Having Fun While Speaking French: A Foreign Language Housing Case Study

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Having Fun While Speaking French:
A Foreign Language Housing
Case Study

Donna Lee Andrus

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Having Fun While Speaking French: A Foreign Language Housing Case Study

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As the need for foreign language education increases, various types of immersion programs are on the rise within the United States. This study presents foreign language housing as an under-researched type of immersion program that can be a valuable component of university language departments. Using the framework of situated learning and communities of practice, this study provides an in-depth look at lower proficiency (LP) student perspectives and experiences within Brigham Young University’s French House.

Data were collected through a preliminary questionnaire, a semester-long period of observations, and multiple interviews with select participants. A comparison of all three sources revealed that all levels of learners played a role in creating a comfortable, safe community where participants could make linguistic progress and build social ties. In particular, student leaders, known as resident facilitators, play a key role in granting legitimacy to the LP learners by including them in a variety of activities and giving them specific roles to fulfill within the community. By contrast, attitudes of superiority from student leaders or higher proficiency learners as well as misunderstandings between residents damaged the sense of community at one point and hindered LP learner participation through increased social tension and language anxiety.

The data also revealed that moderate first language use was an effective tool in building good relationships, a key component of a healthy community of practice. Further, the data suggest that involvement in the community’s activities and practices was related to different personality traits in the participants including willingness to communicate in either the first or the second language.

As a whole, the study exhibits that foreign language houses provide a wealth of viable research topics and underscores the important role of building community relationships within a second language learning environment.

Keywords: foreign language housing, L2 immersion, communities of practice, situated learning, student involvement
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Shortly after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, then-president George W. Bush (2001) issued a statement to educators encouraging them to educate youth in international history, languages, culture, and global issues. In response to this statement, the Committee for Economic Development (2006) reported on the state of foreign language programs within the U.S. and urged educators, policy makers, and leaders in all fields to focus their efforts on improving foreign language and culture education at all school levels. The committee pointed out the fact that for security, economic, technological, and political reasons, Americans cannot maintain an insular approach to education and that while emphasis on math, science, and reading is important, failure to focus on foreign language proficiency and international knowledge will have a significant, negative impact on the United States' standing on a global level.

However, in spite of the encouragement from government and economic leaders to focus efforts on improved foreign language programs, a survey by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) recently revealed that the number of foreign language programs has significantly decreased in elementary and middle schools over the past 20 years (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2009). Fortunately, proponents of foreign language instruction in the U.S. don't yet have cause to despair, because while the number of programs in public schools is decreasing, the quality of instruction is increasing. The CAL survey also indicates that teachers are placing greater emphasis on immersing their students in the target language by speaking it more regularly in class. This promising statistic also connects with the fact that dual and two-way immersion programs have become a growing trend in elementary schools (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003).
Further, in the university setting, foreign language programs which offer semesters of study abroad are on the rise (Wang, 2010). As other research shows that study abroad settings result in a higher degree of “worldmindedness” in university students, the increase in study abroad programs responds perfectly to the rising demand for globally conscious college graduates and American citizens (Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001). Additionally, however, study abroad provides the opportunity to learn a second language (L2) in an immersion setting. As both study abroad programs and elementary and middle school immersion programs are on the rise, this indicates that educators at all levels are answering the call for more foreign language teaching by incorporating more opportunities for L2 immersion. And while traditional language programs are likely to remain the norm in high schools and universities, the growing number of immersion programs at all levels displays a change in perspective for L2 teaching and acquisition.

Immersion is seen as a highly beneficial method to acquire a second language by the general public and researchers alike. This is reflected by the long-standing popularity of programs like the 134 year-old Berlitz Method—essentially a synonym for the direct method in which language courses are given strictly in the target language and students are thought to acquire the language through extensive input and related output (Founding and Max, 2008). This method has been perpetuated by more recent theories such as Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis advocating, among other things, extensive comprehensible input, as well as Swain's comprehensible output hypothesis which requires learners to not only receive the language but also produce it (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). A good immersion setting incorporates both of these often-contrasted theories by surrounding learners with the target language while also placing them in situations where they are compelled to respond in kind.
In more recent research, Rifkin (2005) points out that the increasing shift towards immersion programs responds to the increased political and economic need for highly proficient foreign language students. In comparing the linguistic gains of traditional Russian classroom instruction with intensive immersion in the same language, Rifkin found that even though the two settings provided the same number of hours of language instruction or exposure, students in the immersion setting reached a higher level of proficiency. He further suggests that when offered only traditional classroom instruction, learners may hit a ceiling in their progress that will be difficult for them to break through without an immersion experience.

In light of this finding, it is not surprising that nearly 300,000 college students enroll in study abroad programs each year in spite of the rising expense (Institute of International Education, 2011). Nor is it surprising that researchers are increasingly interested in examining study abroad from various angles such as linguistic gains (Martinsen, Baker, Dewey, Bown, & Johnson, 2010), social interaction (Magnan & Back, 2007), motivation (Allen, 2010), and affective outcomes (Houser, Brannstrom, Quiring, & Lemmons, 2011). However, it is surprising that both researchers and universities have generally overlooked other post-secondary immersion options such as intensive domestic immersion and foreign language housing (FLH).

FLH is generally a university-sponsored residence where speakers of the same foreign language live together. Although FLH does not provide the benefit of firsthand experience in a foreign country, Wolf (2002) argues that a language housing program can serve as a cultural center for a university and that it advocates foreign language and culture engagement throughout the surrounding community. A recent national survey of FLH reveals that 90% of language houses incorporate native speakers in a variety of roles, thereby providing direct exposure to both the language itself and to the culture (Dewey, Baker, Bown, & Martinsen, 2011). The survey
also found that 43% of FLH programs include a language pledge which requires students to speak only the target language while in the house, through which FLH serves as a domestic immersion setting. Further, a number of respondents to the survey felt that FLH served either as an effective bridge between classroom instruction and study abroad programs or as a cost-effective alternative to study abroad. Along those lines, respondents stated that some of the greatest benefits of FLH were increased opportunities to practice the language, greater cultural understanding, and the formation of a community of language learners.

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that FLH fulfills the need for increased foreign language learning and global awareness, the survey also revealed that relatively few universities, only 96 out of the 2000+ surveyed, have established FLH programs. Additionally, foreign language research has yet to pay due attention to FLH and its related benefits for language learning. This underscores the imperative need to examine FLH as a viable language immersion option which answers the call for improved language instruction.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Because foreign language housing (FLH) has been largely ignored by researchers, it is difficult to get a complete idea of the nature of individual language programs and to identify the benefits of these programs. However, examining research on domestic immersion as a whole in combination with the handful of existing FLH studies sheds light on the type of learning that generally takes place in these settings—i.e. experience-based, situated learning. Further, studies such as Speilman and Radnofsky’s (2001) examination of tension in an intensive immersion setting reveal the potentially important role of anxiety within these settings. In addition to the role of anxiety, however, the nature of FLH provides researchers with a variety of complex variables to examine, including the interplay between proficiency levels and ensuing participation.

**Domestic Immersion Programs**

In their recent survey of FLH programs throughout the U.S., Dewey, Baker, Bown, and Martinsen (2011) point out that although language houses have existed since 1914 and Schlimbach and Jordan reported on the positive effects of FLH as early as 1937, there has been a surprising lack of research about this form of domestic immersion. Through their nationwide survey, the researchers found that 96 universities incorporate FLH in some form. Many of these universities have a dedicated dorm, house, or entire complex for the language housing and offer a combined total of more than 16 different languages. The survey also revealed that FLH may incorporate a range of activities to enhance the language learning experience such as lectures, films, and the common practice of eating dinner as a group. Owing to the variety of FLH programs, there is ample room to investigate different program designs and their related benefits, but researchers have yet to fully delve in to the FLH world.
Within the past several years, multiple studies have examined the intensive summer language program at Middlebury College (Rifkin, 2005; Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004; Speilmann & Radnofsky, 2001), contributing to an understanding of the linguistic and affective impact of domestic immersion, but the intense and isolated nature of Middlebury's program does not fully resemble the bulk of FLH programs in the U.S. (Dewey, Baker, Bown, & Martinsen, 2011). Students in Middlebury's seven-week program are temporarily cut off from the outside world and take a pledge to only use the target language (even in e-mails and phone calls) during their time at the school. The program includes language-specific classes and extracurricular activities that encourage students to use the language in a variety of contexts and attempt to mirror the intensive immersion of living in the foreign country (Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004). While this type of immersion does provide a fascinating setting to examine the effects of immersion, its unique nature does not allow for full comparison to the other FLH programs throughout the country. FLH, by contrast to Middlebury's intensive program, generally requires students to continue living their American university lives during the day while expecting them to step over a language border upon returning home. Further, participation in FLH usually extends beyond a seven-week period and can potentially provide housing for students during their entire university experience.

In a precursor to their FLH survey, Martinsen, Baker, Dewey, Bown, and Johnson (2010) were essentially the first researchers to look at the impact of one form of FLH as a type of less intensive domestic immersion. Similar to Freed and associates' comparison of Middlebury's programs with study abroad and classroom settings, Martinsen et. al looked at how Brigham Young University's Foreign Language Student Residence (FLSR) compared to traditional study abroad as well as service-oriented study abroad (in which students are engaged in community
service in the foreign country) in terms of amount of language used and linguistic gains. The researchers measured students’ speaking proficiency at the beginning and the end of a term in each program and also had students keep track of how frequently they used the target language. The most compelling findings of the research first showed that students in FLH used the target language just as frequently outside of class as did traditional study abroad students. Additionally, the research showed that students in all three programs displayed significant linguistic gains, with the gains in FLH being remarkably similar to those in service-oriented study abroad. This strengthens the case for FLH being a powerful immersion tool. The team of researchers next compared the linguistic gains in FLH with traditional classroom settings, also revealing that living in FLH resulted in markedly higher language improvement (Martinsen, Baker, Bown, & Johnson, 2011). These results make a case for FLH being one of the best environments for students to achieve rapid language gains, and is therefore an important new realm of second language research. But beyond issues of linguistic improvement, the nature of FLH provides ample room to examine social and affective implications within this situated learning environment.

**Situated Learning**

To address the specific research gap in social interactions in FLH, this study is based on the theory that learning, particularly second-language learning, is more than a cognitive process. Rather, as stated by psychologists such as Piaget and Vygotsky and as advocated by L2 researchers like Firth and Wagner (1997), learning is a highly complex process which involves a variety of social and affective factors through which learners construct new knowledge. At the center of this idea is the popular theory of situated learning, or learning that takes place in the same situation in which it is applied (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger elaborate on the
idea of socially constructed knowledge by arguing that “learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world” and extends much further than simply transferring knowledge outside of context (pg. 35).

To illustrate situated learning, Lave and Wenger discuss five studies of apprenticeship: midwives, tailors, quartermasters, butchers, and recovering alcoholics. In the case of Yucatec Mayan midwives in Mexico, girls grow up in midwiving families and learn about the practices and procedures of midwivery through constant exposure. There is not necessarily a distinct moment of knowledge transmission, but as the girls grow older, they are given increasing responsibilities to assist in the birthing process. Over time, the girls learn through observation and minimal participation until they are prepared to take on the full responsibilities of a midwife.

In terms of L2 research, FLH is a form of situated learning in that residents are required to both negotiate social situations as they make new friendships and navigate normal roommate conflict, while also gaining second-language skills and vocabulary to do so. They have to take practical skills, such as cooking or even cleaning, which they have long applied in native language (L1) settings and situate them in the second language (L2)--grasping vocabulary and grammar constructs in the process. Fortunately, each newcomer or inexperienced member in a situated learning setting has access to a network of “old-timers”--people who are more knowledgeable about the language and about the social framework and standard practices of their environment. As the newcomers observe, listen to, and communicate with more experienced members of the community, their ability to participate accurately and adequately, just as with fledgling midwives, grows. This design creates a master/apprentice relationship between the two groups, and in the context of BYU's French House, lower proficiency (LP)
students are able to learn as they interact and negotiate with their native speaker or higher proficiency counterparts.

**Legitimate Peripheral Participation**

The idea of apprenticeship has existed for centuries and generally calls up images of young workers learning a specific skill from a master craftsman. However, apprenticeship—often equated with situated learning—is not limited to work environments or learning a trade. Lave and Wenger even point out that all children are apprentices to the adult social world and essentially any form of socially-based learning mirrors an apprenticeship in some form. In a further extension of apprenticeship and the situated learning theory, Lave and Wenger (1991) state that within learning communities, often termed communities of practice, apprentices, referred to as “newcomers,” enter in a peripheral phase—observing the more experienced community members and modeling low-risk practices until they are able to progressively join the center, or core, of the community and participate more fully. This process is termed legitimate peripheral participation. In order for this process to result in full community participation, however, Wenger points out that peripheral participation cannot be divorced from a sense of legitimacy:

> In order to be on an inbound trajectory, newcomers must be granted enough legitimacy to be treated as potential members....Only with legitimacy can all their inevitable stumblings and violations become opportunities for learning rather than cause for dismissal, neglect, or exclusion (1998, pg. 101).

If experienced community members, termed old-timers, don't grant legitimacy to the newcomers, it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to fully benefit from the situated learning environment; they are left in a partially participatory role that lacks the benefit of legitimate community entry
and in which their attempts to model community practices are rejected. As Morita (2004) points out in a study of how six Japanese students enter their English-speaking academic community, this process can be riddled with complications as the peripheral members negotiate access to resources provided by the central members of the community and attempt to navigate established relationships of power. Morita found that the students had to battle with their own fear of inadequacy in speaking English as well as negotiate support from professors and fellow classmates. In cases where they felt supported, they were able to participate adequately in classes, whereas when they felt misunderstood or rejected, they remained silent and became isolated from the rest of the group.

Before Lave and Wenger first published their theory of situated learning and communities of practice, studies in L2 learning and education had found that pairing LP learners with a higher proficiency (HP) counterpart—a mirror of the master/apprentice format—resulted in greater negotiation to accomplish the task and, as a result, more benefits to language learning (Yule & McDonald, 1990; Long & Porter, 1985). Specifically, Yule and McDonald found that creating partnerships with different proficiency levels can result in longer conversations as both partners work to understand each other’s ideas. Pairing high and low proficiency students with a partner who didn’t speak the same L1, Yule and McDonald had the students perform tasks of either giving or receiving directions to negotiate delivery routes. Most importantly, Yule and McDonald's (1990) study found that these proficiency pairings displayed the greatest success and involved the most negotiation when the LP learner was given a dominant role with the HP learner taking a non-dominant role—in other words, when a newcomer to the community is given legitimate responsibilities, both LP and HP learners benefit from the ensuing negotiation, because they each have to look for a variety of ways to communicate ideas. On the other hand,
when the HP learners took the dominant role, they actually perceived the LP learners' roles in the task as less significant—or less legitimate—and task performance involved markedly less negotiation and interaction. In some cases, HP learners just mandated directions rather than allowing LP learners to seek clarification. In connection to Morita's study, this shows that legitimate peripheral participation best occurs when core members of a community allow newcomers to take on distinct responsibilities and are willing to share roles of power. Because FLH incorporates various proficiency levels and degrees of mastery within the language, it provides an ideal location to further examine the process of newcomers entering a linguistic community as well as the distribution of power and core roles within the community of practice (CoP).

**Community of Practice**

To better understand the process of entering the community and negotiating legitimate membership, it's crucial to further explore the nature of communities of practice themselves. Community is generally understood to mean a group of people who have at least one thing in common and practice can be defined as a profession or skill exercised by a group or individuals. When the two terms are united, then, a CoP could loosely be defined as a group who shares a skill and comes together with the goal of improving their proficiency. But beyond working towards greater proficiency, in uniting as individuals to practice something together, Lave and Wenger's (1991) CoP theory becomes a powerful social learning strategy—it is the setting in which situated learning takes place.

As Wenger (1998) defines it, a community of practice works as learners with a shared domain of interest come together in a given setting and form a set of practices such as participating in activities or even regularly conversing about various topics so as to share what
they have learned and collectively learn more. This domain of interest, which is defined as the central purpose of the group, is an integral piece of the community. In fact, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) point out that “without a commitment to a domain, a community is just a group of friends” (p. 30). For a CoP to exist, it must have a distinct learning goal (domain) in addition to a strong social connection.

Wenger (1998) sets up this theory in contrast to traditional learning settings, i.e. classrooms, which he believes are more synthetic than natural because the learners are merely assimilating teacher-conveyed information. He suggests by contrast that in a CoP, learners are building relationships and choosing together what to learn and how best to learn it. In reality, Lave and Wenger rarely explore CoPs in a formal education setting, perhaps because they feel that it does not constitute an organic community. However, multiple studies conducted since the CoP theory was first introduced show that CoPs can be cultivated in education settings (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999) and, specifically, that they can develop in L2 learning settings. Studies conducted in connection to L2 CoPs have examined classroom dynamics (Toohey, 1996), teacher/student relations (Morita, 2004; Belcher, 1994), and writing for scholarly publication (Canagarajah, 2003; Flowerdew, 2000; Casanave, 1998) leaving plenty of room to study different L2 contexts. Only one recent study has considered CoPs in connection with FLH (Bown, Dewey, Martinsen, & Baker, 2011).

In their study, Bown and her colleagues examined student perspectives of the FLH experience by videotaping one dinner conversation and interviewing a select group of students living in the French, Japanese, and Russian houses in BYU’s Foreign Language Student Residence (FLSR). The researchers wished to understand the lived experience of students in the FLSR, and explored levels of investment and changing identities within the community. The
study revealed that creating a livable community was the most important aspect of living in FLH—surpassing even an emphasis on speaking the foreign language. The researchers further discovered that BYU's French House has a strong community of practice with members supporting each other linguistically, socially, and even emotionally. The students living in the French House during the study spoke enthusiastically of their experience and all members helped each other with the language and enjoyed doing things with each other in and out of the House. But the fact that this well-built society of language learners changes almost completely from year to year allows for examining various degrees of involvement in the current CoP, as well as how the CoP domain is defined and supported by community members. Further, as the study was limited to only one dinner hour observation and a handful of professor-led interviews, the research was confined to a somewhat formal perspective of the student experience—a limitation which this study surmounts as I situate myself in the role of a peer and temporary participant within the French House CoP.

Even though Lave and Wenger's theory of CoPs touches on active, social learning and aligns with current second language teaching (L2) theories of communicative interaction, the theory is not without its limitations. In her reevaluation of CoPs in L2 research and teaching, Haneda (2006) points out that Lave and Wenger initially present CoPs as if they were problem-free—not investigating the complex reality of conflict when community members encounter differences and struggle to negotiate membership. But in more recent extensions of the theory, Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) admit that CoPs can run into a variety of snags, because community members are obviously human. When weaknesses are not addressed properly and disputes are not resolved, the community can stagnate or fail entirely. Along those lines, Bown et. al (2011) found that in contrast to the active CoP in the French House, the Russian House at
BYU was characterized by indifference rather than community—a problem related to clashing personalities and one resident's “combative” attitude—and that owing to exclusivity on the part of native speakers, LP learners in the Japanese House struggled to enter the community's core. These findings beg the questions: why do some L2 CoPs thrive whereas others never accomplish either community or organizational goals? What specific snags or failed negotiations occur in one situation, and what positive processes occur in another? As previously stated, because learning is so complex, it is important to examine a variety of variables in the LP learner process towards community membership—one of them being the potential of anxiety.

**Anxiety**

Although anxiety is a broad and sometimes ambiguous term in the world of psychology, there are generally two important classifications that are used to describe it in general terms: facilitating vs. debilitating and state vs. trait (Dörnyei, 2005). In relation to facilitating vs. debilitating, the essential point is that anxiety can sometimes push a person to perform at a higher level (facilitating) whereas other times it can actually hinder their ability to do even basic tasks (debilitating). State vs. trait anxiety refers to anxiety connected to given situations (state) as opposed to a predisposition to feeling anxious (trait).

**Foreign Language Anxiety**

A type of state or situational anxiety, foreign language anxiety is essentially nervousness or stress associated with using a foreign language. It generally has debilitating rather than facilitating effects, as it impacts memory and inhibits language recall (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). It can occur in a variety of contexts and be connected with any foreign language skill such as speaking, writing, reading, or listening (Lin, 2009), but research also indicates that L2 speaking and listening are more likely to produce the highest and most debilitating anxiety
In light of this finding, FLHs, which only incorporate listening and speaking in the foreign language, have an elevated risk of provoking anxiety. Studies in foreign language anxiety have shown that not only is this issue related to a variety of personality or background characteristics (Woodrow, 2006; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993) but that it also exists in various degrees across all levels of language proficiency (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005; Onwuegbuzie, Baily, & Daley, 1999). More importantly, as stated by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), students who struggle with foreign language anxiety “[tend] to avoid attempting difficult or personal messages in the target language” (p. 126). As such, if students in the French House experience foreign language anxiety, it is possible that they will struggle to form relationships and join the community because they are nervous about communicating on a personal level.

In an ethnographic study conducted at Middlebury College's intensive French language program, Speilmann and Radnofsky explored the potentially positive and negative effects of tension—a concept which they relate to anxiety. The two researchers carried out the study as participant observers in the program so as to gain more complete access to the people and all of the activities provided. Through a series of in-depth interviews which were fleshed out by detailed field notes, Speilmann and Radnofsky (2001) found that many sources of tension in the immersion setting occurred outside of the classroom. They also note that developing a sense of self within the foreign language is a crucial factor in alleviating tension or foreign language anxiety, and that lower proficiency learners felt a need to be recognized as legitimate, albeit novice, speakers of French.

As shown by Pierce's (1995) study on female immigrants in Canada, the complexity of foreign language anxiety is linked to language learners' sense of identity within a given
community. In this particular study, Pierce finds that as a learner develops a sense of self within the community or network, willingness to communicate and investment in the language increase in spite of an initially high affective filter. This sense of identity formation can be complicated for LP learners as they generally experience a sense of infantilization, because they lack the linguistic knowledge to present their true selves or personalities to others (Speilmann & Radnofsky, 2001).

Beyond developing a sense of self, it is also essential for language learners to feel at ease with interlocutors. Dewaele, Petrides, and Furnham's (2008) recent study shows that as learners form a social group within the language community, their anxiety gradually decreases as opposed to higher anxiety levels when communicating with strangers; in other words, the better they know the interlocutors, the lower their anxiety level tends to be. These findings support the need for a language learning environment which promotes community and allows learners to connect with each other and open the door for further exploration of how strong language communities, such as those which may exist in FLH, impact anxiety levels.

**Proficiency Level and Participation**

If the French House CoP is first examined in the context of accurate French being the domain, then all LP learners hold a role as apprentices or peripheral members in the community with HP learners and native speakers being identified as the masters. However, because this CoP like many others also has an integral social domain—i.e. creating friendships and positive roommate and “housemate” relationships—anyone who is new to the House, regardless of proficiency level, is also a newcomer to the community. In this way, certain members of the community hold a dual role: they may be an old-timer linguistically but a newcomer socially and vice-versa. For those who enter the community as both linguistic and social newcomers, this
study examines how their proficiency, or indeed, lack of proficiency, affects their involvement in the community.

This study defines participation or involvement in terms of how frequently individuals joined in group conversations during the dinner hour, how much they proportionately spoke in said conversations, and also how often they broke into English rather than maintaining French. In a study conducted in an advanced-level French class, Léger and Storch (2009) found that where students perceived a comparative lack in their vocabulary or overall fluency, they were less willing to participate in large group discussions and, as a result, their class involvement diminished. The study, based on student self-assessment, observations, and focus groups further indicates that as students perceive improvements in their proficiency, they begin participating more frequently and actively. However, the researchers acknowledged that having students monitor their own participation likely impacted student involvement more than improving proficiency itself. Further, because the study examined a limited range of proficiency levels, the connection between proficiency and participation remains unclear.

In studies examining L2 willingness to communicate (WTC)—a variable which looks at the emotional underpinnings of participation—researchers have found that proficiency and competence, either actual or perceived, can negatively impact learner WTC (Cao, 2011; Freiermuth & Jarrel, 2006). Cao's study, which required English students to write journal entries about their WTC as well as to explain the emotions behind their participation in a stimulated recall interview, identifies a wide variety of individual difference factors which impact WTC—notably self-confidence which Cao (2011) defines as “a combination of perceived communicative competence and a lack of anxiety” (p. 473). In this sense, where learners have a lower proficiency or at least perceive that they lack competence in comparison to their peers,
they may experience anxiety which inhibits participation. This finding connects to previous research which states that if learners have a low WTC, either related to proficiency or other factors, they generally avoid interacting and are less likely to risk speaking at all in the L2 (Lui & Jackson, 2008). However, in spite of the growing interest in WTC and its impact on participation and classroom involvement, remarkably little research has been conducted on the exact connection between proficiency and participation. Further, there is a distinct gap in understanding how L2 proficiency might affect learner involvement in a CoP.

**Conclusion**

Although the recent research conducted by Bown and her associates effectively examined the complex world of FLH from an emic, or insider-driven, perspective, their limited number of observations coupled with the fact that they were not truly a part of the CoP inhibited a complete understanding of how students operate within this situated learning setting. As a fellow student and even friend to several members of the French House, it was possible for me to delve deeper into the whys and hows of this particular FLH CoP and to provide a more authentically emic examination of FLH. In this way, this study was designed to continue addressing the various gaps discussed and to contribute to the recent, yet sparse, research on FLH from a participant/observer perspective in the hope of opening the door to future studies on FLH. Further, this study is intended to look most specifically at how lower proficiency learners—the true newcomers to the CoP—are actively involved in the community and what variables are related to their involvement.

Although the study is mainly exploratory in nature and was created to discover a variety of complexities in the lower proficiency learner experience, I used the following research
questions to guide my observations, interactions with participants, and subsequent interviews as well as provide a more distinct focus to the study:

1. How do lower proficiency learners become a legitimate part of the community of practice?

2. How does language proficiency affect the level of involvement in the community of practice?

3. How does anxiety or lack thereof relate to lower proficiency learners' participation?
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Methodology

Owing to the exploratory nature of the study and research questions, I chose to use a qualitative, naturalistic method. Further, similar to the framework of situated learning, qualitative research is designed to understand meaning in context and to see how people make sense of their own world (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research requires the researcher to become the primary instrument of data collection, and since I am in the same life phase as the participants in the study, it was not a stretch for me to become part of the French House community and absorb information on the practices and experiences of the residents. As Speilmann and Radnofsky (2001) point out, “one of the advantages of a naturalistic approach is to find out what respondents themselves choose to discuss, and in what terms,” so a qualitative approach allowed me to explore the complexities of the lower proficiency learners' experience in a way that a test or survey based study would not have done (p.273). Further, because I forged friendships with the participants, they were generally quite candid with me in their discussion of the French House—for better or for worse. In some ways, this became a limitation to my data collection, as certain participants tended to gossip about other members of the community. However, as I sought out information from a range of participants and worked to maintain an objective viewpoint, even the gossip ultimately served as a tool to clarify various positive and negative perspectives and to reveal the lived experience of lower proficiency learners in the French House community of practice.

Participants

For privacy purposes, and in order to encourage candidness during interviews and observations, all of the students' names have been changed throughout this entire thesis. During
winter semester 2012, when I conducted all primary research for the study, there were 18 people living at the French House: eleven women and seven men, all of whom were between the ages of 19 and 26. Students in the French House are normally required to have taken through French 201 (intermediate French) prior to admission, but one participant, Erik, was concurrently enrolled in the class.

In addition to the two native French speakers, Élise and Charlotte, most of the participants had experienced French immersion in some form before moving into the French House, with study abroad being the most common immersion setting. Six participants, Gloria, Catherine, Kaimee, Paige, Beth, and Hannah all spent at least two months in Paris for BYU's study abroad program, with Hannah having completed the program during fall semester of 2011. Five participants, Kevin, Ryan, Adam, Jon, and Mary, spent at least 18 months in a Francophone country as missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church)—Ryan, Jon, and Adam having been in Paris. Seth and Claudia had somewhat different immersion background, with Seth's father having always spoken French in the home and with Claudia attending a French immersion school when she was five. Only three participants, Dave, Erik, and Samantha, had never been in any French immersion setting prior to moving into the French House. Regardless of immersion experience, however, while speaking with the students, I roughly evaluated their proficiency levels and found them to span a broad range of ability. For the sake of simplicity and my own familiarity with the system, I have chosen to categorize these levels according to the ACTFL oral proficiency scale (2012), but have offered approximations rather than exact levels to reflect the general proficiency of each speaker. Further, owing to the break-down of actual proficiency levels in the House, I will refer to all levels from advanced mid and above as “higher proficiency” whereas everything from advanced low and below will be
referred to as “lower proficiency.” Table 1 illustrates my rough approximations of the students’ language proficiencies during winter semester 2012 as well as the assumed proficiency levels (based on the description of winter semester residents) of residents who were living there during fall semester.

**Table 1**

*Participants and Estimated Proficiency Levels*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higher Proficiency Participants</th>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Élise</td>
<td>Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Advanced High/Superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Advanced High/Superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon</td>
<td>Advanced Mid/Advanced High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Advanced Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Advanced Mid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lower Proficiency Participants</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Advanced Low/Advanced Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>Advanced Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Advanced Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaimee</td>
<td>Advanced Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>Intermediate High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>Intermediate High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>Intermediate High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>Intermediate High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Intermediate High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Intermediate Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erik</td>
<td>Intermediate Mid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Participants Mentioned in the Study</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marc</td>
<td>Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Advanced Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Advanced Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>Intermediate High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although my observations centered on the students living in the French House during winter semester, all of the interviewees who were living there during fall semester frequently referred to former residents who had moved out before I began my observations. To further clarify the structure of the House, Table 2 details who was living in which apartment during the two semesters, with the resident facilitator for each apartment in bold.

Table 2

Residents According to Apartment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall Semester</th>
<th>Winter Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Élise (RF)</td>
<td>Élise (RF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>Paige</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>Claudia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Beth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>Gloria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>Catherine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte (RF)</td>
<td>Charlotte (RF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaimee</td>
<td>Kaimee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Hannah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan (RF)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marc (RF)</td>
<td>Erik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Dave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Kevin (RF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>Adam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other Relevant Information

Religious Terminology

As would be expected in any community of practice—whether it is a group of scientists or a collaboration between students—the French House community has a particular vocabulary which is largely adopted from the surrounding community. Because BYU is a private university owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), all of the participants in the study are members of this church and frequently use related words and concepts in their everyday conversation. The following outline is designed as a guide to terms and concepts which were frequently mentioned in both interviews and observations.

- **Sunday School**: LDS worship services generally consist of three, one hour-long meetings, one of which is referred to as Sunday School. The structure of this meeting is generally a discussion format with one lay member acting as a teacher or discussion leader. The topics of the discussion are focused on specific books of LDS scripture and LDS doctrines. It is customary for class members to bring their own scriptures so as to read passages aloud and follow along with the class discussion.

- **Baring Testimony**: During all worship services, members are regularly encouraged to talk about what doctrines are important to them while relating them to personal experiences and insights. But baring testimony is different from a discussion format in that one person generally stands before the rest of the group and speaks for a few minutes without interruption. While what is said tends to spring from the moment and is unrehearsed, there are usually some formulaic phrases such as “I know that,” “I believe,” or the conclusion “in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.”
• **Mission:** Young men and young women in the LDS Church are encouraged to devote two years (for the men) or 18 months (for the women) to full-time missionary service. As a missionary, young people spend approximately 12 hours a day, six days a week, sharing their beliefs with others in impromptu conversations, teaching lessons about the LDS faith, and providing service in the community. Before leaving for their missionary service, prospective missionaries receive what is referred to as a “mission call,” which is essentially an assignment to one of the 340 worldwide mission locations. Even though the prospective missionaries have to provide information about what languages (if any) they speak while submitting their application to serve a mission, it is not uncommon for missionaries to be sent to a country where they do not yet speak the language.

• **Scripture:** Scripture in the LDS Church includes the Bible as well as three books of LDS-specific scripture: The Book of Mormon, The Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price. Similar to the Bible, these books of scripture have been translated into a wide variety of languages, and each language house at the FLSR used a target language translation during Sunday School classes.

• **Prayer:** In the LDS Church, prayer is typically individualized and extemporaneous rather than following memorized lines. However, similar to baring testimony, there are certain common phrases, such as beginning with “Dear Heavenly Father” and closing with “in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.” In terms of public or group prayer, it is customary for everyone to bow their heads and close their eyes while one person acts as voice to offer the prayer.
• **Gospel**: While the term “gospel” is widely used in all Christian faiths, including the LDS Church, to refer to the teachings of Jesus Christ, it is also commonly used by LDS Church members to refer to LDS doctrines, beliefs, and practices.

• **Devotional**: While a devotional (a short, religious service) can take many forms in the LDS Church, the form used in this study is of a very brief meeting that typically consists of singing a hymn, reading scripture passages aloud, and offering a prayer.

**FLSR Structure and Rules**

Just as knowing the basics of LDS vocabulary is important to interpreting this study, there are also a variety of FLSR rules and structural characteristics which are essential for understanding the discussion. While a copy of the FLSR “honor code” (outlining rules) is included in the appendices, this list will serve to further clarify some of the common practices and terms in the FLSR.

• **Resident Facilitator (RF)**: One RF lives in each apartment at the FLSR, and receives free rent in exchange for ensuring that the apartment and the language house is run properly. RF responsibilities include managing grocery money for dinners, organizing cooking groups, enforcing language use, and assisting all house members with the language. Although the RF is ideally a native speaker, sometimes an advanced high or superior non-native speaker will be hired in the absence of sufficient native speakers.

• **Faculty Coordinator**: The French House, like the other language houses, is monitored by a faculty coordinator who generally works as a teacher or a professor at BYU. The coordinator regularly checks in with the RFs to make sure the house is running smoothly. During winter semester, the French House coordinator typically stopped by the house at least monthly during the dinner hour to interact with all House members.
• **Dinner Group:** All students were required to be at the FLSR from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Sunday through Thursday to ensure being present for the dinner hour (6-7 p.m.). A group of three or four students is assigned one night a week to be in charge of dinner, and they typically start preparing around 4:00. The cooking group members take turns being in charge of the meal with the “captain” of the week choosing the recipe and being responsible for getting the ingredients for the meal during the weekly shopping trip.

• **Grocery Shopping:** Each week, usually on Friday evening at the French House, the cooking group captains for the upcoming week all go grocery shopping together. One RF is required to accompany the group, and the captains for a given week are often in the same apartment. Because the FLSR has an account with the local grocery store, Macey's, all grocery shopping for house dinners is required to be done there in order to regulate the money which everyone pays into the account as part of their monthly rent.

• **Physical Set-up:** As seen in the picture, the FLSR consists of four outer buildings and one central building, all of which have three floors. Two of the outer buildings house all of the men's apartments with the other two outer buildings housing all of the women. The center building has common rooms which are used for dinners, activities, and Sunday church meetings. FLSR residents are allowed to speak English in the common area except during the dinner hour. All outer buildings are connected to the center building by outdoor walkways, but the men's and women's dorms aren't connected to each other directly except by passing through the center building. The French House apartments are all on the third floor, with the women's apartments being directly next to
each other in one building and the men's apartments directly next to each other in the nearest men's building.

**Initial Questionnaire**

After touching base with the faculty coordinator for the French House (also referred to as the House) and alerting the resident facilitators (RFs) that I would be coming, I made my first visit to the House on January 25 during the dinner hour. I immediately set about getting to know some of the students, and once everyone was done eating, I announced and explained the study in English, using the consent form as a guide to explain what would happen, and allowed everyone to ask questions. The students then filled out a simple questionnaire to help me know more about them—specifically their motivation to live in the FLSR, their previous immersion experiences (if any), and some demographic details (Appendix A).

Although I mainly used the surveys to help me get to know each participant a little better and to give me a brief evaluation of their language background before commencing observations, the final question on the survey was designed to shed some light on the French House experience in general: “How have you felt thus far about your experience at the FLSR? Likes, dislikes, etc.” Responses to this question were later coded for mention of negative experiences (such as those related to anxiety or conflict), positive experiences (which were often related to friendship and security), or anything related to lack of involvement in the community.

**Observations**

During February and March, I ate dinner with the French House on Wednesday and Thursday nights for a total of eleven times. I also went grocery shopping with them once, helped prepare dinner three times, spent a Sunday morning and afternoon at the House—attending Church meetings, helping prepare dinner, and then spending the dinner hour with them—and
went to a couple activities, with House members, one inside the House (a birthday party) and the other outside (a concert put on by Dave’s band). For both of the activities, I was specifically invited to come as a friend.

My main goal with observations was essentially to become as much a part of the community as possible. I wanted to get to know the individual members while simultaneously observing how they interacted with each other. I made a habit to sit next to different people each time so as to gain a better understanding of different groups and individual experiences. I would sometimes ask questions about the French House—mainly to gain a better understanding about how things operated—but I generally just participated in the group conversations rather than pushing my own agenda. As I am personally a French teacher and have lived in both France and Switzerland, I was generally looked at as an additional RF, and community members began using me as a linguistic reference point after my first two or three visits.

Directly after each visit or other activity, I recorded my thoughts and impressions on a digital recorder. These observation notes were later transcribed and coded according to the same categories and related words discussed in the interviews section below.

**Interviews**

In mid-March, near the end of the twice weekly visits and other observations, I selected nine students—at least three from each girls' apartment and two from one of the boys' apartments: Élise, Paige, Claudia, Beth, Charlotte, Hannah, Samantha, Ryan, and Erik. These interviewees were selected based on two specific factors: level of involvement in the community (most being more involved and others being chosen owing to lack of involvement) and proficiency level. In relation to proficiency, in order to gain a broader perspective on the lower proficiency learner experience, I interviewed both lower proficiency learners themselves in
addition to the more advanced students and native speakers. As I didn't interact as much with the other apartment of boys, largely owing to scheduling conflicts, I did not select an interviewee from their apartment, and they will not factor as much into the discussion and analysis of the study.

Each interview was between 15 and 45 minutes long, with the interview questions for RFs focusing on their observations about the LP learners, and the questions for other community members focusing on their experience in the French House. The interviews were mainly open-ended and I let each student's responses guide further questions. However, there were certain questions which I asked all interviewees, such as why they do or do not like living in the FLSR, who they interact with the most in the French House, and the role of English in the French House. A more complete outline of the questions is included in Appendix B. Because the purpose of the interviews was to gain an in-depth view of how the students felt about their experience rather than to gauge French language ability, all interviews were conducted in English. Similar to my observation notes, each interview was recorded on a digital recorder and subsequently transcribed.

Following transcription and initial analysis, I conducted a follow-up interview with Paige and Claudia and communicated through e-mail with Ryan in order to clarify certain points in their interviews and gain greater perspective on what their first interviews had already revealed. I did not deem follow-up interviews necessary with any of the other participants, as their interviews were already sufficiently clear.

Data Analysis

As suggested by the coding process already described, the Constant Comparative Method was used to organize the incoming data into categories throughout the entire research process
(Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method specifies comparing all newly collected data to previous data and continually refining theories and ideas until a more specific conclusion is formed about the study. As such, the initial questionnaire helped me focus on individual students during observations, guiding my interaction with the group. Once the observation process was nearing completion, I reviewed my notes to formulate more questions for the interviews as well as to determine who to interview. During the interview transcription process, I started identifying frequent themes and repeated words which related to my research questions and which also tied to my observation notes. These themes were noted and refined into specific categories, grouping them according to my three research questions. However, I decided to combine the coding and the discussion for questions 1 and 3 as anxiety was almost exclusively experienced in relation to the process of entering (or not entering) the community of practice. By assigning each category a specific color to increase visual organization, I coded all three data sources (the questionnaire, observation notes, and interview transcriptions) by highlighting all references to the following categories and related words (in random order):

**Categories for questions 1 and 3**

- **Process**: understanding, learning, beginning, over time
- **Errors**: mistakes, fear of mistakes, correction, fix
- **Anxiety**: nervous, fear, worry, stress, hard, intimidated, scared, awkward, uncomfortable, self-conscious, tense
- **Bad Attitudes**: condescending, rude, mean, better, superior
- **Connections**: safe, secure, comfortable, friends, unity, together, involved, dynamics, help
- **Separation**: individual, separate, barrier, exclusive, alone
- **English Use**
• Conflict: resolution, arguments, rift, problem
• Religion: scripture, prayer, Sunday School, devotional, mission
• Expectations: thought, assumed

Categories for question 2

• Personality and Good Attitudes: shy, outgoing, loud, fun, social, open, enthusiastic, helpful
• Schedule: time, gone, homework, seclusion, busy
• Willingness to Communicate: willing, hesitant, quiet
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

As explained on the Foreign Language Student Residence (FLSR) website, the purpose of language housing is to provide students with a “language immersion experience” while allowing them to continue regular university involvement (FLSR, 2012). Consequently, the idea of the French House is to place students in a situation where they can speak French as much as possible while at home and, hopefully, improve their linguistic ability. However, the idea of a community of practice (CoP) extends beyond being a learning environment or even a group of people with a common purpose. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) point out that a CoP “is a group of people who interact, learn together, build relationships, and in the process develop a sense of belonging and mutual commitment” (p. 34). Without these various ingredients of interacting, belonging, and committing, the community does not thrive. In the French House, this means that students have to go beyond just speaking French to each other out of obligation and have to work toward forming connections and making sure that everyone feels like they fit in. Thus the community domain has to include an element of social connection.

Wenger et. al (2002) further state that a community's domain is best defined by the community members themselves. It may be similar to the stated purpose of the organization, but to truly drive and inspire the community, it has to be something that they all agree on—either subconsciously or explicitly stated. At the French House, everyone has an understanding of the organizational goals, as they have to sign a contract—known as the FLSR honor code—before moving in to the FLSR. This honor code places an emphasis on creating a positive atmosphere of teamwork to assist each other in speaking French (Appendix C). As I spoke with individuals, a similar domain came out, but Beth, Charlotte, and Paige also emphasized the importance of having fun or enjoying their time together within the framework of a team. Ultimately, the
residents of the French House are college students; having a good time through social interaction is important to them. And while twelve people stated on their questionnaires that their reason for moving into the French House was to improve their French, there was a constant thread of the desire to make French-speaking friends throughout all of the interviews. Accordingly, I feel that the community members themselves define the domain or purpose of the French House as “having fun with friends while speaking French.”

In addition to understanding the domain of the French House, it is also important to recognize that the system of newcomers vs. old-timers is somewhat complex in this setting. As is typical in BYU housing, students sign contracts for an eight-month time period covering fall and winter semesters. This allows for the possibility that the entire CoP will dissolve and subsequently renew itself with completely different members each school year. Fortunately, as students can live in the house during the four months of spring and summer terms, there are typically two or three students who stay in the community for longer than eight months with some staying for a few years. At the beginning of fall semester 2011, Gloria, Charlotte, Catherine, Marc, Jon, and Seth were all French House old-timers whereas everyone else was moving in for the first time. However, the system of newcomers and old-timers also includes the important aspect of language proficiency. In this way, newcomers are not limited to new members of the French House. Rather, anyone with a lower level of French is situated in a newcomer role, even if, as was the case with this group of students, they can't be termed a novice or a true beginner. As my study is more centered on community interaction in relation to lower proficiency learners, I have chosen to specifically focus on the experience and attached perspectives of five students who were newcomers both to the French House and to the language: Paige, Claudia, Beth, Hannah, Samantha, and Erik.
Question 1: How Do Lower Proficiency Learners Become a Legitimate Part of the Community of Practice?

As I observed and interviewed both lower proficiency (LP) and higher proficiency (HP) learners, I discovered that there are distinct phases that nearly everyone passed through before becoming part of the community of practice. In line with Cummins' (1979) threshold hypothesis, which states that L2 learners will only reap benefits in the language after passing a certain threshold of proficiency, I found that all learners first need to come to a point where they can at least moderately understand other members of the House—most notably native speakers—and feel comfortable with their level of comprehension. Once learners are able to cross the barrier of comprehension, they are able to focus on communicating, improving their proficiency, and participating more actively in the community. In order to do so, they next need to develop an understanding that mistakes are ubiquitous from all levels of learners and ultimately are an important part of improving language production. Once they reach a level of comfort with both comprehension and production, LP learners participate as legitimate members of the community as long as they feel validated by and safe with their peers—an ingredient which also proved to be crucial in surmounting anxiety and dealing with tension. As Claudia stated,

learning a language is embarrassing; it is frustrating. It’s hard. It’s like running cross-country: you don’t know why you’re doing it, but you’re there...for some reason you’re doing it, because you’re some crazy person and you want to. And I feel like when you show that to people, then finally...you’re just more of an outgoing person. It breaks down that barrier of trying to be secure and safe—[because] you are secure and safe and you realize that.
It is crucial for LP learners to recognize this safety in order to step outside of initial fear and, as Claudia puts it, continue running the race as they immerse themselves in the language. Because a brief period of anxiety or nervousness plays into this process, Question 3 (how does anxiety or lack thereof relate to LP learner's participation) will be mainly discussed in this section.

In addition to finding a consistent process that LP learners—and in many cases, HP learners—go through as they first enter the French House, my observations and interviews also revealed that there are things that all community members can do to either promote the community of practice and full participation in it or rather hinder its formation. Although the CoP that I personally observed during winter semester was vibrant, thriving, and actively involved all learner levels, I learned through interviews that the French House had a very different dynamic during the preceding semester. To illustrate this contrast, Figure 1 is a rough approximation—constructed based on participants' comments during the interviews—of the CoP layout near the middle of fall semester 2011 whereas Figure 2 represents the CoP as I saw it during winter semester 2012.

![Figure 1. Fall 2011 Diagram](image1)

![Figure 2. Winter 2012 Diagram](image2)
The most obvious contrast between the two semesters is that the CoP was split into two main factions during fall semester and was generally rather scattered whereas winter semester had one, solid community with varying levels of participation. In connection with my research on LP learner progress in the community, I found that because the process towards involvement includes a sense of safety and security, it is important for learners to build connections and learn to resolve conflict within the community. As will be discussed, using English in moderation and incorporating various learner commonalities—such as religious background--can be excellent tools to do so. On the other hand, as often happened during fall semester, failing to resolve conflict or communicate expectations, fostering exclusivity, and giving way to attitudes of superiority (on the part of native speakers or HP learners), can distinctly damage both the sense of safety and the general feeling of community.

The Process of Becoming Legitimate Members

As mentioned in their interviews, most students at the French House—native speakers, HP learners, and LP learners alike—went through a brief initial period of anxiety, uncertainty, or hesitancy towards community participation. For the LP learners, the most important things in surmounting the anxiety and engaging fully in the community were understanding the language, recognizing the role of mistakes, and finding a sense of security, all three of which are linked with a sense of legitimate participation and membership within the CoP. Although the first two are personal aspects of the process towards finding legitimate roles, the sense of security proved to be a full community effort that the resident facilitators (RFs) in particular needed to foster.

Understanding the language Recent research shows that when listening comprehension is lower, willingness to communicate and participate in an L2 setting decreases (Peng, 2012). Thus, before being able or willing to participate on even a small level in the community, the LP
learners need to cross a certain threshold of understanding. During the first few nervous days—and for some of them weeks—understanding what native speakers and even HP learners were saying was a difficult task. Samantha stated that “it takes [her] a while to get used to someone's accent the first few times they speak” and even admitted that she was not sure she ever really understood Marc, a native-speaking RF during fall semester. Claudia explained that Marc “spoke really fast and it was so scary, because [she] never knew what he was saying. And he would slow it down, but he has such an accent that [she] would just be confused.” In most cases, though, as LP learners were exposed to more French during dinner and other activities, they started understanding most community members and felt increasingly capable. In fact, Erik exemplified the importance of understanding others in his own process toward community involvement as follows:

I met my roommate Ryan on the first day and started talking. He talked really fast. And it kind-of motivated me. He sounded like a native speaker to me and I wanted to be just as good as him. And I knew more than I thought I would—understood more than I thought. I could follow conversation reasonably well. But it motivated me to start getting some vocab for sure.

This brief exchange between Erik and Ryan helped Erik recognize that while Ryan spoke quickly and Erik could not understand everything, there was enough Erik could latch on to that he felt motivated to learn and be better—his growing ability to understand also became a tool for him to measure his progress in the language and was an encouragement to increase his participation.

For Paige, understanding was not just an issue of comprehending speech at dinner or in the apartment, but it also came up in other activities, such as church meetings: “At the very beginning of the semester, Adam was doing the [Sunday School] lesson, and he asked me to
read—and it was a long [passage]. And I felt like it took me five minutes to get through it. And at the end I didn’t even know what I’d read, because I was focusing on the pronunciation more than actually understanding it.” Paige contrasted this fall semester experience with winter semester, excitedly stating that,

just two weeks ago, someone asked me to do another long [passage] and I was able to do it very smoothly...and I actually understood what I was reading while I was reading it rather than just reading it for the sake of getting it out there to move on. So that was kind of a happy moment when I realized I could do that.

Within Paige's remarks, there is a tacit indication that HP students were giving her opportunities to fulfill a legitimate role within the community—encouraging her to participate in small ways during Sunday School in order to assist her progress in the language. Beyond that, this moment for Paige exhibits the importance of recognizing progress in the language—and comprehension was a tool for her to do so. As she recognized that she could understand more, speaking the language became less of a chore and the “fun” aspect of speaking French—a crucial piece of the domain—became more of a reality for her. As she embraced the domain more fully, she could participate in the community's practice more completely. In this sense, through this progress of greater linguistic understanding, Paige, Erik, and others moved forward in their linguistic and social progress within the French House community.

**Realizing mistakes are normal** Research has shown that not only do learners prefer to receive error correction rather than be allowed to continue making mistakes, but also that they are less anxious and more willing to participate when they recognize that making mistakes is normal (Young, 1990). For example, when Hannah first moved in, she was overwhelmed by all of the French at dinnertime—in part because she did not know anyone and did not understand
what was going on socially in the conversation. In this way, she hesitated on the outside of the CoP before beginning to participate in a peripheral role. Her fear was amplified by the fact that she did not understand all of the French either. However, as she spoke to more people and listened more closely, she started to feel less intimidated: “I started hearing people make mistakes and then I was like, oh it's fine—no one actually knows what they're talking about.”

When Hannah felt like she might be criticized for her mistakes, she was uncomfortable speaking and even stated that she was momentarily unsure about the decision to move in to the French House. She went through a brief period of fear, but as she recognized that her French was good enough to get by, she was empowered to participate and overcame both linguistic and social fears: “I listened more and I was like, even though I've had less exposure to French, my French is good enough that I can communicate pretty easily what I want to say.” The anxiety level dropped almost instantly, and she was able to start the process of getting to know other members of the community without fear of being mocked.

Paige stated that she felt more secure with mistakes as she recognized not only that many of the other members of her apartment and the House were at a similar level to her, but also that making mistakes was not problematic because of the general attitude towards error correction:

When I realized that everybody else was willing to talk and there was no laughing at each other for saying grammar stuff wrong…and we’re almost all at the same level. So it really was good. But I think even someone who was at a beginning level would feel comfortable at least with the girls we have here. Because we’re not, um…because with these [people], we all understand and we’re all willing to help.

The relaxed and helpful attitude towards error correction and making mistakes was crucial to promoting newcomer progress within the community, a finding which is similar to Young's
(1990) study in which students linked decreased classroom anxiety to a teacher's patient, relaxed attitude towards error correction. Likewise, Claudia laughingly expressed her own attitude towards making mistakes during her second semester by stating, “[Everyone] has already seen me speak like an idiot—it’s gonna be fine; it can’t get any worse than this.” She further explained that because the other LP learners—and in fact most members of the House—had to battle through a period of uncertainty or difficulty during their first semester, they broke down barriers and weren't afraid to make mistakes and even be corrected by their peers.

Interestingly enough, an initial feeling of anxiety toward making mistakes is not just related to LP learners and their involvement in the community. As Horwitz (1996) found, nonnative teachers—who presumably have an advanced level of language proficiency—can struggle with foreign language anxiety and fear of making mistakes. While the French House does not exactly have teachers, the RFs and many of the HP community members are situated in a teaching position as they are charged with the responsibility to assist LP learners in the language. In addition to nonnative speaker anxiety, however, I actually found that even native speakers felt anxious in certain contexts. Charlotte admitted that during fall semester, she was intimidated by one resident’s general condescension, and that when this person was around she would “go into super corrective mode and...would think [she] couldn't speak French.” This also suggests that feelings of anxiety may not be limited to general situations but can actually be localized to communication with specific interlocutors. In a more general sense, however, Élise admitted that prior to moving in, she felt some trepidation:

[I was anxious] because…it’s just the whole [thought of] “I don’t know these people—they’re totally going to judge me.” And I was terrified to find out who the other RFs were for some reason. I felt like maybe I [wouldn't] be as proficient; but it was scary to me....I
think it’s just always like comparing yourself. I think that’s the biggest issue when moving into the FLSR is like my language—am I as good as other people? Are people gonna laugh at me?

Even though both Charlotte and Élise are native speakers, they still felt concerned that they weren't as proficient as they should be. This feeling was magnified with residents who did not exude a positive attitude towards error correction. Fortunately, in Élise's case and in most cases where residents were helpful rather than condescending or negative, it only took a short time for most members to feel comfortable communicating with each other. After all, as Élise stated, “everyone is struggling; everyone is trying.”

**Finding and creating a sense of safety** Even after getting over the initial feelings of anxiety in relation to mistakes, however, LP learners did not fully participate in the community until after finding a more emotional, interaction-related sense of safety. For example, Élise noticed that for a few weeks during fall semester, her roommates seemed to be afraid of her. She remarked that “they’d go hide in their rooms after school and then they’d just talk for a little during dinner, and dinner would be kind of awkward for a little bit.” Claudia and Beth further explained that because they were “so afraid of her,” they tried setting goals to motivate themselves to talk to Élise. Notwithstanding, even this small step on their part still only led to moderate small talk and did not do much to dispel their uncertainty or to assist them in playing a legitimate role in the community. Claudia elaborated by saying, “when you don't speak someone's language [well], in your head you have all these ideas of what they're thinking about you when they're talking to you. So you just feel kind of silly.”
Rather than ignoring the problem and dismissing LP learners for their linguistic or social inadequacies, Élise decided to reach out to her roommates and to all members of the House in order to bring them together socially. Claudia remembers,

[Élise] noticed that we didn't feel connected to the other RFs because they would just sit in their little RF pod. Not even with just RFs, they would lean more toward the people who spoke really well, thinking that they were more outgoing, and then she was like that's not true—you guys were just shy to talk. And it's not that any of them were more outgoing or anything. And so she just for a little while spent a lot of time getting to know individual people. I don't know if she did it on purpose, but it just seemed like she spent time getting to know us individually. And then it was easier for me to feel safe speaking with her.

Because Élise made an effort to connect with people, they were increasingly willing to participate and started forming a CoP more completely. In this way, Élise became an unofficial leader and promoter of the CoP—something which Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) suggest is crucial to a thriving community. Beth stated that the biggest factor in helping her feel comfortable at the French House was becoming friends with Élise: “because then I started speaking French with her a lot more and I just talked to everyone a lot more. And I felt included—like I fit in.” This sense of belonging and bonding with one of the CoP “masters” proved crucial for French House community newcomers in order to encourage even the most basic and peripheral levels of participation.

During my first few observations, I noticed that some of the LP learners—specifically Paige—were hesitant to speak to me. However, as I made an effort to speak to a variety of people, similar to what Élise had done, people began warming up to me and started treating me
like an RF—asking language questions and seeking help with conversations. Once they realized that I was not a spy checking to see how much French everyone was speaking, they welcomed me more readily and spoke to me more freely—in French and in English. Paige explained that when new people came to visit at dinner, she would get nervous and became uncharacteristically quiet. However, if they visited regularly, as I did, and she knew who they were, the nervousness went away and she felt safe addressing them.

As already mentioned, a patient, relaxed attitude to error correction, such as Élise's approach, was also crucial, because Claudia realized that Élise was not irritated by mistakes: “I knew when she was correcting me it wasn't like 'oh, idiot.' But just kind of like: 'let me help you say this the right way.' And I knew she was just correcting me.” Paige also stated, “I really quickly realized that [Élise] was really nice and she was really chill about things...the first day she sat down and said, ‘I'm not here to get you in trouble for not speaking French.’” In fact, Élise stated that she initially felt uncomfortable when she had to remind her roommates to speak French. However, as she and her roommates formed friendships and as she communicated her willingness to help rather than to rule over LP learners, her apartment developed a comfortable atmosphere in which she was more willing to remind them to maintain the language and her roommates accepted her assistance freely.

Élise also encouraged her roommates to be in the living room as much as possible and to avoid spending all of their time in their bedrooms. Once they started doing homework together, they realized they could use each other—particularly Élise—as a resource on their French homework, and were more motivated to step out of their rooms. In the end, Élise's consistent efforts to include LP learners and cheer on their progress were instrumental in creating a tight-knit CoP which attracted most LP learners during fall semester.
Tools to Assist the Process

There are various things the RFs can do to facilitate participation throughout the house. For example, when Ryan became a RF winter semester and Erik and Dave moved in, he made an effort to be available to them and assist them when they wanted help. Charlotte typically likes to sit down with new roommates at the beginning of each semester and discuss rules and expectations. For Élise, helping her roommates participate also meant becoming friends and spending time together—in and out of the House. While specific methods of promoting community are as multifarious as RF personalities, English and religion were important background commonalities that nearly everyone mentioned as factors in building the CoP.

The role of English: Building connections In addition to drawing her roommates out of their rooms and making sure that they felt safe speaking to her and each other in French, Élise began looking for other ways to break down barriers of fear or awkwardness in her own apartment. “I thought about it and I think you need to get to know people better outside of [the House] first. So we all went out and had sushi and spoke English the whole time and then came back and speaking French and getting to know each other was a lot easier that way.” Claudia remembers this experience as a turning point for their apartment: “after that then it was easier to talk and now we're all friends.” Becoming friends was something which arguably would not have happened as quickly in French as it did in English. Taking time to connect in English can bridge the gap between higher and lower proficiency learners, and even though their L2 ability will not change drastically while speaking English, the LP learners will talk more and participate in the community more when they develop a foundational friendship. Claudia added further insight to this by stating that “the more comfortable you feel, the more connected you feel with people, the
more drawn you are to speak a language with them,” and she actually was more inclined to speak French after taking the time to build friendships in English.

According to Charlotte, English has a distinct role in promoting the community, because “it's more important to have a united apartment and just be friends than to just be letter of the law” about not speaking English. She suggested to her roommates that even when in their apartment, if the girls were in their rooms together chatting at night and were trying to connect, they could “switch to English so [they could] connect on a more personal level and become friends.” She also encouraged her roommates to do things outside of the apartment such as going to movies or going shopping and recommended spending that time speaking English. She remarked that as she did that, she also became better friends with them. In contrast, she noticed the opposite effect when only speaking French: “Kaimee wouldn't speak English with me. She just always spoke French. We were roommates and we got along fine, but we didn't become really good friends.”

Although Erik was always a stickler for speaking French as much as possible, he also noticed that switching into English helped transcend some social barriers: “Sometimes if people start speaking English, I don't mind—it's a chance for me to show some personality to get to know people a little bit better.” Likewise, Ryan noticed that he and Dave spoke English to each other more frequently, both in and outside of the House, and they became closer friends as a result.

Paige also discussed a regular English speaking activity that she and her roommates did to connect with each other: “There was this thing we did last semester called the table of truth where we'd sit at the table and ask each other questions, and we had to answer them as honestly as possible. We did that in English... the closer [or more personal] things are in English.” She
explained that for her and her roommates, connecting became a top priority, even though it sometimes came at the expense of practicing French even while at home. “I think it kind of scared us that there might be a time between where there wouldn't be any emotional connection. So I think we chose between the emotional connection and language abilities.” In that light, speaking English can actually be a detriment to the CoP, creating a distinct imbalance; building relationships and community should still be juggled with supporting the practice of speaking and improving French. The effects of Paige’s repeated unwillingness to speak French will be discussed later, but as Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) point out “having a community may create a toxic coziness” which causes members to lose sight of the true CoP domain (p. 144). In the end, while speaking English to build the sense of community is important, French House members have to use caution when choosing not to speak French so as to accomplish the “speaking French” aspect of the domain and so as to avoid abandoning the established purposes of the FLSR.

**The role of English: Resolving conflict** In my observations, it was clear that there were other situations where certain people—or even whole groups of people—would abandon French in favor of English. For example, one night, as I helped one of the groups prepare dinner, Paige had a complete language breakdown. When I arrived about two hours before dinner, Samantha explained to me that cooking might be difficult that night, because everyone in the French House had to prepare for a cleaning check later on. Since the cleaning check included cleaning the oven, two of the four ovens in the House were already on self-clean—a process that would take a couple hours. Because we would be cooking several pans of chicken, Paige started to panic that dinner would never be done in time. At that point, Paige abandoned French and started discussing options in English. Even though I maintained French myself, and Samantha and I
discussed possibilities which lead to solutions, Paige continued to speak English for most of the
two hours we prepared the meal. As I asked Paige to explain the decision to choose English over
French even while in the French House, she stated that “if I'm super stressed about something,
like having a bad day or something, you know—I just don't want to worry about [French] at that
time.” Samantha further elaborated, “if we're talking about something really serious that needs
to be understood, we'll often speak in English for that.” These statements coincide with Bown,
Dewey, Martinsen, and Baker's (2011) previous study on FLH, which suggested that although the
main goal of the FLSR is to give students the opportunity to immerse themselves in their
language, speaking the L2 was not always the highest priority of the students themselves.

Both Élise and Claudia contrasted the sense of unity and even purpose in their apartment
with Charlotte's apartment, feeling that “it was a little difficult for [the other girls]” to feel at ease
and to help each other during fall semester. Claudia observed,

our apartment was doing well—and if there ever were any problems in our apartment, we
fixed them. We would talk to each other. And if there was a problem, we would talk to
each other in English just to make sure everything was clear. But I just always felt tension
with [Charlotte’s apartment].

Charlotte also noticed that Élise's apartment was “comfortable talking to each other and
bringing up problems,” which was largely done in English. She contrasted the unity Élise's
apartment created with her own more “individualistic” apartment during fall semester, and
admitted that even though she feels speaking English is important to building friendships, she
rarely took the opportunity to use English during fall semester. However, she and Ryan both felt
like the girls in Élise's apartment went too far in using English and paid a price for what was
termed the girls' unwillingness to speak more frequently in French. Charlotte remarked that there
was not “a lot of improvement in their French” and Ryan stated that “they're really hurting themselves” by not taking advantage of the linguistic opportunity. Once again, while using English can be a fantastic tool to resolve immediate conflict and is essential to creating deeper connections, each apartment—and the entire House—has to find an appropriate balance between English and French, or in other words, an appropriate balance between the community needs and the goal of practicing French.

**Religious background: Sunday School** Each Sunday morning, all of the language houses at the FLSR gather together for the standard three-hour LDS worship services. While two of the hours are conducted in English so as to unify all of the students living in the FLSR, the languages each divide into their own respective houses for one hour of Sunday School. This class is always conducted in the language of each house, and is a forum to discuss LDS scripture. As such, Sunday School is a useful tool to promote the community, because it mirrors language class instruction in several ways: students are reading aloud, giving opinions, looking for key words and concepts in the text, listening to each other, and at times discussing ideas or concepts with a partner. Regardless, because it is a class that most of these students have had their entire lives, it does not carry the feeling of a regular school class, and it certainly lacks the pressure of a grade. Claudia explained that Sunday School “is an opportunity to take initiative and speak out and learn together, read the scriptures together, be spiritual together.” Further, as Hannah mentioned, “the Gospel's such a huge part of [BYU student] life, [that] it's not fun to have an entire vocabulary chunk missing.” Along those lines, Sunday School becomes an opportunity for students who know the required vocabulary and are equipped with the linguistic tools and experience to discuss the accompanying concepts to pull the LP learners into the community as Gospel discussion apprentices.
When I observed the Sunday School class, the first thing I noticed, as the lesson got started and the students waited expectantly with their French language scriptures in their laps, is that the level of the lesson was very simple. It was immediately clear that while a typical LDS adult Sunday School class is often a colloquium of complex ideas and an exploration of doctrinal applications to life, this French foray into that world was, of necessity, more preparatory than profound. We read short scripture passages, used colorful markers to make lists of related words, and listened to short life applications from various students. As I asked them later to express their thoughts on Sunday School, multiple members of the community commented on how Élise's approach to teaching effectively “gets people involved and also connects to the lower levels of French.” Rather than having abstract discussions on deep topics, Élise used pictures, crafts, and a variety of small activities like drawing pictures to represent stories and doctrines to help the LP learners gain new vocabulary. Hannah expressed that “[Élise] breaks it down really simply, which is so nice, because so many vocabulary words in the scriptures, I don't understand. So then you really understand by the time Élise is done.” In the end, as Charlotte remarked, it was fascinating to recognize that an effective Sunday School class in the French House is “very basic, and that's how it needs to stay” in order to be a learning tool for the LP members of the community.

Another way that Sunday School promotes a pattern of apprenticeship is that it provides a chance for all learners to perform as individuals in front of their peers, who may then assist them to improve. Research has shown that when students feel more exposed in front of their peers, they are more prone to feeling anxiety (Young, 1990). In spite of this finding, however, the typical Sunday School tasks which require individual exposure, such as praying, commenting, and baring testimony, actually grant peripheral community members the opportunity to
participate in a legitimate way. Élise explained that she made an effort to ask different people each week to offer the prayer and would also try to include everyone by asking individuals to answer questions rather than waiting for someone to volunteer information. In this way, even though Hannah and Paige both expressed initial anxiety towards praying in front of others, they and other LP learners gradually became more adept at performing these tasks and, as such, felt decreasing anxiety about them. Paige recounted one such experience towards the middle of winter semester which displays her changing attitude towards baring testimony, another activity which was initially hard for her, in front of her peers:

They just a couple weeks ago asked me to bare my testimony and I could actually do it. I mean, I’m not perfect—I did have to ask a couple of times like how you say something, but it wasn’t bad….It was in Sunday school and we had like five minutes left over, and because I’d just received my mission call, I think they wanted to hear from somebody. And I didn’t want to say no, because I had just received my mission call, so I was nervous, but it really wasn’t [bad]…like I said, there were a couple times where I had to ask what vocabulary was, but I just…most of it was pretty easy.

Not only was this experience a triumph for Paige, who had a habit of not speaking in French regularly, but it gave her the chance to frequently ask for words from experienced community members. Particularly because Paige will be baring testimony regularly as a missionary, those who had already completed their missions were ready to pass along their knowledge and help her prepare. Her feelings of nervousness support Young's findings about anxiety in cases of exposure, but the structure of a positive CoP and the knowledge that her peers viewed her as a legitimate member of the community helped Paige perform the task well.
Religious background: Devotionals In addition to holding weekly Sunday School classes in French, each apartment was asked to hold nightly “devotionals”—a short roommate gathering where a scripture passage is shared and someone offers a prayer. While this type of meeting is not necessarily a standard occurrence in the LDS faith, it is common for BYU students to gather roommates together each evening and at least pray together before going to bed. Because these devotionals are less formal than Sunday School, they prove a perfect chance for LP learners to feel empowered in the learning process and engage in discussion and even training in a low-stakes setting.

Paige explained that her apartment would hold their devotionals at least two times a week and all of the girls read a short verse of scripture aloud. As they did that progressively throughout the two semesters, she went from feeling like she could not comfortably read aloud to being able to both read and understand longer passages as she read them. It went from being a painstaking chore to being something that she could identify as a success. Further, Paige admitted that she “detested” praying in French before living at the French House, but as she did it more with her roommates, it was not an issue at all.

For Charlotte's apartment, the devotional gave Samantha a sense of purpose, because Charlotte assigned her to gather the roommates together every evening. During my first visit at the House, Samantha proudly informed me that they had devotionals at precisely 9:00 each night and I was welcome to come. Charlotte’s willingness to share leadership roles was essential in helping Samantha find a legitimate role in the CoP. Having a sense of responsibility made life at the French House a very positive experience for Samantha, and it actually brought her roommates together in a fantastic learning and sharing environment. Charlotte admitted that sometimes they “all hated doing it,” because it forced them to put aside homework or other tasks
for a few minutes. However, she also expressed how the chore became a positive bonding and linguistic experience:

Even though each time we came in we were like this is so annoying, by the end after the prayer, we were like—yay this is so good! It's a good thing that we did it. So I think that was a huge helper to all our relationships that we read the scriptures together as a group so they'd all speak French together.

In fact, prioritizing the devotional time during winter semester was one of the things which helped Charlotte's apartment feel less like a group of individuals and more like a community where they could ask questions, share ideas, help with the language, and learn together.

**Roadblocks and Barriers**

One of the first things I noticed about the dinner hour during winter semester was that there was not a sense of tension or any lack of conversation. The LP learners were busily chatting, the HP learners and native speakers were sharing jokes and having a good time—it was immediately clear that most people felt at ease being in the House. And while HP learners lead conversations and discussions the most, LP learners were treated as a legitimate part of the community. However, after talking to several higher and lower proficiency community members, I discovered that the feeling of camaraderie had not only taken time to develop, but that there were also some issues which caused factions within the community and diminished legitimate peripheral participation during fall semester. The most notable factors which I have chosen to discuss were the attitudes of HP learners, unresolved conflicts, unequal expectations, and exclusivity between proficiency levels.

**Attitudes of superiority** The RFs have to create an environment where the learners feel safe and validated, because if learners feel uncomfortable with each other, then they will not talk.
As such, they aren't practicing the language, and they aren't becoming part of the French House community—and in fact, without talking and general participation, there is no community. For example, Claudia, Paige, and Beth all commented on negative interactions with Marc, and discussed how this impacted their involvement when he was around.

One of Marc's responsibilities during fall semester was to conduct a conversation class for anyone in the French House who wanted extra practice. The idea of the class was to discuss current events, learn appropriate vocabulary, and equip learners with skills to more adequately discuss their opinions. As everyone living in the French House had at least taken through French 201, there were no additional prerequisites for the class, and students of various proficiency levels enrolled: Ryan, Lisa, Beth, Adam, and Claudia. Concerning Marc’s attitude, Claudia and Beth both reported they felt uncomfortable during the class. Claudia stated,

[Marc] was just kind of condescending and [there was] a harsh environment around him. So even while in his class, I struggled speaking....And I didn't really talk to the guys, because I think I was just so afraid of Marc that I just would not talk to the guys.

For Beth, whom everyone I interviewed described as shy or timid even in English, there was a small confrontation with Marc: “he was really intense about [the class]...and he told me if you don't talk more, I'm going to tell the faculty supervisor. I think he was kidding, but it was scary. That just made me want to talk less.” Beth went on to state that she feels like the French House environment should be fun, and that Marc's joking threat to turn her in seemed both unfair and contrary to the purpose of the House: having fun while helping each other learn and practice French. Several of the LP learners felt like Marc was too prone to dismissing newcomers to the language, and they portrayed him as unable to grasp the domain of the community as most other members saw it. As a result, some community members felt that his actions displayed a tendency
to “hoard power” (see Wenger et. al, 2002) and they perceived him as intimidating and unwilling to assist LP entry into the community. In fact, both Claudia and Beth said they did not want to speak to him or people closely associated with him because they felt uncomfortable when he was around. In this way, their progress within the community was not only impeded by their perception of Marc's attitude but by their own shrinking willingness to participate.

While Paige was not enrolled in the conversation class, she also discussed how she felt around Marc at dinner time and in other situations:

[Marc] kind of went out of his way to make you feel like you weren't doing well. He'd like purposely speak really fast and mumble so you'd have to ask “what?” a lot of times. And I thought it was just me, and I thought “oh my gosh, I'm not keeping up.” But the better French speakers were like, “no, he's doing it on purpose.” So I was like, that's not really beneficial to the whole point of being here. So that made me kind of nervous.

Charlotte related a conversation she’d had with Marc in which he seemed to think it was funny to use complicated words just to see if people would ask for clarification. She cited a specific illustration of this where Samantha was trying to understand him and was actually asking for clarification, but Marc just gave up on her and walked away rather than explaining. This depiction of Marc’s actions is a perfect example of dogmatism which Wenger et. al (2002) define as hoarding power and using complicated jargon with the intent of excluding others—a problem which the authors identify as a serious threat to a CoP. Charlotte summed up her opinion of Marc's attitude by stating, “he just had a gift with making people feel dumb.” While I do not know all the details on Marc's motivation to speak quickly, use big words, or “mumble,” the fact that multiple community members felt like he was intentionally making things difficult for LP learners created a barrier between him and most of the House.
In fairness to Marc, Ryan provided an alternate explanation for Marc's interaction with the rest of the house:

[Marc] has that French argumentative side, and he couldn't understand...like, I had a conversation with him where he kind of came to the realization, and I guess I kind of did too [that]...if I'm American and I respect your opinion, then I will respect it enough to not try to pick it apart, because...I think it's solid and it doesn't need to be attacked. A French person says that if I respect your opinion...it’s worthy of entering into a debate and debating it. So both sides offend the other one. So he was like, “No one will talk with me.” And I think the way he was interpreting that was no one respects [his] opinion enough to discuss it.

It is interesting to see from this anecdote that Marc noticed the barrier and, according to Ryan, was hurt by it. Unfortunately, it appears he never transcended it, and Ryan pointed out that even the HP learners did not always enjoy being around or talking to Marc. He further explained that the difference between Marc and Élise or Charlotte is that the girls had been more Americanized “so, even if they have their own culture, they are comfortable acting in another one [whereas] Marc is not that way.” This culture clash could point to reasons why Marc appeared power hungry and unwilling to validate LP learners and community newcomers.

Any way the situation is presented, it is clear that Marc and the LP learners of the House were unable to understand each other—sometimes linguistically, but most notably on a social level. In addition to this misunderstanding, his perceived condescension created a sense of competition which Lisa, another fall semester resident, appeared to adopt towards her roommates. Charlotte stated that Lisa felt her French was better than Charlotte's—even though Charlotte is a native speaker—and so Lisa was “cold” and refused to speak to anyone. These
attitudes of superiority and perceived power resulted in distinct factions within the House during fall semester. Most specifically, Élise's apartment kept to themselves, Marc and Lisa preferred to be alone, and the other House members were left to fit in wherever they could.

**Exclusivity** Although my first two observations at the French House revealed that certain people often preferred to sit next to and talk with each other during dinner, it was clear after only three visits that the groups weren't static, and no one was being excluded in a general way. Granted, their willingness to involve everyone could have been related to my presence during the dinner hour, but as I was such a frequent visitor and formed friendships with most of the residents, I think it is unlikely that their welcoming attitudes were just a front. Ryan, Jon, Élise, and Charlotte—as the highest proficiency speakers—did tend to gravitate towards each other, but they also regularly changed seats and did not mind if LP learners joined in their conversation. It was clear that the HP community members and the native speakers recognized the LP learners and any HP community newcomers during winter semester (such as Mary) as legitimate members. Paige further remarked on the sense of unity and community in the House, stating,

I feel like we're all just one big apartment....Like I really consider them almost like a family, because I'm comfortable around them. We don't even have to ask before we steal dishes and stuff from them. As long as it stays within the French house it's okay. I just feel really comfortable around the guys too—it's just like a big French family.

However, she also mentioned that the sense of family hadn't always been quite so strong: “Last semester was a little stressed with [Charlotte's] apartment because there were three girls, [Paula, Lisa, and Amber], that just weren't involved.”

Samantha, who shared a room with Lisa fall semester, elaborated on the lack of involvement in her apartment, saying she didn’t have a strong friendship with Lisa, because she
preferred to associate with Paula and Marc. Claudia also noticed that “Marc, [Lisa], and Paula would stick together” during dinner without making an effort to include LP learners. This small group essentially situated themselves at the core of their own community, sharing knowledge internally rather than assisting newcomers to participate in legitimate ways.

Ryan also tended to prefer sitting with Marc, Lisa, and Paula during fall semester, explaining that he initially felt frustrated that most of the girls in the House did not have a high level of French. Because he was bored with small talk and wanted to practice French on a more abstract level rather than suffer through LP stumblings, he gravitated towards those who seemed more capable, noticing that “very quickly there started to be a polarity between people who spoke [well] and people who didn't.” He also admitted that while Sunday School classes were intended to be simple and usually allowed the LP learners to contribute to the community in a small yet distinct way, they sometimes became another occasion where LP learners were excluded: “For the advanced French speakers, we don't [always] want to use [Sunday School] to explain French—we want to be edified, and so we explain less what we're talking about. So I'd say that kind of increases the barrier.” Although Élise's teaching method ensured that LP learners were regularly involved, Élise was not the only Sunday School teacher at the French House. When I observed the group Sunday School class, I noticed that the other teacher, who was not living in French House at that time, had a method of asking questions and waiting for students to volunteer information rather than calling on and actively engaging a variety of individuals. This opened the door for HP learners to appropriate the lesson topic and steer away from the preferably basic level. And by increasing the barrier to LP learner's participation in community activities, the HP learners who preferred to maintain their own group and disliked simplifying their conversations actually fractured the rest of the community.
Unresolved conflict In addition to general attitudes, there were a few situations where lifestyles clashed and created a different kind of barrier—one which was unrelated to proficiency level or position in the community. These moments, if ignored rather than resolved, drove wedges between certain members of the House. Ryan explains that cultural barriers...are what caused a lot of problems to make it so that a lot of people didn't actually want to be at the French House [fall semester]. [They] didn't want to be home, because they had fewer good memories of being at home because it was tense and awkward and like walking on egg shells.

He stated that during fall semester, he and his roommates tended to avoid being at home whenever possible, and that because they specifically felt uncomfortable around a few select individuals following some sociocultural disagreements, they never went out and did things as a group: “it's also kind of awkward to say, 'Hey, guys! Let's go to a movie!' If you don't want to invite [certain people].”

While Élise did not elaborate on the social conflicts herself, Claudia remembers that, “[Élise] was frustrated with some of the things [Marc] did...it was just a mess, and she would get really frustrated.” And while Élise and Marc were “decent” toward each other, her frustration towards him caused a further rift between her apartment and his. Ryan remarked that Élise's apartment isolated themselves as a result, in many ways creating their own insular CoP, and then everyone else escaped the House after dinner.

Charlotte recounted a specific incident that, because of the lack of complete resolution, brought an end to her previous friendship with Marc. Following some confusion related to grocery shopping, the two RFs had a tense argument, and Charlotte explained that afterward, “[she] didn’t want to talk to him. [She] talked to him on a professional level and [they] stayed
cool and distant” but Charlotte didn’t feel Marc had a right to treat her poorly and still be considered a friend. Charlotte and others further expressed that owing to myriad misunderstandings and the building tension between the RFs and several other community members, the atmosphere of the French House did not start to become comfortable again for a couple months. And without a sense of unity and commitment to each other, there ceased to be a cohesive CoP.

Conflict, of course, was not exclusive to fall semester nor was it localized to any one individual or group of individuals. Claudia mentioned that while her apartment got along really well and developed an attitude of helping each other, they still ran into disagreements and problems. The difference, however, is that whenever they had problems, they would discuss them together and fix them, thereby maintaining a sense of community. In contrast to this approach of resolution, though, Claudia discussed her relationship with Paula, a HP speaker from Charlotte's apartment:

Me and Paula had been friends in the beginning, but a couple personal things happened where...she would ask me for rides and be nice to me and then she'd be [rude] to me, and I felt used. So I didn't like that. Every time I communicated with Paula was always awkward. So it wasn't a French thing—because when we were friends, I didn't mind speaking to her in French. But [after the disagreement], even in English, it was like we didn't have anything to say to each other.

Claudia never got to a point where the conflict was resolved with Paula. As a result, their friendship was essentially severed, and Claudia was unable to use Paula as a resource for her French.
In an interesting turn of events, Marc, Lisa, and Paula all left by the end of fall semester: the first two having gotten married and Paula leaving for scheduling and perhaps other reasons which will be discussed later on. As a result, Claudia, Beth, Samantha, and Paige all remarked that winter semester was strikingly different from the fall. Claudia even felt that “the dynamics of the French House changed completely,” because the center points of unresolved conflict and tension left, thereby resolving the issues by default. Further, because four new members moved into the House during winter semester, they freshened the atmosphere and infused a new perspective into the community by “not being overly caught up in the thicket of internal relationships” (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, pg. 145).

Unequal expectations In some cases, the unresolved conflicts stemmed from differing ideas of French House requirements. Although there was never any specific training on French House rules beyond the importance of speaking the language and coming to the dinner hour, there were certain assumed expectations in relation to dinner that were unequally formed throughout the house, specifically because two residents had certain dietary needs. Although one of these residents left after fall semester and the ensuing conflict dissipated, the other student remained—allowing me to see how the conflict reached a peak and eventually a moderate resolution. Claudia explained her perspective on the conflict as follows:

We were told that the [girls with dietary needs]...were using money to buy food at Macey's and they were making their own food. [But] they never went with us to buy meals, and they never made their own food. And I guess a couple girls in their apartment started making meals more geared toward them, and they started expecting it, even though at the beginning of the semester, I was like, “I'm sorry, I didn't know that we were
supposed to make food for you.” And they told me specifically, “oh no—we're making our own food.” But then they got offended.

Charlotte further explained the issue as related to the girl who stayed for both semesters, stating that she initially had no problem picking things out of her food and did not expect anyone to cater to her. However, by the end of fall semester, she no longer wanted food that didn’t already fit her requirements and she had developed an expectation that at least something—even if it were only a can of soup—would be provided for her.

In fairness, Charlotte pointed out that while this student was particular about not having her food mixed contrary to her dietary needs, she was not picky about what was provided for her to eat. When I offered to cook a meal during my winter semester observations, Charlotte simply asked me to make sure there would be something set aside for this student, and while helping Claudia make dinner one afternoon, I noticed that she conscientiously made a small dish that would also fit these specifications. Neither of us felt like altering the recipe or adapting our plan was a severe hardship. However, the problem lay in the particular student’s expecting something that other members of the house did not feel obligated, or often forgot, to provide. Beth related a specific experience that caused a distinct rift between the two girls:

Just a few weeks ago, I made dinner and I didn't make a special part, and I got yelled at by the [girl with dietary needs], and I just didn't say anything. So I just asked the RF to make sure it was the official policy that you didn't have to—and I was right. And I think [the faculty coordinator], might have talked to her even. But if it would have been said nicely, I would have been fine with it. But it was kind of like she feels like it is expected that it's done, but it's not the official policy.
From Charlotte's perspective, Beth was wrong for not making an effort to adjust her recipe, but for Beth the experience was frustrating and divisive because she felt attacked when she considered herself to be in the right. Fortunately, this episode between the girls was resolved when the faculty coordinator approached various members of the House and worked to fix incorrect assumptions and expectations.

**Conclusion**

As is already established in Lave and Wenger’s (1991) explanation of legitimate peripheral participation, newcomers become part of a CoP by participating in small tasks within a community and by slowly taking on more important and perhaps difficult responsibilities over time. In the French House community, the linguistic and social newcomers were able to move through this process as they improved in listening comprehension, recognized they could take risks in speaking without fear of mistakes being mocked, and as they formed social ties that encouraged them to participate more fully in the community. However, if internal community leadership fails to allow newcomers to participate in legitimate ways, this process is interrupted and the entire community fractures or stagnates, as happened during fall semester. In this way, the process for LP learners to enter the French House community involved both their own improving understanding and social interactions as well as the willingness of HP learners and native speakers—the “masters” of the community—to incorporate these linguistic apprentices in their own activities and practices.
Question 2: How Does Language Proficiency Affect the Level of Involvement in the Community of Practice?

Levels of participation and community involvement proved to be even more varied than I had initially anticipated. However, as the issue of participation during fall semester was related to a variety of factors—such as the attitudes discussed previously—the issue of language proficiency and its connection to community involvement was much more transparent during winter semester.

Figure 2. Winter 2012 Diagram

When the problems which have been discussed were essentially absent during winter semester, a cohesive community formed which revealed more clearly which participants were fully involved and which were less engaged. In the end, however, language proficiency did not appear to be a factor in community involvement at all. In fact, as seen in the CoP diagram for winter semester (Figure 2), the community members who could most accurately be considered at the social core spanned several proficiency levels: Élise, Dave, Samantha, Claudia, and Ryan to name a few. However, when considering involvement in the community, engaging socially is not the only description. Meeting the purpose of the French House by continual efforts to speak French and help others maintain and improve the language is also a crucial factor in becoming part of the community. In this case, Paige was essentially the only community member who did not participate as regularly, which
situated her more on the community boundary than she otherwise would have been. However, in relation to both social and linguistic involvement, there were definite patterns of what contributed to a learner's level of participation: in addition to the key factor of security and safety which has already been discussed at length, personality and attitude, willingness to communicate, and outside schedules were frequently linked to community involvement.

**Personality**

Although there are myriad ways of discussing and analyzing personality and how it affects learning and interpersonal interaction, I have chosen to discuss this variable in terms of the “Big Five” framework of traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion/introversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism/emotional stability (McCrae, Costa, & Martin, 2005). This framework is used as a personality inventory, placing people on a scale within each trait, and was originally created based on thousands of personality adjectives which were grouped into these five categories. For example, high scorers in the “agreeableness” category would be described as likeable, friendly, forgiving, etc. whereas low scorers in the same trait would be described as cold, critical, rude, etc. (Dörnyei, 2005). I find that this framework lends itself perfectly to the various labels community members used to describe each other and themselves during our interviews.

**Traits which promoted involvement** Paige, Élise, and Charlotte referred to the “open” and “social” personalities (adjectives in the extraversion category) of most community members during winter semester—with Élise actually drawing a small comparison with the group during fall semester: “I think the people that moved in this semester are a lot more open. Just the new guys that we have and the new girls we have are a lot more open than even some people who are still here, so they’re a lot more open and enthusiastic.” She went on to explain that because of the
change, she noticed more enthusiasm to participate throughout the entire House. Charlotte further elaborated that “different personalities just create different dynamics” in the community and pointed to Hannah and Mary's “bright,” “nice” and “fun” attitudes—all adjectives associated with agreeableness—in direct contrast to some of the negativity which had existed in her own apartment during fall semester. For Paige, this openness is directly linked to feeling comfortable and being able to talk about a variety of subjects with her roommates—in other words, to engage more fully in the social scene of the community.

Claudia further explained that because new members of the community during winter semester were more agreeable and had “the kind of personality where they want to help and want to get to know [everyone],” they entered the community smoothly and even assisted her and other LP learners to be more involved. Paige also suggested that a willingness to help others was essential to her apartment's unity and involvement, and Élise specifically explained her own personality in that regard: “I think it’s exciting to be helping people with the language and it’s fun to see them making progress, because they definitely do make progress. So to me it makes me happy—to interact with them and compliment them.” Élise's positive perspective was not only important in making LP learners feel comfortable, but it was instrumental in her own full participation—in contrast to Marc's more critical attitude of coming down on mistakes rather than helping others to learn.

Of course, being agreeable and willing to help others was only one side of the equation: Charlotte and Claudia also mentioned the importance of all learner levels being willing to learn and be corrected. In reference to Hannah and Samantha, Charlotte explained,

They take corrections really well, and they look for them. And so I think that it's just their attitude—that they wanted to improve was a huge help....We were reading scriptures last
night and Hannah was there and was like, “How do I say this word?” So I'd help her out and correct her—it's just their attitude—it was a big thing.

Similar to Hannah's willingness to seek help, Claudia explained her own attitude towards correction: “when I'm trying to learn—when I'm in that mind-set of I'm here to learn—then I don't get bothered [by people correcting me].” These open traits of wanting to learn and accepting correction, reflecting a degree of emotional stability and lack of neuroticism or trait anxiety, impacted community involvement much more directly than proficiency level. And community members who were able to pair this stability with general agreeableness, a degree of extraversion, and overall openness were much more involved in the community than members who did not exhibit these traits.

**Traits which deterred participation** Beyond the negative and condescending attitudes during fall semester which were already discussed, introversion, mainly identified as shyness, was also a deterrent to social involvement in the community. Élise remarked that “people in [her] apartment are shy...until you get to know them really well,” and Claudia specifically identified Beth as the truly shy member of the community—a trait which Beth herself admitted to. Claudia stated that Beth's shyness prevented her from opening up and that most people viewed her as “quiet.” During my observations, I initially identified Beth as aloof from the rest of the community and thought she was lacking linguistic ability because she was frequently a silent observer during dinner conversations. However, after Claudia mentioned that Beth had recently received an advanced-mid OPI rating, I began to recognize that she is just naturally quieter and less inclined to speak with others.

More so than Beth, the person who was least engaged in the social aspect of the community was Adam. During my dinner and other observations, Adam rarely if ever joined in
even small conversations. In fact, he would often bring a book or a French-English dictionary with him to dinner and would spend the entire hour reading silently to himself rather than chatting with the rest of the group. On the rare occasion that he forgot a book or something to do, he sat and silently observed, admitting to me that he was bored with the obligation to stay for an entire hour. When I came early to help prepare dinner with his cooking group, he participated in some casual conversation—enough for me to determine that his proficiency is roughly at the advanced-mid level—but he still held himself apart from the group. On my last dinner visit as the rest of the French House pulled out a board game to play after they finished eating, he simply went over to a nearby chalkboard in the room and occupied himself with drawing during the rest of the hour. As I was unable to interview him, I do not know all the reasons for his reticence, but it was definitely not attributable to a lower proficiency level—he simply seemed to have a proclivity to being alone. Although research has shown that introverts tend to score better in certain measures of L2 proficiency (Busch, 1982), when learning is taking place in a situated, social setting, introverts may be at a disadvantage. At the least, my research shows that in the case of two introverts, Beth and Adam, their preference for alone time often prevented them from engaging fully in the CoP.

In addition to introverted students, Ryan, who was often at the hub of the community both linguistically and socially, related a story about two other community members, Kaimee and Seth, who did not join the core group:

one comment they both kind of said in a conversation between the three of us was “whenever I get with a group of people, I'm always the outsider.” And so I was like, “Well I'll be your friend!”...And then as I got to know them, it was like: I know why
you're the outsiders...you're really hard to hang out with for different personality traits in each of [you]...and it made me not want to hang out with them....I can't handle it.

Charlotte explained that “it took [her] a long time to get used to Kaimee,” because they just had very different personalities and approaches to life. The end result was that while Kaimee was almost always present during dinner and other House activities, she was usually at the periphery of the community—a fact which I also noticed about Seth. The specific personality traits that separated Kaimee and Seth from the rest of the community were not mentioned, but whatever they were, they were unable to slide into the personality of the entire group. And while I will avoid making an argument for the benefits of homogeneous personalities, if people have strong personality traits which alienate others—or indeed, themselves—it appears to be a deterrent to their involvement in the community.

In terms of linguistic participation, while I found that it is important to allot some time to speaking English—ideally outside of the House—there was a distinct disruption in the community when certain members, most notably Paige, exhibited a lack of conscientiousness by slipping too glibly into English. Ryan explained that for the most part, “laziness is really the reason people jump into English,” rather than absolute necessity. Paige herself validated this statement, admitting, “I think it's that I'm kind of lazy. I kind of even predicted it before I moved in here. I said, oh, I hope I'm not...the one that messes it up for everyone else.” And while Paige did not “mess it up” for everyone else, her nonchalance towards the issue—an unfortunate trait in this situation—did bother other community members. Specifically, Ryan repeatedly expressed his irritation with Paige's “unwillingness” to stay in French, and during one dinner observation, I heard Adam mildly chastise Paige for always breaking into English.
Conclusion In summary, when members of a CoP would score high in traits of extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability, they are likely to be very involved in the community regardless of their proficiency level. On the other hand, if they tend to be more introverted and lack conscientiousness and agreeableness, they will generally remain on the outer boundaries of community activities.

Willingness to Communicate

McCroskey and Baer (1985) present the concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) as a person's predisposition to communicate in a variety of situations, an idea which has more recently been adapted to communicating in the L2 and was thereby given a situational context in addition to its original construct as a personality trait (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998). As such, its specific link to L2 situations merits separate discussion from personality.

Among a variety of other variables which MacIntyre et al (1998) arrange as a pyramid ultimately leading to communication, WTC relies on perceived communicative competence combined with communication anxiety. In this sense, the variable of foreign language anxiety is essentially related to WTC, and in cases where this anxiety is present, WTC will be lower. However, the fact that perceived rather than actual competence or proficiency influence WTC indicates that participation and willingness to participate within the community are more an issue of psychological differences rather than differences in ability—an idea born out by my finding that proficiency level and participation aren’t related. To further illustrate this point, Hannah, who was roughly at an intermediate-high proficiency level, expressed that although she didn’t know how to say everything she might want to in French, she still felt like she was competent enough to participate fully in any conversation. This serves as a contrast to Beth, an advanced-mid speaker, who was often very quiet when in groups of more than two people. As already
mentioned, Beth admitted that she is generally shy and less inclined to join large group conversations. Interestingly, however, she further explained that speaking in another language—even though she confirmed a sense of confidence in her French proficiency—often made her even more shy and less involved than otherwise. In this case, perceived and actual competence were only small factors in Beth’s WTC. Charlotte expressed her belief that “as [students] improve in their French, they're more willing to talk,” but at least in Beth's case, WTC was more related to inherent communication anxiety. However, whenever Beth did make the effort to communicate and be involved, she at least maintained the language and contributed to the community linguistically.

Both Ryan and Hannah, who regularly exhibited their own WTC by leading or actively participating in dinner conversations, expressed frustration that certain people in the community either would not or simply did not speak French regularly. For Paige, although she described herself as a very open and social person, side-stepping French was a normal thing and she often opted to just communicate her ideas in English. As discussed earlier, she felt that trading emotional connection with her roommates for linguistic improvement was a sacrifice she was not ready to make. She explained that she “sometimes can't quite...get the emotion across that [she's] feeling in French just because [she's] not used to speaking in French.” She went on to say that she sometimes felt “dumb” speaking to her roommates and other community members in French, because she knew that they could all speak English. This feeling is similar to Léger and Storch’s (2009) finding that some L2 speakers are less willing to communicate when they share the same L1 as their interlocutors. Such students feel that speaking the L2 is artificial in this context and feel uncomfortable trying to maintain it. For Paige, rather than speak more French and battle through the sense of artificiality, she err'd on the side of communicating her emotions in the
easiest, most comfortable way possible. In the end, her WTC in a general way overpowered her WTC in the L2, and her involvement in the community domain (i.e. having fun with friends while speaking French) was negatively impacted. Oddly enough, however, Paige demonstrated her knowledge of and belief in the community domain by expressing that having a good experience in the French House is dependent on “being willing to talk and practice.” However, understanding the community domain does not necessarily cultivate investment in it.

In contrast to Paige’s feeling that speaking French resulted in artificial situations, Hannah actually hinted that speaking French allows her to express herself more freely. She stated that because she has a smaller vocabulary in French, she tended to be more “frank” and was often surprised by how much she said in French whereas she would have remained silent in English. Similar to the idea of artificiality while speaking the L2, Hannah explained that when she speaks French, “it’s almost like playing pretend.” However, rather than the “imaginary” world of the French House impeding her WTC in the language, it actually liberated her to speak more frequently. This finding opens the door to future research on WTC in FLH as it would be instructive to examine the role of personality types and L2 WTC within a community.

**Outside Schedules**

In relation to schedules outside of the FLSR, “busy” was definitely the buzzword, being used ten times during various interviews to explain differing levels of social involvement in the community. Élise mentioned that busyness prevented her apartment from doing devotionals more frequently and Charlotte, Samantha, Beth, Erik, and Hannah all stated that being occupied with work and homework kept them from participating in more activities. Hannah specifically explained how busyness can have a negative impact on the FLSR experience: “It just depends on the day, really, how effective living in the FLSR is. Because if I'm super busy, I just shut myself
in my room and do my homework, so that's not very helpful.” Interestingly, Paige even suggested that RFs or HP learners did not assist LP learners with their French as frequently or offer corrections as readily because “they're just busy doing homework or cleaning or whatever.” And Charlotte stated that part of the problem with Marc during fall semester is that “he got super busy and didn't want to do any of his RF duties.”

On the other hand, just as outside obligations can impact community involvement, living at the FLSR can also impact outside schedules. On their preliminary questionnaires, Samantha stated that living at the FLSR could be “time consuming,” Kevin pointed out that “it's a long time commitment,” Catherine suggested it is only good for those “with enough time,” and Seth explained that “it can be hard to balance FLSR rules [i.e. coming to dinner every night] with a busy schedule.” In the end, living at the FLSR is a constant process of balancing priorities with some people choosing to emphasize community involvement whereas others chose to focus on work, school, or external social interaction.

While most members of the House continued to fight the scheduling battle, others chose to leave the FLSR entirely. Claudia explained that one of the main reasons Paula and Amber decided to move out of the house after fall semester was that they were both so busy with work and school that they were only involved on a minimal level. Charlotte clarified that Amber “was working every night until midnight right after dinner. And then she had class at 9 a.m., so we barely ever saw her.”

Conclusion

Because language proficiency was not directly related to participation in the French House CoP, this study accomplishes one of its intended purposes by opening the door to further research into the reasons behind various levels of participation in FLH. The data collected for
this study indicate that inherent personality, WTC, and even banal factors like personal schedules are important components in helping or hindering legitimate peripheral participation within a strong CoP.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

As is often the case with qualitative research, there are numerous conclusions which can be drawn from the collected data. In a further elaboration on my initial research questions about the process for LP learners entering the community, the impact of proficiency on involvement, and the role of foreign language anxiety in the French House, three of the most important findings of the study were (1) the crucial role of RFs and HP learners in facilitating LP learner involvement, (2) the importance of WTC, and (3) the role of the first language (L1) in an immersion setting. Some of the other findings suggest areas of future research that could shed needed light on the world of FLH.

**Facilitating Legitimacy and Involvement**

Contrasting the CoP dynamic between fall and winter semesters revealed fascinating insights into what helps LP learners become part of the community and what can prevent them from fitting in. In the case of fall semester, rather than ending up with one cohesive community with a network of peripheral members, there were two factions with most members being scattered between them. During winter semester, however, there was one distinct network of core and peripheral members who all appeared to perform legitimate roles. The data I collected suggest that this difference is strongly related to the attitudes and actions of the resident facilitators (RFs), which can subsequently be adopted by HP community members—for better or for worse. Where community leaders are willing to give legitimate roles to LP learners, their journey towards the core of the community can happen rapidly, as shown by Hannah and Dave's high level of participation during winter semester, and is only blocked by individual differences or scheduling conflicts. Where these road blocks don't exist, LP learners can be a viable part of the community core, and proficiency is not a factor in determining community involvement.
As such, whoever the facilitators are, they have to understand what it means to facilitate. A facilitator's role is not to crack down on their fellow students or serve as a sort of language gestapo—it's to help them get to a point where they are speaking the language regularly and well. As was the case with Marc, a lack of understanding may even lead RFs to laugh at the attempts these learners make and never grant them a sense of legitimacy in the community. However, if they have an attitude like Élise, Ryan, or Charlotte—making themselves available to help others and really viewing their role as a job with specific requirements—then all levels of learners will be drawn into the community.

Similar to the importance of understanding roles within the community, all members need to come to a mutual understanding of the community domain. Part of the reason the French House was divided during fall semester was that Marc's group didn't embrace the aspect of creating a positive, “fun” environment for LP learners. Their actions suggest a domain of perfecting French, but did not allow for imperfections within that process. This resulted in LP learners flocking to Élise and Charlotte's group, which had a domain that included having fun and being friends with each other within the context of learning French.

As the RFs don't receive any training on how to facilitate learning, beyond being told that they are to enforce speaking French at all times, future research could focus on the effects of leadership training or the lack thereof in language houses, particularly examining how this training affects attitudes within the community. Further, it would be useful to investigate the application process for becoming an RF and what qualifications are generally sought in the hiring process.
Anxiety vs. Willingness to Communicate

Because strong CoPs provide a safety net that allows members to take greater risks and perform increasingly difficult tasks without fear of reprisal (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), it became apparent during my observations that WTC was a greater indicator of community involvement than anxiety. Although this willingness can be fostered by resolving conflicts, lowering anxiety by forming genuine friendships, and developing attitudes of helpfulness and openness to correction, individual personality differences are still an important factor in how willing learners are to participate and communicate. In a sense, each member is responsible to facilitate their own learning by being willing to engage—both linguistically and socially—in the CoP. However, even though participants like Beth and Adam weren't willing to fully engage in the social climate of the CoP, Beth in particular still had a positive experience and felt like she fit in during winter semester. In that light, WTC, or unwillingness, does not preclude legitimate membership in the community, but it can keep members in a peripheral role rather than prompting them to core involvement.

Future studies could use more distinct measures to study how WTC might change—or not change—as learners spend more time within the community and become increasingly legitimate participants. Further, as both WTC and anxiety were sometimes linked to communicating with specific interlocutors, as was the case when Marc, Lisa and Paula were living in the French House, there is ample room to research specific correlations between negative or exclusive attitudes and WTC within the community.

In spite of the more important role of WTC, it was nevertheless clear that anxiety and tension did exist in some forms. This anxiety, however, was more localized towards interacting with specific people, and was magnified by lack of validation with certain interlocutors such as
Marc and Lisa. Fortunately, where validation and legitimacy are offered, anxiety is much less common and is concentrated on performing specific tasks—such as praying—which exposed learners rather than allowing them to negotiate the language with their peers. However, even these types of tasks could become decreasingly stressful as learners recognize that no one laughs at mistakes and that everyone is learning together. In light of this finding, it would be instructive to study how LP learners progress from anxiety towards specific tasks towards greater confidence in performing them.

The Facilitating Role of the L1

Even though the point of second language (L2) immersion setting is to provide as much L2 input and require as much L2 output as possible, studies on L1 use in the L2 classroom have already shown that the L1 can play an important role in student interactions, particularly in helping students avoid cognitive overload (Scott & de la Fuente, 2008), seek clarification from each other (Storch & Wiggsworth, 2003), and comfortably negotiate meaning (Antòn & DiCamilla, 1998). Owing to the growing understanding of L1 use in classrooms and considering the findings of Bown, Dewey, Martinsen, and Baker (2011) that speaking the L2 was not always the highest priority for FLH residents, I had anticipated hearing English, the L1 of the majority of participants and a common language for all participants, used in cases of conflict or when the participants felt it was necessary to fully express themselves. However, it was a surprise to me to realize that the majority of students in the French House CoP actually felt like speaking English was not only a means of resolving conflict but that it was also an important if not crucial component in building friendships among roommates and all community members. Charlotte expressed that even though the strict rule of the French House is to speak French all of the time while in the apartment, holding fast to that idea is not always possible or even desirable in order
to build a cohesive community of language learners. It would be useful for future FLH research to dig deeper into student perspectives related to L1 use and to analyze the frequency of L1 use in relation to L2 gains within this setting.

**Other Conclusions, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research**

One of the greatest limitations of the study is that I was unable to observe the CoP during fall semester, and so the comparison between the two communities is incomplete. Because the participants’ representation of community conflict and struggles was so vivid, however, I was able to assemble inside perspectives, if not completely factual illustrations, of the progress and stumblings of both LP learners and the entire community. Regardless, future research in the field would benefit from examining FLH communities in the earliest days of the new school year and following the CoP throughout two major semesters if not for an entire calendar year. This could provide greater insight into how LP learners become part of the CoP.

Although I did not explore the specific role of the faculty coordinator in great depth, both Ryan and Claudia mentioned the contrast between faculty involvement during fall and winter semesters. The French House received a new coordinator during winter semester, and there is a possibility that different approaches to conflict resolution or differing levels of involvement played a role in changing the community dynamic. Further, it is possible that greater intervention from faculty could have regulated Marc's dogmatic approach and changed the climate of the struggling CoP. As no studies have yet been conducted on the role of faculty involvement in FLH, research could center on how outside leadership impacts the CoP and compare and contrast the dynamic of different houses in relation to faculty involvement.

As mentioned in the discussion, one of the key indicators of community involvement was actually busyness outside of FLH. Although scheduling is not always something that students can
control, especially in an immersion setting which doesn't eliminate normal college life, the fact that some students chose to place higher priority on their outside schedules than on their involvement in the community potentially points to varying motivations within the CoP. The initial questionnaire revealed a variety of reasons that students chose to live in the French House—such as free rent for the RFs or the chance to make French speaking friends—but a more defined study on the role of motivation within the CoP would further clarify various degrees of involvement. Further, it would be useful to see how motivation fits into participants’ decision to use the L2 vs. the L1 in different situations.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____________________________

1. Where are you from?

2. What are you studying at BYU and what year are you?

3. How long have you lived in the French House?

4. Have you lived in any of the other language houses? If so, which ones?

5. Have you ever been in a French immersion setting before? If yes, for how long and in what setting (mission, study abroad, etc.)?

6. Why did you decide to live in the French House?

7. What French classes have you already taken? What classes are you currently enrolled in?

8. Did you take any French courses prior to college? If so in what setting and for how long?
   Eg. 2 years in high school.

9. How have you felt thus far about your experience at the FLSR? Likes, dislikes, etc.?
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Potential Interview Questions (Lower Proficiency Learners)

1. What is it like living in the FLSR? Good/bad things. Do you like living in the FLSR?
   Why?
2. Aside from the language requirement, how is living in the French House different from living in a regular apartment?
3. Tell me about your first few days in the FLSR—what was it like? And would it be different in a regular apartment where you didn't know anyone?
4. What do you think contributes to having a good experience at the FLSR? Have you had any negative experiences?
5. Have you ever felt anxious talking with your roommates or other members of the French House?
6. How would you describe your level of French?
7. When do you break into English? What types of situations make that necessary?
8. Who do you interact with the most in the FLSR/in the French House?
9. What do you do outside the FLSR?
10. Do you hang out with other members of the French House outside of the FLSR? If so, what do you do together? Do you speak French together?

Potential Interview Questions (Advanced and Native Speakers)

1. What is it like to live in the FLSR? Do you like it? Why/why not?
2. Why did you decide to move into the French House?
3. How would you describe your relationship to specific LP learners in the French House?
4. What things have helped them learn more?
5. Is there anything that prevents them from interacting with you or others in the French House?

6. Who do you interact with the most in the French House? Why?
APPENDIX C: FLSR HONOR CODE

Honor Code for the Language House
Non-RF students

1. I clearly understand that while I am living in the FLSR I am expected to improve my language proficiency and will, therefore, enroll (not audit) in a regular language course taught on campus each semester. Courses like choir or individual studies are not acceptable, although they may be taken in conjunction with a regular language course. Language labs do not qualify as a target language course.

2. Participation in the following language programs requires completion of level 102: Hebrew, Portuguese, Italian, Russian, German, and Spanish. Participation in the following language programs requires completion of level 201: Chinese, French. Participation in the Japanese program requires completion of level 202. Faculty Coordinators will discuss course requirements with returned missionaries.

3. In the apartment I will always speak the target language and will incorporate the linguistic corrections and suggestions of my RF. I understand that non-target language speaking visitors (including boyfriends/girlfriends) may only stay a few minutes and must otherwise go to the commons room. I will avoid speaking English on the phone or on video chat (IE: Skype) in the kitchen or living room areas. I will be discrete and go to my room or the commons area.

4. I will not watch English TV, DVDs or videos in the apartment. I understand that the big screen TV in the commons room is for viewing English TV; however DVDs and videos may not be viewed in the commons areas.

5. I will support the particular aspects of the target language program as defined by the Faculty Coordinator.

6. I understand that the success of the language immersion program in the Foreign Language Student Residence depends on effective teamwork and agree to function as an integral part of my Language House team, doing my share whenever necessary.

7. I will maintain the cleanliness and order of the apartment and agree to do my part in a timely fashion for the cleaning inspections. I understand that this impacts the academic goals of the program.

8. I understand that a positive spiritual atmosphere in the apartment greatly benefits linguistic progress and will do my part to promote good feelings and cooperation among the residents.

9. I will be at the apartment during the dinner hours (5:30 – 7:30 pm approx.) Sunday – Thursday. This is a 100 percent commitment. I will not apply to the FLSR program if I have class, work, social or extracurricular activities that interfere with this commitment. I understand that I am not to “eat and run” but linger and participate in the conversation groups and help others to do the same. *(Any food allergies / restrictions must be discussed with your Faculty Coordinator prior to admission.)*

10. I agree to work responsibly as a part of a cooking team. I understand that on my night to cook I will arrive at the apartment early enough to prepare the meal by 6:00 p.m.

11. I will cooperate with the RF and do what I can to make this a positive learning experience for all concerned and will earnestly try to be an example of tolerance, patience and magnanimity.

12. If I do not abide by these rules, I may be asked to leave the program even during the semester/term.

13. If I cancel my participation in the FLSR program, *for any reason*, I will be charged a cancellation fee of $50.00.

Orientation desktop folder (Honor Code.doc) Revised 10/2011
Resident Facilitator Honor Code for the Language House

1. I will always speak the target language and will encourage all residents to not only speak the language, but improve in their skills. I understand that non-target language speaking visitors may only stay a few minutes and must otherwise go to the commons room.

2. I will try to maintain the cleanliness and order of the apartment and agree to do my part in a willing and timely fashion for the cleaning inspections. I understand that this impacts the academic goals of the program and will work with all residents to have a well functioning team effort at maintaining apartment cleanliness.

3. I understand that a positive spiritual atmosphere in the apartment greatly benefits linguistic progress and will do my part to promote good feelings and cooperation among the residents. I will actively encourage and participate in scripture reading and prayer as determined to be possible and convenient.

4. I will be at the apartment during the dinner hours (5:30-7:30 approx.) Sunday-Thursday. I understand that I am not to “eat and run” but linger and participate in the conversation groups and will actively encourage others to do the same.

5. I agree to work responsibly as a part of a cooking team. I understand that on my night to cook I must report to the apartment by 4:00 p.m. I understand that part of my cooking supervisory responsibilities include linguistic modeling and correction.

6. I will enthusiastically support the Family Home Evening program.

7. I will not watch English TV, DVD’s or videos in the apartment. I understand that the big screen TV is available in the commons room for viewing English TV. However, DVDs and videos may NOT be viewed in the commons areas. I will actively encourage the students to follow this rule.

8. I will do all I can to help those in my apartment to succeed in their linguistic goals and in those of the program.

9. I recognize that as the RF I give a clear signal regarding commitment to the linguistic program and agree to be the apartment leader in this regard.

10. As an RF, I agree to help with the shopping on a regular basis and to fulfill one of the regular RF duties as follows:
   b. Organize the language FHE’s. Work with the activities people from each apartment.
   c. Manage the media supplies. Post vocabulary sheets in the apartments.
   d. Go get or return the van.
   e. Other, as defined by Faculty Coordinator.

11. I agree to attend the mandatory RF orientation meeting the Saturday before school starts.
A $50.00 administrative fee will be assessed for non-attendance or late arrival.

12. Failure to adhere to this honor code will result in your removal from the FLSR.

Signature ____________________________________________ Date _______________________

Revised February 2010: Scholarship Folder HonorCode RP’s.doc