital literacy or digital medium (computer, cell phone) required to obtain necessary information. Governmental agencies must acknowledge that most newcomers lack the 21st century literacies required to operate in Canadian society and this forms a major barrier to community involvement and employment opportunities. Immediate assistance with navigating and interpreting online spaces is imperative in order to avoid information poverty (Chatman, 1991), as print resources are becoming a thing of the past. Participation in community activities and facilitating integration into new neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces promotes connectedness and prevents alienation.

Second, my findings revealed that Irene was not as invested in her ELL class as she could have been. My speculations that a participatory model would have been of more benefit to her leads me to believe that this model would be of benefit to all ELL adult learners. As her teacher noted, working with vulnerable populations requires some degree of caution with topics broached. However, if the instruction were personalized, so that students felt “seen and heard” by their teachers and their cultural capital validated, they may be more motivated to pursue their life goals, such as continuing their education or securing meaningful employment (Cervatiue & Ricento, 2012). Building a trusting relationship with instructors and classmates is essential for
newcomers, especially those who have faced trauma in his or her home country, coupled with the trauma of relocating to a new community.

When the curriculum is co-created by teacher and student, it is better able to reflect the daily lives and needs of the learners. Adult refugee and immigrant learners need and should have their daily lives integrated into the class material. Government language programs, such as LINC, should be integrated with other governmental employment, housing and social organizations. In this way, the teacher is a facilitator, not an authority figure, who encourages transformation through learning rather than simply transmitting skills in a mechanical way. As noted in Chapter 5, most LINC centres operate using this transmission approach and research has demonstrated that it is failing to meet the needs of Canadian adult newcomers (Curry, 2001; Khalideen, 1998, Cervatiuc & Ricento, 2012). Such an approach is outdated, and with the increasing diversity of English language learners in multicultural urban centres and schools across Canada, it is imperative that more research be conducted in this area.

As a secondary English teacher, I feel that this model of ELL instruction would also greatly benefit teenage newcomer students. While in a large classroom of sometimes up to 30 students, implementing this model would take effort if the ELL students were integrated into the regular stream. This model would suit a smaller ELL program, with fewer students, as it would allow for a more personalized approach to learning and help new students blend their “real” lives with their academic lives.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

As with all research studies, there were limitations to this research study. I included multiple instruments for triangulation as delimitations in an attempt to prevent as many limitations as I could. First, the participants’ memory may have been unclear, they may have
altered or tailored their responses to suit me or withheld information. These are all common possibilities when using interviews as the primary research method.

Second, the inequality of the relationship between Irene and myself may have affected our interviews, resulting in missing, partial or incorrect information. I tried to circumvent this by staging the interviews at the end of the study period after we had four months to develop a relationship. I also tried to alleviate the participants’ anxiety by maintaining a hyper self-reflexive participatory stance, as mentioned in Chapter 3 (Spivak, 1990). I continually reflected on the power dynamics of our interactions – what seemed to put Irene at ease and what did not. Sometimes this meant the tone of my voice, eye contact, and the way I faced or sat beside her. This research helped bring a greater awareness to the master narratives that operate on a subtle level within my own consciousness (Dixson & Rousseau, 2007). I began to develop an understanding and sensitivity of the power differentials between privileged and non-privileged, westerner and non-westerner, researcher and participant.

Third, as a 42-year-old white Anglophone female English teacher, I may have been inclined to look for evidence of a positive experience with literacy. When it turned out that there were many more barriers than “benefits,” I had to readjust my own lens through which I viewed my data. It is also possible that I may have been more biased towards a feminist viewpoint, with an expectation that women should be independent and educated. I went into this study with an awareness of this bias, so when Irene told me that she wanted to get married and have a child before she pursued upgrades to her education, I tried to remain as open and objective as possible. When coding my data, I tried to maintain this position so that my results would not be skewed. Fourth, I was not able to capture as many examples of engagement with literacy as I had initially hoped for. A longitudinal study would have allowed more time for the participant to progress and
thus provide richer data. As language skills take time to develop, a true understanding of SLA calls for longitudinal design (Hou & Beiser, 2006). A follow-up study with this participant is recommended, as there are many possibilities for further research. For example, I was not able to assess the measurable empowerment resulting from Irene’s language literacies due to the short period of time I spent with her. Irene had not yet blossomed into her imagined identity, a proficient English speaker. She had yet to develop the self-confidence and symbolic capital, which leads to an increase in a sense of personal power.

6.4 Directions for Future Research

6.4.1 Participatory Approach to ELL

More research regarding participatory approaches being put into practice in Canada would be beneficial. As seems to be the case in Canada, this model is not always being implemented – why is this? How can this model be effectively put into practice? A longitudinal study that details the conception, implementation and results is needed to fully assess how this approach may be used in ELL classrooms across the country. This research would add to the body of literature regarding observable increases in student participation resulting from a transformational approach to ELL instruction.

6.4.2 Psychological Factors of Refugee Migration and SLA

Further exploration into the psychological factors associated with refugee trauma and how it implicates SLA would be useful in better understanding the learning needs of refugees and immigrants. There is a significant body of research demonstrating the psychological issues faced by refugees and immigrants, but little research that conveys the relationship between SLA
and emotional states. While Hou and Beiser (2006) provided foundational research for this complex connection, there is a need for more longitudinal case studies providing a deeper understanding of the psychological implications of refugee resettlement and SLA. Similarly, more research surrounding the social exclusion of immigrants and refugees and how it can be prevented, would be beneficial to the field.

6.4.3 Chinese Immigrants and Choice of Language Immersion

More research regarding Chinese immigrants and refugees who immerse themselves in only Chinese language and culture in their new communities would be significant, and especially well suited to this city, as it boasts the highest Chinese immigrant population in Canada. It would also be helpful to understand the practices of Chinese newcomers who do not immerse themselves in Chinese and instead choose to live, work and study with native speakers. These studies would offer multiple perspectives on Chinese immigrants’ transition to living in Canada.

6.4.4 Comparison Between Immigrant and Refugee Language Learning

Another important direction for future study would be a comparison of immigrants and refugees’ English language learning process. Hou and Beiser (2006) believe that this type of research comparing refugee and immigrant language learning should be an important future priority. Also, more research examining the specific effects of pre-migration trauma on post-migration well-being and successful integration is warranted.
References


Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. (1999). China: Treatment of returnees to Fujian by organized crime groups involved in illegal emigration (snakeheads) including whether they extort or threaten returnees; whether illegal emigrants use loan sharks to pay snakeheads' fees and, if so, whether loan sharks extort or threaten returnees. Retrieved September, 18, 2015, from http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6ad4024.html


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Watkins, P., G., Razee, H., & Richters, J. (2012). 'I'm telling you ... the language barrier is the most, the biggest challenge': Barriers to education among Karen refugee women in Australia. *Australian Journal of Education (ACER Press), 56*(2), 126-141.


Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Permission

November 14, 2014
To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to confirm that Kate Crosbie has been volunteering at our organization, Inland Refugee Society, for the last few months. The teacher, the students, and I are familiar with her. I am aware that the observation will be part of a research study and am aware that it will be published by UBC.

I agree to have Kate observe our ESL class on Thursdays from 6:30 to 9:00 pm, starting in January 2015 and running until March 2015.

Please contact me if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Emil Stefan
ESL and Life Skills Program Coordinator
Inland Refugee Society of British Columbia
Appendix B: Participant Consent Form (Cantonese)

I. 研究小組

是誰在進行這項研究？

主要研究者：Dr. Marlene Asselin，語言和識字教育，UBC大學

聯合調查員：Kate Crosbie 語言和識字教育，UBC大學

這項研究是識字教育的碩士學位論文。在研究過程中，沒有一個是與以上所列出的研究者將具有對數據的訪問。學習研究報告將於課程完成後發表，公眾可見。

II. 邀請和研究目的

為什麼你應該參加這項研究的部分？

你被邀請參加這項研究，因為你是一個難民，最近抵達加拿大並且正在學習英語。

我們為什麼做這個研究？
我們要更多地去了解這個重要的話題，我們會邀請像你這樣的人，因為你是一個正在學習英語的女難民。

III. 學習的過程

如果你說“是的，我想學習”會發生什麼呢？

如果你說“是的”， 這裏是我們將如何學習:

我們將會一週有一次輔導課。在學習過程中，我將討論你的英語是如何幫助你。三個月後，我們將會問你怎麼看待我們的課堂，你的ESL課程和一般的英語有沒有幫助你。面試將在中央圖書館，我們平常上課的地方。這大約需要一小時。我也會加入你的ESL課堂一週一次幫助你和其他學生。

IV. 研究結果

這項研究的結果只發表在碩士論文和訪問研究小組。這是結果也可能會被刊登在雜誌的文章和書籍。如果你想通過電郵得到副本，請寫下你的email地址在這裡。

V. 該研究的潛在風險

參加本研究可能會對你有壞處？
我們不認為這項研究中會對你有壞處。如果有些問題比較敏感或屬於個人隱私，你可以取決於你自己回不回答。

VI.這項研究的潛在好處

在這項研究會怎麼樣幫助到你呢？

你可以在你的學習過程中改善你的發音，會話和增加詞量。你可能同時也會學到新的方法讓你更容易得學會英語。

這項研究還可以幫助其他難民和移民在加拿大學習英語，還可以幫助esl的教師或者決策esl課程的政府人員。

VII.保密

如何維護你的隱私？

你的隱私將得到尊重。在研究過程中的數據將被存在電腦。所有文件將有代碼號進行識別荷包次在文件夾。文件將不會被打開在通過驗證身分之前。除非是你提出了要求。

VIII.聯繫有關研究資料

如果你有任何問題或者疑惑，請聯繫學習人員或者負責人。所有的名字和電話號碼都列在第一頁最上面的表格。

IX.聯繫抱怨問題／投訴

如果你有任何問題或者疑惑，你可以問誰？
如果你有關於研究的疑惑與投訴，你有權利去投訴，聯繫研究參與者投訴倫理辦公室的工作人員。

X. 參與者同意和簽字頁

參與這項研究完全由你決定，你有權拒絕參與這項研究。

如果你決定參加，你可以在任何時候選擇離開，不可以帶任何負面影響給你的輔導課程或者esl課程。

下方的簽字表明你已經收到本同意書的副本。

參與者簽名 日期

______________________________

參與者簽署上述印名稱

______________________________
Appendix C: Participant Consent Form (English)

I. STUDY TEAM

Who is conducting this study?

Principal Investigator: Dr. Marlene Asselin, Language and Literacy Education, UBC
Phone: 604-822-5733  Email: marlene.asselin@ubc.ca

Co-Investigator: Kate Crosbie, Language and Literacy Education, UBC
Phone: 778-839-7663  Email: kcrosbie@shaw.ca

This research is for a Master’s Degree thesis in Literacy Education. During the study, no one other than the investigators listed above will have access to the data. After completion of the study, a report based on the study will be published and will then be a publicly available document.

II. INVITATION AND STUDY PURPOSE

Why should you take part in this study?

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a female refugee who has recently arrived in Canada and is learning English.

Why are we doing this study?

We want to learn more about how female refugees benefit from learning English. This study will help us to learn more about this important topic and we are inviting people like you because you are a female refugee learning English.

III. STUDY PROCEDURES

What happens if you say “Yes, I want to be in the study”?

If you say ‘Yes’, here is how we will do the study:
We will meet once a week for our tutoring sessions. During the lesson, I will ask you about your experience during the week speaking and reading English. We will discuss how your English helped you or didn’t help you. After three months, I will interview you about how you feel our lessons, your ESL classes and English in general has helped you. The interview will take place at the central library, in the same location where we have our lessons. It should take about one hour.

I will also come into your ESL class once a week and assist you and the other students. If you agree, I will also conduct one interview with your ESL instructor and the program coordinator after the three months. We will be speaking about the organization and your experience with the ESL program. If you do not agree, I will not conduct the interviews. It is entirely up to you if you feel comfortable with this.

I will ask the other students if they feel comfortable with me being in the classroom and if they don’t feel comfortable, I will not be observing your class. Also, if you feel uncomfortable with me talking to the students about this research, I will omit the class observation as part of the research. If you don’t want to participate in the study, you can either continue with me as your current tutor or if you prefer, you can ask your English teacher for another tutor.

IV. STUDY RESULTS

The results of this study will be reported in a Master’s thesis and only accessible to the study team. It is possible that the results may also be published in journal articles and books. If you would like a copy of the results mailed to you, please include an address here:

V. POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for you?

We do not think there is anything in this study that could harm you or be bad for you. If some of the questions seem sensitive or personal, you do not have to answer any question if you do not want to.

VI. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Will being in this study help you in any way?

You may be helped in this study with your English pronunciation, conversational fluency, and new vocabulary, from our tutoring lessons. You may also learn new ways that can make learning English easier for you. This study may also help other refugees and immigrants who are learning English in Canada. It may also help ESL teachers or people in the government who make decisions about ESL programs.

VII. CONFIDENTIALITY

How will your privacy be maintained?

Version 3: 28 January 2015
Your confidentiality will be respected. Data collected during the study will be stored on password-protected computers. All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Subjects will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study, unless requested.

VIII. CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact the study leader or one of the study staff. The names and telephone numbers are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

IX. CONTACT FOR COMPLAINTS

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

X. PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE PAGE

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your tutoring lessons or ESL classes.

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature __________________________ Date ______________

Printed Name of the Participant signing above

Version 3: 28 January 2015
Appendix D: ELL Instructor Consent Form

“Consent Form”

Literacy acquisition: The benefits for female refugees in resettlement countries

I. STUDY TEAM

Who is conducting this study?

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Marlene Asselin, Language and Literacy Education, UBC  
Phone: 604-822-5733 Email: marlene.asselin@ubc.ca

**Co-Investigator:** Kate Crosbie, Language and Literacy Education, UBC  
Phone: 778-839-7663 Email: kcrosbie@shaw.ca

This research is for a Master’s Degree thesis in Literacy Education. During the study, no one other than the investigators listed above will have access to the data. After completion of the study, a report based on the study will be published and will then be a publicly available document.

II. INVITATION AND STUDY PURPOSE

Why should you take part in this study?

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are an ESL teacher for refugees and immigrants who are learning English.

Why are we doing this study?

We want to learn more about how female refugees benefit from learning English. This study will help us to learn more about this important topic and we are inviting people like you because you teach English to refugees and immigrants.

III. STUDY PROCEDURES

What happens if you say “Yes, I want to be in the study”?

If you say ‘Yes’, here is how we will do the study:

I will be conducting a study of one of your students and will be observing the participant in ESL class once a week for three months. I will also be participating in the class, as I have done before, assisting the students and yourself as needed. I will not be researching you at any time during the class. After three months, I will ask how you feel the participant has progressed during the three months, as well as any
prior progress before the study began. This will take about 30-45 minutes and will occur in the classroom, either before or after class, at your convenience.

IV. STUDY RESULTS

The results of this study will be reported in a Master’s thesis and only accessible to the study team. It is possible that the results may also be published in journal articles and books. If you would like a copy of the results mailed to you, please include an address here:

V. POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for you?

It is unlikely that the questions will seem sensitive or personal as they are about the participant only, but if they do, you do not have to answer any question if you do not want to.

VI. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Will being in this study help you in any way?

You may learn, after reading the study, how a refugee experiences learning English and the benefits they feel are associated with learning English. This study may also help other refugees and immigrants who are learning English in Canada. It may also help ESL teachers or people in the government who make decisions about ESL programs.

VII. CONFIDENTIALITY

How will your privacy be maintained?

Your confidentiality will be respected. Data collected during the study will be stored on password-protected computers. All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Subjects or the name of the organization will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study, unless requested.

VIII. CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact the study leader or one of the study staff. The names and telephone numbers are listed at the top of the first page of this form.
IX. CONTACT FOR COMPLAINTS

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

X. PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE PAGE

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study.

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature     Date

Printed Name of the Participant signing above
Appendix E: Program Coordinator Consent Form

I. STUDY TEAM

Who is conducting this study?

Principal Investigator: Dr. Marlene Asselin, Language and Literacy Education, UBC
Phone: 604-822-5733  Email: marlene.asselin@ubc.ca

Co-Investigator: Kate Crosbie, Language and Literacy Education, UBC
Phone: 778-839-7463  Email: kcrosbie@shaw.ca

This research is for a Master’s Degree thesis in Literacy Education. During the study, no one other than the investigators listed above will have access to the data. After completion of the study, a report based on the study will be published and will then be a publically available document.

II. INVITATION AND STUDY PURPOSE

Why should you take part in this study?

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are the manager of the organization dedicated to assisting refugees and immigrants where the ESL classes are held.

Why are we doing this study?

We want to learn more about how female refugees benefit from learning English. This study will help us to learn more about this important topic and we are inviting people like you because you are the ESL program coordinator for an organization that offers English classes to refugees and immigrants.

III. STUDY PROCEDURES

What happens if you say “Yes, I want to be in the study”?

If you say ‘Yes’, here is how we will do the study:

I will be conducting a study of one of your clients and will be observing the participant in ESL class once a week for three months. I will also be participating in the class, as I have done before, assisting the students and the teacher as needed. After three months, I will ask how you feel the participant has
progressed in English during the time you have known her. This will take about 30-45 minutes and will occur on site at the organization, at your convenience.

IV. STUDY RESULTS

The results of this study will be reported in a Master’s thesis and only accessible to the study team. It is possible that the results may also be published in journal articles and books. If you would like a copy of the results mailed to you, please include an address here:

________________________
________________________

V. POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for you?

It is unlikely that the questions will seem sensitive or personal as they are about the participant only, but if they do, you do not have to answer any question if you do not want to.

VI. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Will being in this study help you in any way?

You may learn, after reading the study, how a refugee experiences learning English and the benefits they feel are associated with learning English. This study may also help other refugees and immigrants who are learning English in Canada. It may also help ESL teachers or people in the government who make decisions about ESL programs.

VII. CONFIDENTIALITY

How will your privacy be maintained?

Your confidentiality will be respected. Data collected during the study will be stored on password-protected computers. All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Subjects or the name of the organization will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study, unless requested.

VIII. CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact the study leader or one of the study staff. The names and telephone numbers are listed at the top of the first page of this form.
IX. CONTACT FOR COMPLAINTS

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

X. PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE PAGE

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study.

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature     Date

Printed Name of the Participant signing above
Appendix F: Information Form for Students in ELL Class

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“Information Form”

I. STUDY TEAM

Who is conducting this study?

Principal Investigator: Dr. Marlene Asselin, Language and Literacy Education, UBC
Phone: 604-822-5733 Email: marlene.asselin@ubc.ca

Co-Investigator: Kate Crosbie, Language and Literacy Education, UBC
Phone: 778-839-7663 Email: kcrosbie@shaw.ca

II. STUDY PURPOSE

You are not being asked to take part in this research study. This study involves one of your classmates. This research is for a Master’s Degree thesis in Literacy Education. Data collected will involve your classmate, but you may be referenced indirectly. For example, if you were having a conversation with the participant, I will note that 2 people were taking about (xxx) for (xxx) minutes. During the study, no one other than the investigators listed above will have access to the data. After completion of the study, the results of the study will be published and will then be a publically available document.

Why are we doing this study?

We want to learn more about how ESL students benefit from learning English. This study will help us to learn more about this important topic.

III. STUDY PROCEDURES

The co-investigator will be coming into your ESL class once a week to simply observe, take notes and participate as an assistant to your teacher. She will function much the same as your teacher and be available to answer any questions you may have.

IV. CONFIDENTIALITY

How will your privacy be maintained?

Your confidentiality will be respected. Data collected during the study will be stored on password-protected computers. All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Subjects will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. There will be no pictures or audio/video recording of any kind.
V. OPTING OUT

It is up to you whether you feel comfortable with the co-investigator coming into your class once a week. If you would rather not have the co-investigator come into your class to observe and participate, please speak to your teacher privately. Thank you for your time.