EXPLORING A PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGY
THROUGH THE CONSCIOUS EXPERIENCE OF CO-EMERGENCE
IN THE CONCEPT AND CONDUCT OF A RESEARCH SETTING IN ESL

JOHN IPPOLITO

Dr. Lous Heshusius
Dr. Jill Bell
Dr. Evan Thompson

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A PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGY THROUGH THE CONSCIOUS EXPERIENCE OF CO-EMERGENCE IN THE CONCEPT AND CONDUCT OF A RESEARCH SETTING IN ESL

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Abstract

This thesis is my attempt to conduct an ESL research study using an alternative to the experimental methods traditionally followed in second language research. I begin with an explication of the notion of mind and language on which these experimental methods rest and then outline an alternative view of mind and language referred to as *relational*. Drawing on two central concepts, *embodied action* (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1996, p. 172) and *perceptual and linguistic reciprocity* (Abram, 1996, p. 90), I then articulate an alternative guiding metaphor for research in ESL. I term this metaphor *co-emergence*. The fundamental premise of *co-emergence* is that the research participants, the researcher and the research activity are simultaneously co-emerging in an ever-unfolding *present*.

Co-emergence becomes a guide for attuning myself, as the researcher, to the *present* of the research experience. My consideration of language in the research becomes a focus on its non-representational dimension in an absolute *present*, at its instant of utterance. I contrast this dimension of language with the notion of language as a system of arbitrary, symbolic representations facilitating information transfer. Ultimately, my concern with language in its present, non-representational aspect informs my attempts to understand the research experience.

The research experience itself regards a study conducted around an ESL (English as a Second Language) conversation exercise involving community college EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and TESL (Teachers of English as a Second Language) students. Ostensibly, I set out to capture the participants' experience of the conversation exercise by

minimizing my role in our discussions. However, rather than feeling at ease with the liberty to discuss the videotaped conversation as they see fit, the participants become uneasy and confused by my not taking a more active role in the discussions. Their anxiety raises important questions about a researcher's 'understanding' of research participants.

In the spirit of a *relational* orientation to the research, my methodology evolves in response to the participants' thoughts and feelings as well as my own. As such, the study moves from a focus on ESL to a reflection on methodology to a tracing and documentation of a relational understanding of language in the research. In addition to documenting this movement, I also provide exploratory attempts at rendering an audiotaped discussion with one of my research participants. I term these renderings *narrated transcription* and *transposition*. The key challenge that these exploratory attempts address is how to relay the sense of a present when it is no longer in a present. The latter of these renderings, *transposition*, goes so far as to consciously blur the words, thoughts, feelings and imagination of a research participant and me, as the researcher, in a conscious attempt to gesture toward the *co-emergence* of research participant, researcher and research activity. In this sense, both relational renderings are replies to the perceived inadequacy of *verbatim* transcripts.

My elaboration of a *relational* notion of mind and language, my experience of an evolving *co-emergent* research methodology, and my exploratory attempts to render audiotaped discussion through *narrated transcription* and *transposition* lead to a set of suggestions for an articulation of a participatory methodology for research.

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"An important and pervasive shift is beginning to take place in cognitive science under the very influence of its own research. . . . it reflects the necessity of understanding cognitive systems not on the basis of their input and output relationships but by their *operational closure*. A system that has operational closure is one in which the results of its processes are those processes themselves. . . . The key point is that such systems do not operate by representation. Instead of *representing* an independent world, they *enact* a world as a domain of distinctions that is inseparable from the structure embodied by the cognitive system." Varela et al., 1996, pp. 139-140.

"It may be best, then, to leave language undefined, and to thus acknowledge its open-endedness, its mysteriousness. Nevertheless, by paying attention to this mystery we may develop a conscious familiarity with it, a sense of its texture, its habits, its sources of sustenance." Abram, 1996, p. 73.

PART ONE

Introduction

The research dimension of this thesis regards an ESL (English as a Second Language) conversation exercise involving community college EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and TESL (Teachers of English as a Second Language) students. The EAP program is a pre-college preparation program for students planning to apply to community college certificate or diploma programs, and the TESL program leads to certification as a Teacher of English as a Second or Foreign Language. From the outset, I knew that I wanted to engage an alternative approach to research, that is, alternative to traditional, experimental research methodologies. In wanting to be guided by an alternative research methodology, however, I was first obliged to elaborate the conceptual basis for traditional approaches and then outline the alternative conceptualization which informs the consideration of this study in ESL.

A common focus in ESL studies is on methods for effective language instruction and acquisition. *Effective* is typically defined as the most successful means by which to transmit the linguistic and social knowledge required to function effectively in a society where English is the dominant language. In establishing such methods, the studies often concern themselves with variables that are seen to affect the learning of English. The variables, which are grouped into categories which include the cognitive, affective and socio-cultural, are characterized as in some way advancing or hindering the movement toward an optimal level of proficiency in the second language learner. This approach to language instruction is rooted in assumptions about the practical benefits for instructing and acquiring language. In ESL

circles it is not uncommon to hear the case being made for English language skills as the means by which students can gain access to and participate successfully in the wider English speaking society. This claim is contestable on its own grounds[1] but is cited here as an example of a common justification for approaches to language instruction which adhere to practical results. In this regard, it is not surprising that the field of ESL has intimate connections to an experimental methodology geared toward isolating language learner variables and then measuring the presumed connection between specific variables and changes in language learner behaviour. These observations and conclusions give rise to pedagogical and curricular recommendations.

However, there has recently been a shift within ESL to a wider set of cultural and socio-political concerns. For instance, Corson (1997) has reevaluated the philosophical underpinnings of applied linguistics, and Pennycook (1995) has assessed the ideological presuppositions of teaching ESL. Additionally, even a cursory look at the contents of second language journals in 1996 and 1997[2] reveals some attention to issues of culture, class, gender, identity, power and authorship. This significant development is introducing a reflective dimension to the field. In directing its attention back upon itself, ESL is being pushed into a wider epistemological context. As such, the field's once common recourse to experimental methods has been challenged. My thesis takes up this transition by engaging a methodology which moves beyond experimental methods and seeks to understand the research conducted around an ESL conversation exercise as an experience simultaneously shaped by the research participants, the researcher and the research activity itself.

The conceptual topography for my study can be mapped out in relation to the model of mind[3] informing experimental approaches in ESL, approaches which were once predominant and whose influence lingers on. In the context of ESL, a *model of mind* would more commonly be understood and expressed as a *model of the cognitive processes involved in language learning*. The crucial point, however, is that by beginning a discussion of ESL with the latter definition, one is implicitly conceding a particular model of mind and precluding a wider *meta-discussion* of various conceptualizations of cognition which give rise to their own definitions of mind. The first task, then, is to provide a background for and elaboration of a particular model of mind, the model which informs experimental approaches in ESL.

I will preface my discussion of *models* by responding to a conceptual distinction made by Harré and Gillett:

> The essential ambiguity of models of cognition leaves open the question of whether these models are abstract representations of structures and processes in the brain and nervous system [what we cannot see] or whether they are metaphorical presentations of the 'grammatical' (that is, discursively grounded) structure and relationships of intended, goal-directed, and norm-constrained human action [what we can see]. Sometimes a model may allow both interpretations. (1994, p. 52)

I was initially inclined to view the model of mind informing experimental approaches in ESL as fitting the former definition, that is, a model as a picture of *what we cannot see*. My reasoning was this: the model informing experimental approaches provides an analogical

picture of what is supposedly happening in the brain. In other words, the presumed connection between specific variables and changes in language learner behaviour is the "visible" analogue to the "invisible" processing taking place in a brain. However, further reflection has demonstrated that the opposite is equally plausible, that is, the presumed connection between specific variables and changes in language learner behaviour may also be a metaphorical account of *what we can see*. In this scenario, the presumed connection between specific variables and changes in language learner behaviour is a *story* of the acquisition of a second language.

Perhaps it is the case that models of mind allow for both interpretations, that is, as descriptions of what we cannot see and explanations of what we can see, not simply *sometimes*, but potentially always. In either case, this *essential ambiguity* attests to the complexity of models of mind.

Mind, Experience and the Cartesian View of Being

In the *Dictionary of philosophy*, Angeles defines *mind* as "consciousness" or "awareness" (1981, p. 172). He also explains that it can denote "the adaptive responses of an organism to its environment in the struggles for survival" (Angeles, 1981, p. 172). Thus defined, *mind* refers to that which is experienced, either mentally, in the form of *consciousness* or *awareness*, or physically, in the form of *adaptive responses* to an *environment*. This distinction between the mental and physical aspects of experience reflects the Cartesian distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, the thinking being and the

material being.[4] The distinction is a theme which resurfaces across Descartes' work. In the *Discourse on the method*, Descartes writes:

> I saw that while I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world and
> no place for me to be in, I could not for all that pretend that I did not exist . . . From
> this I knew I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is only to think, and
> which does not require any place, or depend on any material thing, in order to exist.
> Accordingly this 'I' - that is, the soul by which I am what I am - is entirely distinct
> from the body, and indeed is easier to know than the body, and would not fail to be
> whatever it is, even if the body did not exist. (quoted in Cottingham, 1996, xxx)

The separation of a thinking 'I' resulted in what Abram calls "a thorough dichotomy between mechanical, unthinking matter (including all minerals, plants, and animals, as well as the human body) and pure, thinking mind (the exclusive province of humans and God) (1996, p. 48). Divorced from its ecology, the primacy of a thinking 'I' is reiterated and defended in *Meditations on first philosophy*:

> Thus, simply by knowing that I exist and seeing at the same time that absolutely
> nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I can
> infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing.
> It is true that I may have (or, to anticipate, that I certainly have) a body that is very
> closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea
> of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other
> hand I have a distinct idea of a body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-

thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it. (quoted in Cottingham, 1996, p. 54)

This view allows for a definition of being wherein subject and object are detached: a cognizing agent is separate from that which is cognized. As we have seen, a further consequence of this view is that the cognizing agent's own physical body, which is seen to house the cognizing faculty, itself becomes an object. This theory of mind, referred to as mind/body dualism or, with regard to Descartes' philosophy, soul/body dualism,[5] allows for an understanding of experience premised on a separation of thinking being from material being. In other words, as I look out the window, my experience of seeing the budding trees can be understood as a case of my internal senses, thinking being, perceiving the external trees, material being. I am here, and they are there. This is a simple but clear case of how one's view of being shades one's understanding of experience.

A Functional Model of Mind

When the nature of being is shaped by a distinction between our thinking selves and that which we think about, it becomes possible to characterize mind as an inner faculty whose primary function is to represent the external world. These characterizations are called representative theories. In a general sense, representative theories propose a correspondence between aspects of the external world and our efforts to make those aspects comprehensible. For example, in a representative theory of meaning, particular objects in the external environment correspond to particular words as symbolic representations. Similarly, in a

representative theory of perception, objects in the external world correspond to mental representations of those objects. In proposing this correspondence between an inner faculty and external world, representative theories define mind by its capacity to function representationally.

However, in distinguishing between a weak and strong sense of representation, Varela et al. point out that representation does not have to entail a representative theory of mind. In this regard, a weak sense of representation is

> . . . purely semantic: It refers to anything that can be interpreted as being about something. This is the sense of representation as construal, since nothing is about something else without construing it as being some way. A map, for example, is about some geographical area; it represents certain features of the terrain and so construes that terrain as being a certain way. Similarly, words on a page represent sentences in a language, which may in turn represent or be about still other things. (1996, p. 134)

In contrast, a strong sense of representation is extended "to construct a full-fledged theory of how perception, language, or cognition in general must work" (Varela et al., 1996, p. 135). They elaborate this stronger sense of representation by outlining its "quite heavy ontological and epistemological commitments" (1996, p. 135):

> We assume that the world is pregiven, that its features can be specified prior to any cognitive activity. Then to explain the relation between this cognitive activity and a pregiven world, we hypothesize the existence of mental representations inside the cognitive system. (1996, p. 135)

The theory of cognition outlined as *strong representationalism* defines mind by its capacity to function representationally. In the field of cognitive science, this theory is expressed as *functionalism*. In its earliest form, functionalism proposed that human cognition was similar to the workings of a digital computer. Johnson expands this point:

> This meant that humans' sensations and actions had to be--respectively--data input to, and computational output from, such a computer. Furthermore . . . inner mental states were identical with abstractly specified and relationally defined computational states of a machine table--or, in other words, the list of software instructions that causally controlled the computer's operations. (1997, p. 8)

In computational fashion, then, the activity of mind is seen as a process whereby aspects of the exterior, pre-existing material world are perceived and then assigned a symbolic representation, we could call this the input stage; the symbolic representations are then manipulated by mental hardware, we could call this the processing stage; and then translated into a result in the form of physical or mental action, we could call this the output stage.

The impact of this model of mind has been significant. Since this present study concerns itself with issues connected to ESL, what is of particular relevance here is its expression in attitudes toward language. However, it would be premature to discuss a model of language without first elaborating the model of mind which underpins the model of language. What follows, then, is an elaboration of what, for the purposes of this paper, I will call the *functional* model of mind.

A functional model of mind can be defined by at least three central beliefs.

a.   The human mind is distinct from its environment.

b.   The human mind is a processor of data and communication is a transfer of information.

c.   The operation of a human mind can be assessed for relative success in completing pre-designated tasks.

The Human Mind is Distinct from Its Environment

The implications of proposing that the human mind is distinct from its environment can be considered in both a conceptual and physical sense. Conceptually, it is possible, within a functional model of mind, to delimit the boundary where cognition, understood as input, processing and output, begins and ends. In this sense, human cognition is dependent on its surroundings to the extent that those surroundings are a source of stimuli. This point can be usefully elaborated in reference to *mind/body physicalism*, the theory that mental events or processes, which might include anger or happiness and processes such as confusion or learning, are identical to brain events or processes, this would refer to neurophysiological activity or any other empirically demonstrable event or process. At one extreme in this position, one finds the idea of *narrow physicalism* wherein mind is equated with brain. Bechtel points to this idea in making reference to

> . . . a tendency to think of cognitive activities as activities occurring exclusively within the mind/brain [whereby] the mind/brain might receive information from outside itself (stimuli) and generate outputs into the external world (behaviors), but cognitive

activity consists in processing information within the system itself" (1997, p. 187).

Bechtel moves away from this end of the physicalist continuum by espousing a position closer to *wide physicalism* where the mind is at least partially defined by its connection to its environment. Working within a connectionist framework,[6] Bechtel suggests that cognition is "not due to developments exclusively within the mind/brain, but to developments in the interaction of the mind/brain and the environment" (1997, p. 206). According to Bechtel, part of this interaction with the environment may be in the form of a cognitive system interacting with external symbols. For instance, problem solving, which is done exclusively within the brain in a computational account of mind, may also be accomplished in the physical, external world. As an example, Bechtel gives the case of a simple arithmetic problem. Confronted with the task of multiplying two three-digit numbers,

> We begin by writing them in canonical form [with one three-digit number directly over the other] . . . Writing the problem in this way permits us to decompose it into several simple component tasks, each of which can be solved mentally by applying procedural knowledge of how to multiply two one-digit numbers. This does not require internal computation; rather, through schooling we have simply learned the procedures. As soon as we *recognize* one of the simple problems, the answer comes to mind. . . . The point I want to emphasize is that a problem that would be quite difficult if external symbols were not available is rendered much simpler with these symbols. (Bechtel, 1997, pp. 197)

Bechtel's position makes allowance for the connection between organism and environment

in that perceivable, tangible symbols in the external world are seen to assist the process of cognition. In this sense, cognition becomes context dependent.

Crucially, however, the distinction between the human mind, the cognizing faculty, and the environment remains fundamentally unaltered from its form in a computational model. While the cognizing faculty may be working with symbols in the environment external to the brain and *recognizing* rather than *representing* some of them in its attempts to solve problems, the cognizing faculty itself remains separate from its milieu, its environment. The conceptual distinction between thinking being and material being stays intact.

Physically, this distinction is expressed in the belief that a border exists between a human mind, a cognizing faculty, also sometimes referred to as a *self*, and its surroundings. These surroundings include the environment on both sides of one's skin. In other words, within a functional model of mind, cognizing agents are doubly removed from their environments, once from their very own bodies and once from the world of earth and sky. This is in keeping with a model which takes the digital computer as its guiding metaphor. A computer's hardware, its physical manifestation, what it needs to carry out symbolic processing, is distinguishable from both aspects of its environment. In the first instance, the hardware is separate from its software, the particular program it is running and the information entered into it. Secondly, it is disconnected, apart from its power source, from the room where I sit at my desk.

The analogy between a computer's relation to its environment and the human mind to its surroundings is a seductive one: it seems to fit so well and, at first glance, does so

unproblematically. However, as a reiteration of the separation between thinking being and material being, it casts cognition in a particular and not inconsequential light.

i)   When the cognizing faculty is held to be separable from its own physical body, cognition assumes a pronounced *mental* character. This is to say that the possibility for physical and emotional knowledge is overlooked.

ii)   When the cognizing faculty is held to be separable from its ecology, cognition becomes *hypothetical, unlived*. This is to say that by conceiving of cognition in isolation from the air we breathe or the water we drink or the sun we absorb or the feelings we experience is to conceive of cognition in a literally *unnatural* way in that cognition is cut off from nature and our experience as beings in nature. Cognition then occupies a location that is nowhere.

The Human Mind is a Processor of Data and Communication is a Transfer of Information

In keeping with the computer metaphor, a functional model of mind characterizes cognition and the purpose of cognition in a particular way. Cognition is seen as a process of manipulating representations of the external environment with a view to solving problems, problems of the sort that range from the task of going into the kitchen to get a cup of coffee to the task of writing an MEd thesis. To facilitate this problem solving, information is collected as input and the product of mental activity is implemented as output. Allocating and reallocating information in this way is then taken to be communication. Understanding communication in this way is not without epistemological consequence.

When cognition is seen as the collection, processing and application of information to solve problems, knowledge takes on a functional demeanour and, as a consequence, knowing becomes an empirical matter. That which cannot be interpreted with recourse to observable facts or identifiable bits of information necessary for problem solving cannot be considered a part of knowing. For instance, when an *a priori* concept such as *intuition* is considered, it is a valid form of knowing only when it can be explained in relation to its part in problem solving. For his part, Bechtel makes intuition an acceptable form of knowing by conceptualizing it in this way:

> Intuition is not intended to constitute a mysterious ability, but rather the ability to recognize directly that a particular situation is comparable to one experienced previously, and to use the solution to the previous situation as a template for the solution to this problem. (1997, p. 199)

As such, knowing becomes stringently, narrowly defined. For example, in restricting my use of the term *knowledge* to that which can be associated with empirically observable fragments of information useful for problem solving, I am rendered silent in my wish to explain that the reason I went to the kitchen for a cup of coffee as opposed to cup of tea was because I *like* coffee better than tea, it gives me more *pleasure* than tea. I am rendered unable to think about preferences as a way of knowing unless I can, for instance, explain my preference for coffee as a result of my body's physiological reaction to it or as a result of my life history (which is potentially documentable) which has evolved an affinity for coffee. On its own, my immediately experienced preference for coffee becomes an inadmissible form of knowing.

In short, a functional model of mind places strict conditions on what is admissible as knowledge. Knowledge must be empirically identifiable information which serves a demonstrable function in human activity, activity which has problem solving as its goal.

The Operation of a Human Mind Can Be Assessed for Relative Success in Completing Pre-designated Tasks

As a consequence of cognition being conceived of as problem solving, the completion of tasks is seen to be an arbiter of successful cognitive performance. While so obvious as to seem almost a given, it is worthwhile pointing out that this is premised on the assumption that human cognition *can* be assessed. Successful performance, whether it be my successful retrieval of a cup of coffee from the kitchen or the timely completion of my thesis, is taken as the measure by which cognition is evaluated. Once again, this orientation to cognition is not without implication. In measuring cognition against a scale of relative success, at least two things happen: i) cognition is externalized, it becomes something other than an aspect of ourselves in that it is dissociated from our lived experience and consequently ii) normative judgements can be made about cognitive activity.

In the first case, the externalization of cognition is of considerable importance since it sets the conceptual orientation for discussions of cognition. For instance, when my efforts to retrieve a cup of coffee from the kitchen are interrupted by a stumble which results in spilt coffee, a broken cup and perhaps some physical injury, my inclination will be to distance myself conceptually from the incident so as to explain its cause. I may dismiss the mishap as

a momentary lapse of concentration or a failure of mental and physical coordination, or I may have cause to suspect something more serious, a migraine headache or worse yet, a neurophysiological disorder. As a further option, I may entertain both explanations. The point, however, is that by working within a framework which has already implicitly conceded the possibility of externalizing cognition, in this case my very own cognitive processes, I am able to place cognition at a distance[7] and speculate as to the causes of my cognitive processes. When a causal account finally succeeds in explaining the incident, it is commonly grasped as an *understanding* of the incident. In a subsequent section devoted to a *relational* model of mind, we will revisit this spilling of the coffee and consider an alternate method for coming to understand the incident.

The second consequence of measuring cognition against a scale of relative success is that normative judgements can be made about inferred cognitive activity. This is perhaps most obvious when we assess the actions of others. For instance, had I watched a friend stumble as she returned from the kitchen with a cup of coffee, I would be in a position to note not simply that spilling was not a desired result, but I would also be able to make judgements as to the relative shortcomings of the cognitive processes responsible for the result. Again, these judgements would have to be made against some predesignated standard of sufficient performance, otherwise they would be meaningless as normative assessments. I might conjecture that she was suffering from a physical disability (a lack of sufficient ability) or was somewhat uncoordinated (a lack of sufficient coordination) or, if I chose to be kind, might attribute the stumble to an unfortunate and atypical loss of balance (a lack of sufficient

balance).

Under the most usual circumstances, it is reasonable to assume that neither I nor my friend wish to stumble, spill the coffee and sustain physical injury. However, how we choose to understand that event is skewed within a computer model of cognition. In the first instance, the event is objectified and thus made amenable to interpretation. In the second instance, the event is assessable for its relative distance from a predesignated standard of successful performance.

A Functional Model of Language

Having outlined the characteristics of a functional model of mind, we turn now to discuss its expression in attitudes toward language. It should be stressed at the outset that in using the term *functional* to describe a certain model of language, I am defining *functional* in the narrow sense of *information transfer*. Admittedly, this is a selective interpretation of *function* in language since language accomplishes much more than information transfer. For instance, in addition to facilitating information transfer, language also serves essential functions on the personal, interpersonal and collective levels. Personally, it plays a crucial role as a point of identification between the individual and the group; interpersonally, it enables and supports relationships between members of a group; and collectively, it is arguably the single most important adhesive for any group identified as a collective. In restricting *functional* to indicate *information transfer*, I am focusing on the function of language most amenable to isolation, observation, hypothesis formation and testing. In other

words, *information transfer* is the linguistic function that lends itself particularly well to experimental approaches. As such, language as *information transfer* serves as a useful point of departure as I work toward an alternative to experimental approaches in ESL. Nonetheless, I move from this point of departure in recognition of its particular focus on one *functional* aspect of language and of the many other functions served by language.

Language as a Digital System

A clear articulation of the connection between a functional model of mind and the study of language as information transfer is provided by Chomsky when he writes:

> Language is an infinite digital system, hence tailor-made for computational approaches. In the language case, a particular state of the language faculty can be taken to be a computational system of rules and representations that generates a certain class of structured expressions, each with the properties of sound and meaning specified by the language in question. (1997, p. 17)

He continues by assessing the impact that the transition from behaviourism to cognitivism has had on linguistics:

> Behavior and its products, such as a corpus of utterances, are no longer the objects of inquiry, but are just data, of interest insofar as they provide evidence for what really concerns us, the inner mechanisms of mind and the ways they form and manipulate representations, and use them in executing actions and interpreting experience. (1997, p. 17)

Chomsky's account of language is computational and reflects the three defining attributes of a computational model of cognition. If we consider them individually, we can see that this is the case.

a.   The human mind is distinct from its environment.

Presumably, the *inner mechanisms of mind* are *forming and manipulating representations* of something, something which exists in an outer world.

b.   The human mind is a processor of data and communication is a transfer of information.

In computational fashion, the mind *forms and manipulates representations* with a view to *executing actions* and *interpreting experience*. Communication, in this sense construed as *forming representations* (input); *manipulating representations* (processing); and *interpreting experience* and *executing actions* (output), is based on representations containing decipherable information.

c.   The operation of a human mind can be assessed for relative success in completing pre-designated tasks.

Since the *inner mechanisms of mind* are goal oriented, that is, since they are geared toward *executing actions and interpreting experience*, they can conceivably execute actions to a lesser or greater degree of effectiveness and interpret experiences to a lesser or greater degree of accuracy.

When language is conceived of as the manipulation of discrete units of data, it makes

seemingly unproblematic sense to assign the human cognitive faculty the role of manipulator and to see language as a source of discrete units amenable to manipulation. One can then treat aspects of the cognitive faculty and bits of linguistic data as *variables* in the process of manipulation. The output of this process, linguistic behaviour, is then taken as the audible, visible manifestation of the interaction of variables. In this form, language lends itself to isolation, observation, hypothesis formation and testing. This controlled procedure is commonly referred to as an *experimental* methodology.

An Alternative Conceptualization of Being, Experience and Language

Having elaborated a functional model of mind and its impact on a particular view of language, the task now turns to exploring an alternative conceptualization. At the outset, I suggested that one's view of being shades one's understanding of experience. The Cartesian distinction between thinking and material being, the cognizing agent and that which is cognized, was just such a view of being. I further suggested that it was this view of being which enabled representation, a computational model of mind and its attendant means of coming to understand experience, language being one aspect of that experience. In a similar way, I will now outline an alternative view of being which gives rise to its own method of coming to understand experience and which, for the purposes of this paper, will offer an alternative orientation to conceptualizations of language and their application in ESL.

At its most basic level, an alternative view of being needs to address the Cartesian distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, the thinking being and the material being.

Why is this so necessary? It is necessary because the assumed distance between our agency as cognitive beings--our position as perceivers of objects and speakers of languages, and our material bodies--the objects they perceive and the languages they utter, has a direct impact on how we live our relationship to that which surrounds us. It sets the parameters for how we believe we are in the world.

In sketching an alternative view of being which addresses this concern and points to an alternative model of mind and language, I will build on two ideas: the concept of *embodied action* (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1996, p. 172) and the notion of *perceptual and linguistic reciprocity* (Abram, 1996, p. 90).

A Relational Model of Mind

In laying the groundwork for a recharacterization of the gulf between inner mind and outer world, Varela et al. outline two positions which seem to exhaust the choices available within the Cartesian distinction. They refer to these as the *chicken and egg positions:*

Chicken position: The world out there has pregiven properties. These exist prior to the image that is cast on the cognitive system, whose task is to recover them appropriately (whether through symbols or subsymbolic states).[8]

Notice how very reasonable this position sounds and how difficult it is to imagine that things could be otherwise. We tend to think that the only alternative is the *egg position:*

Egg position: The cognitive system projects its own world, and the apparent reality

of this world is merely a reflection of internal laws of the system. (1996, p. 172)

This description is helpful because it relays a sense of the autonomy allotted to each pole in the distinction and highlights the apparent irreconcilability of these descriptions of cognition. It is at this point, then, that Varela et al.'s discussion breaks significant new ground:

> Our discussion of color suggests a middle way between these two chicken and egg extremes. We have seen that colors are not 'out there' independent of our perceptual and cognitive capacities. We have also seen that colors are not 'in here' independent of our surrounding biological and cultural world. Contrary to the objectivist view, color categories are experiential; contrary to the subjectivist view, color categories belong to our shared biological and cultural world. Thus color as a study case enables us to appreciate the obvious point that chicken and egg, world and perceiver, specify each other.
>
> It is precisely this emphasis on mutual specification that enables us to negotiate a middle path between the Scylla of cognition as the recovery of a pregiven outer world (realism) and the Charybdis of cognition as the projection of a pregiven inner world (idealism). These two extremes both take representation as their central notion: in the first case representation is used to recover what is outer; in the second case it is used to project what is inner. Our intention is to bypass entirely this logical geography of inner versus outer by studying cognition not as recovery or projection but as embodied action. (1996, p. 172)

This position maps out an alternative view by challenging the presumed distance between

thinking being and material being. As a consequence, it also contests representation as a means of coming to understand experience. In place of either extreme in the Cartesian distinction, *embodied action* is proposed as a view of being:

> By using the term *embodied* we mean to highlight two points: first, that cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities, and second, that these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural context. By using the term *action* we mean to emphasize once again that sensory and motor processes, perception and action, are fundamentally inseparable in lived cognition. (Varela et al., 1996, pp. 172-173)

The concept of embodied action provides the means for understanding that thinking being and material being may never have been separate in the first place. In fact, embodied action proposes that neurophysiological capacities and the wider natural and social environment cannot be separated in that they *mutually specify* each other. For the purposes of this paper, I will use the term *co-emerge*[9] to capture this sense of mutual specification.

Co-emergence suggests a radically different means for coming to understand experience than those two options made available within a Cartesian framework. In coming to understand experience, I am compelled to let go of old habits of thinking and recognize the co-emergence of what, within a Cartesian framework, would be seen as the impact of "outer world" on "inner me" and, conversely, the impact of "inner me" on "outer world." Having said this, I am not suggesting embodied action be construed as a patchwork of realist and

idealist proclivities. It is, rather, a real alternative in that it pushes an understanding of experience away from either extreme or, for that matter, an oscillation of extremes. In other words, in understanding experience, I am pushed into a position where I am already conceding the impossibility or, perhaps more to the point, undesirability of imagining a world which exists prior to my experience of it or, at the other extreme, an autonomous self which can be conceived of without regard to its corporeal and ecological manifestation.

This middle position is informed by "the Buddhist method of examining experience called *mindfulness meditation*" (Varela et al., 1996, p. 21). The practice is of relevance to a discussion of Cartesian mind/body dualism since it addresses the very motivation for drawing a distinction between subject and object. It brings to awareness the drive that acts to separate thinking being from material being.

Varela et al. explain that the purpose of *mindfulness awareness* practice is "to become mindful, to experience what one's mind is doing as it does it [emphasis added], to be present with one's mind" (1996, p. 23). In a passage which discusses the experience of the practice for individual practitioners, they write:

> Meditators discover that mind and body are not coordinated. The body is sitting, but the mind is seized constantly by thoughts, feelings, inner conversations, daydreams, fantasies, sleepiness, opinions, theories, judgements about thoughts and feelings, judgements about judgements--a never-ending torrent of disconnected mental events that the meditators do not even realize are occurring except at those brief instants when they remember what they are doing. (1996, p. 25)

As they point out, this observation of the human condition brings to light the difficulty in being completely *present* with one's being. Ultimately, the difficulty is attributed to a continual grasping for a fixed ground. Included here would be the habitual tendency to look for a solid foundation on the inside in the form of an ego-self or on the outside in the form of a pregiven world (1996, p. 143). In this regard, "by progressively learning to let go of these tendencies to grasp, one can begin to appreciate that all phenomena are free of any absolute ground and that such 'groundlessness' (sunyata) is the very fabric of dependent coorigination" (Varela et al., 1996, p. 144).

Implicit in this 'groundlessness' is the notion of *codependent arising*, the idea that a subject, its object and the relation between them cannot exist independently of each other (Varela et al., 1996, p. 221):

> How can we talk about the seer of a sight who is not seeing its sight? Conversely how can we speak of a sight that is not being seen by its seer? Nor does it make any sense to say that there is an independently existing seeing going on somewhere without any seer and without any sight being seen. (Varela et al., 1996, p. 222)

This is where the insight gained from mindfulness/awareness practice facilitates a more meaningful understanding of the Cartesian distinction. The two poles of the distinction, the mental and the material, reveal themselves as potential foundations, the former as a stable, identifiable inner self and the latter as an already existing, independent outer world. They are opposite extremes of the same position, and mindfulness/awareness practice makes it possible to see them as instances of grasping.

Embodied action, then, is a position that treads a middle space. Informed by the tradition of mindfulness meditation, it recognizes the habitual tendency to grasp at imagined foundations, both inner and outer, and uses this knowledge to gain insight into the Cartesian distinction between thinking being and material being.

Where the Cartesian distinction gave rise to representation as an explanation for the process of cognition, a process characterized by the separation between an independent knower and the object of cognition, embodied action rejects representation in such an account. In an understanding within which thinking being and material being mutually specify each other, it is nonsensical to propose that an autonomous cognitive faculty is receiving and processing information from an independent and already existing external environment. In this alternative portrait of cognition, the input-output formula, recognizable in early computationalism, is conceptually inadequate for explaining cognition. If not representation, then what? As a response, Varela et al. suggest that cognitive systems, human cognition being one such system, need to be understood

> . . . not on the basis of their input and output relationships but by their *operational*
>
> *closure*. A system that has operational closure is one in which the results of its
>
> processes are those processes themselves. The notion of operational closure is thus
>
> a way of specifying classes of processes that, in their very operation, turn back upon
>
> themselves to form autonomous networks. . . . Instead of *representing* an independent
>
> world, they *enact* a world as a domain of distinctions that is inseparable from the
>
> structure embodied by the cognitive system. (1996, pp. 139-140)

Thus, the cognitive act, understood as *enaction* (Varela et al., 1996, p. 173), is based on a reciprocal relationship between a simultaneously emerging system, cognition, and its milieu, a world. Since the former is inconceivable independently of the latter, and *vice versa*, it would be misleading to characterize their relationship as interaction since interaction suggests two distinct parties to the process. What is needed here is a term that acknowledges the necessity of distinguishing between a system and its world for the purposes of explanation, and yet accepts the indivisible, reciprocal connection between them. For these purposes, I am using the term *co-emergence*. Cognition, then, is the co-emergence of thinking being and material being.

Co-emergence is the vantage point from which we can articulate the defining attributes of an alternative model of mind. In reflecting its basis in co-emergence and reciprocity, I will refer to this as a *relational* model of mind. In response to the three defining attributes of a functional model of mind (provided in italics), a relational model of mind can be outlined in this way.

a.   (*The human mind is distinct from its environment.*)

      The human mind co-emerges with its ecology.

b.   (*The human mind is a processor of data and communication is a transfer of*

      information.)

      The process of co-emergence is a simultaneous coming into being of organism and

      ecology which enables language.

c.   (*The operation of a human mind can be assessed for relative success in completing*

pre-designated tasks.)

An organism's co-emergence with its ecology can be expressed.

The Human Mind Co-emerges with Its Ecology

What, then, does it mean to say that the human mind co-emerges with its ecology? Conceptually, this implies that the human cognitive faculty is inconceivable in isolation from its ecology. It is one with its ecology. On this point, however, it could readily be shown that the human cognitive faculty is, in fact, commonly understood as distinct from its material surroundings. While this observation may be true, it is of interest here insofar as it illustrates how one's understanding of experience betrays a particular view of being. If I conceive of my experience of thinking or having anger or feeling happiness as conceptually distinguishable from my body and my wider ecology, I betray a view of being wherein my cognitive aspect is distinct from my material aspect. Conversely, in coming to understand experience as something which is generated by cognitive activity unimaginable in isolation from its ecology, I hold a view of being where cognition co-emerges with its ecology. This latter view of being is a radical departure from the autonomous cognitive faculty commonly and unwittingly imagined by many of us living in modern societies.[10] It is a position whose implications are far-reaching. However, in the interests of circumscribing our discussion so that it is immediately relevant to linguistic matters, I will follow one line of implication as it makes its way toward language.[11]

In moving beyond mind/body physicalism, a relational model of mind rejects the

equation that mind equals brain and that, for instance, happiness or anger are the same as particular neurophysiological states or processes. Moreover, a relational model of mind moves beyond Bechtel's (1997) suggestion that some cognitive activities occur outside the brain. As was pointed out, Bechtel's *wide physicalism* does not challenge the primary distinction of thinking being from material being but rather rebalances the relative weight accorded to, on the one hand, the traditionally inner domain of cognition and, on the other, the outer environment. In this sense, Bechtel's suggestion that certain aspects of our outer environment are *recognized* rather than *represented* (recall the arithmetic problem and our ability to simply *recognize* the solutions to multiplying two one-digit numbers) is an exteriorizing of cognition, but one is still left with the sense of an inner processor responsible for the recognition of the solution.

In venturing beyond this position, where does a relational model of mind move to? What lies beyond representation and recognition? As I have been reminding the reader--and myself, representation, and now also recognition, take the mind/body, inner/outer distinction as a starting point for discussions of cognition. If this starting point is replaced in favour of one where the interior/exterior distinction is allowed to dissolve, representation and recognition become incomprehensible as models of cognition. In this redefined terrain, a concept such as *enaction* (Varela et al., 1996, p. 140) gains comprehensibility. Cognition can then be understood as the "mutual specification" (Varela et al., 1996, p. 172) of what, within a Cartesian framework, is seen as that which we experience individually on the *inside* and that which we share collectively on the *outside*.

How, then, does this affect our understanding of language? If language is to be understood as something other than the recovery or projection of symbolic representations, interpreted either as stable signs or ever-differing referents of meaning or even, as Bechtel (1997) suggests in the case of arithmetic language, a collection of learned indicators of objects in the external world which we simply *recognize*, how else can we imagine language?

Language can be seen as an ontologically significant act distinguishable from its more common epistemological interpretation as a system of representations facilitating information transfer. It can be viewed as the co-emergence of a speaker, a spoken to and an act of speaking. This is language as it emerges in the *present*. This dimension of language does not concern the linguistic meaning generated by semantic or syntactic constructions. It concerns itself with language at a pre-conceptual level, language before it has made its full impact as a transfer of linguistic meaning. In using the term *pre-conceptual*, I am pointing to a qualitative difference in states of being which occur before and after thought. If states of being are imagined as a spectrum, the pre-conceptual state is the wavelength closer to co-emergence while the conceptual state is on the wavelength of representation where language is information transfer.

The pre-conceptual dimension of language is amenable to the *mindfulness awareness* practice outlined by Varela et al. Since the practice allows one "to experience what one's mind is doing as it does it" (Varela et al., 1996, p. 23), it brings to awareness the pre-conceptual dimension of lived experience, experience as it is unfolding. Language as co-emergence in the *present* is one aspect of that pre-conceptual experience and while language

is what concerns us most directly here, it should be stressed that *mindfulness awareness* practice is attentiveness to a wider ecology of which language is only a part. Essentially, *mindfulness awareness* practice is attentiveness to everything that comes into being at any given moment.

My focus on the pre-conceptual, mindful dimension of language is not meant to deny the function of language as a facilitator of information transfer. Language as a system of representations through which the negotiation of *past* usage is made possible is, of course, a useful and important picture of language. It is not a picture compatible with language as *enaction*, language as co-emergence in the *present*, but it does have its own area of comprehensibility and utility. For instance, language as representation is the basis, albeit an unstable one, for the negotiation of meaning based on *past* usage. Analyses of this negotiation bring to light the shifting forces at play on language and, conversely, how language use shapes those forces. This type of analysis enables ideological, historical and psychological critiques of language.

Significantly, even when looked at as a system of representations, language does not have to entail a representative theory of cognition. This is made possible through Varela et al.'s previously cited notion of *weak representation* wherein representation denotes "anything that can be interpreted as being about something" (1996, p. 134). In this sense, my use of the word *tree* can be broadly construed, in English, as being associated with a certain type of organism whose qualities are construed in a similar way by speakers of English. As such, use of the term *tree* may be understood as a negotiation of meaning for the purposes of drawing

attention to the same organism, the tree. However, this does not entail a commitment to a theory of cognition or language as representation, what Varela et al. refer to as a "stronger sense of representation" (1996, p. 135).

We are now in a position to focus on language as a meaningful act at the moment of manifestation, the *present*, without denying language as a system of representations based on *past* usage. Having differentiated between these two dimensions of language, and established that it is the former with which we are specifically concerned, we are positioned to move toward a relational model of language. As was mentioned, however, the *present* dimension of language requires a concomitant method of understanding. Unlike an explanation of negotiated meaning based on a consideration of *past* usage, awareness of language in the *present* requires attentiveness to language as it occurs. This attentiveness is possible through *mindfulness awareness* practice (Varela et al., 1996, p. 23) and constitutes an alertness to language, spoken or heard,[12] at the instant of utterance.

In a subsequent section, we will return to the significance of language in the *present* and, in reference to Abram's (1996) work, suggest that language is not only an integral aspect of one's co-emergence with an ecology, it is the very bringing into being of that ecology.

Before moving any further, however, we need to touch ground, appropriately, and envision what impact a relational model of mind might have on our everyday physical state of affairs. What does it mean, in a physical sense, to say that the human mind co-emerges with its ecology? In response, a relational model of mind would presuppose that it is inappropriate to understand cognition by positing a physical border between the brain and its

ecology, both bodily and in a wider sense. In a relational model of mind, the cognizing agent is removed neither from her[13] own body nor from the world of earth and sky. She simply *is* in the world as an inseparable aspect of that world. When the physical body and the wider ecology are held to give rise to cognition, cognition assumes *physical* and *emotive* characteristics in addition to its traditionally *mental* traits. *Knowing* becomes as much a physical and emotional experience as a mental one.[14] A clear consequence of the validation of physical and emotive knowledge is that the connection that a physical body has to its ecology and the emotions it experiences do not have to be mediated *mentally* to become legitimate forms of knowing.

Additionally, when cognition is held to be inseparable from its ecology, cognition becomes *actual, lived*. This is to say that a relational model of mind acknowledges our *actual* position as organisms in a wider ecology and the quality of our *lived* experience. To conceive of cognition as a process inseparable from the air we breathe or the water we drink or the sun we absorb or the emotions we experience is to conceive of cognition in a literally *natural* way in that cognition becomes a dimension of the natural world. Rather than existing in a bounded inner space, or in a transaction between what is seen as inner mental space and external physical object, cognition becomes located in the everyday world in which we live.

The Process of Co-emergence Is a Simultaneous Coming Into Being of Organism and Ecology Which Enables Language

In a relational model of mind, cognition is seen as a process of co-emergence of

organism, in this case human, and an ecology. The co-emergence is not mentally driven and goal directed. Rather than a process of collecting information from the external environment with a view to solving problems, cognition is now a process whose coming into being is contingent on previous patterns of co-emergence of organism and ecology, what Varela et al. refer to as a "history of structural coupling" (1996, p. 200). In referring to a *coming into being*, however, my intention is not to suggest that organism and ecology somehow conspire to bring their relationship into being. The *coming into being* of a particular relationship of organism and ecology *is* the very connection that constitutes the relationship. This radical simultaneity of cognition and connection seems to be implicit in the notion of *enaction* (Varela et al., 1996, p. 173).

When cognition is seen as a process of co-emergence of organism and ecology, knowing becomes more than an empirical matter. Since cognition is a relationship wherein organism and ecology simultaneously specify each other and therefore arise together, the nature of the relationship becomes paramount. In this regard, my awareness of the connections between me and the trees outside my window is more than a matter of recognizing my concretely observable relationship to the trees as a matter of representation, whether that representation be the measurable ten metres in distance they are from my window or the quantity of light they prevent from entering my room or even the gases they emit which make their way into my lungs. In a relational model of mind, knowing is more than knowledge about how the trees influence the environment we cohabit: knowing is awareness of the relationship which *is* my co-emergence with the trees. Knowing thus

becomes a conduct guide, an ongoing awareness of the *present*. In this way, knowing is expanded to enfold past information relevant to an organism's interaction with its environment *and* mindfulness of the present nature of the relationship into each other.

Language is enabled by the co-emergence of organism and ecology. This is to say that language is made possible by co-emergence, but it is not a necessary expression of co-emergence. In other words, when a moment comes into being as part of an ever-unfolding *present*, it may be in silence or in utterance. When the moment comes into being in utterance, language is happening. At the moment of co-emergence, however, a familiar utterance can occupy a place which is, paradoxically, both pre-conceptual and representational. For instance, when a moment comes into being with my uttering the familiar word *dog*, it is both a pre-conceptual production of sound and the use of a particular sound used to refer to a particular organism in one of my linguistic groups. This will explain how an act of new meaning, emergent meaning, can, at the same time, be the negotiation of a similar construal for words based on previous negotiative acts. An utterance accomplishes these dual roles by ranging itself across the spectrum I made reference to earlier, that is, it traverses the pre-conceptual and conceptual parts of the spectrum. When an utterance co-emerges with a moment, it is pre-conceptual and, one might say, *weakly* representational. It then continues its trajectory through time and deeper into thought, which is to say deeper into a *strong* sense of representation. However, unlike this aspect of language derived from *past* usage, the emergent dimension of language is always in the *present*, never a repetition of what has gone before.

An Organism's Co-emergence with Its Ecology Can Be Expressed

Within a relational model of mind, cognition is not a matter of problem solving nor is the completion of pre-designated tasks an arbiter of cognitive performance. Simply put, there is neither the need nor the desire to assess cognition. As such, accounts of cognitive episodes, understood as episodes in the co-emergence of organism and ecology, are descriptive and expressive rather than evaluative. To once again return to an earlier example, my retrieval of a cup of coffee from the kitchen or the timely completion of my thesis are episodes in the ongoing co-emergence of me and that which surrounds and sustains me. The unfolding of this co-emergence will clearly be influenced by past patterns of co-emergence, but the *present* will also contain its own emergent meaning and significance as an act of creating.

When my retrieval of a cup of coffee from the kitchen is interrupted by some misfortune, a stumble or a spill, my inclination will not be to look for invisible, inferred causes such as a lapse of mental concentration or a neurophysiological malfunction. In resisting the urge to measure cognition against a scale of relative success and to locate supposedly *inner* causes for my less than successful *outer* behaviour, I resist the urge both to objectify cognition and, as a consequence, to make normative judgements about cognition. All this is not to deny the necessity for or validity of causal explanations, the sort of explanations I discussed within a functional model of mind, but to explore alternate means for coming to understand the incident. In a relational model, an understanding of this past cognitive event, again understood as an episode of co-emergence between organism and ecology, is generated

by the initial assumption that I am one with my actions and the world in which these actions take place. If I am inclined to look for explanations as to why I now sit at my desk without a cup of coffee, the explanation needs to think about the events leading up to this point not as the failure of my cognitive and physical capacities to successfully negotiate an outer world of cups, chairs and desks, but rather as a state of affairs affected by previous interactions between me and my world.

When cognition is not measured, making normative judgements becomes an inappropriate method for understanding cognition, my own and that of others. The critical point here is that normative judgements are premised on a view of cognition where organism and ecology are separate. If this separation is dropped, so too are normative assessments of cognition and, more fundamentally, facile distinctions between self and other. I will revisit the issue of self and other in Part Three of this paper when I consider the audiotaped recordings from my study.

To continue our revisiting of a previous example, had I watched a friend stumble on her return from the kitchen, I might be in a position to infer that spilling was not the desired result of her interactions with her environment, but I would resist the temptation to attribute this outcome to the relative shortcomings of *inner* cognitive processes. I would not be inclined to measure the outcome against some predesignated standard of sufficient performance. Rather than pointing to her lack of ability or coordination or balance, I might view the incident as part of her being in the world at that particular instant. This would not preclude an understanding of this instant as contingent on her previous interactions with her

environment nor would it disable her efforts to avoid more spilling in the future.

Within a relational model of mind, how we come to understand cognitive activity is better expressed as a matter of how we understand our ongoing co-emergence with an ecology. In contrast to a functional model of mind, a relational model of mind looks not to objectified cognition but rather to co-emergence with an ecology. Rather than assessing this co-emergence for its relative distance from a predesignated standard of successful cognitive performance, the co-emergence is taken as an episode in the ongoing creation of a world through the relationship of organism and ecology.

A Relational Model of Language

Before turning our attention to expand the possibilities for thinking about language afforded within a relational model of mind, I will provide a sense of that to which a relational model of language is reacting, namely, the view of language as a system of information transfer. Specifically, I will consider language as information transfer in the context of ESL.

ESL and an Experimental Methodology

Much of the traditional thinking in ESL instruction and acquisition is expressed through an experimental research methodology. Within this approach, typically, various components of language, the language learner and the language learning process are isolated, observed and then assessed for their potential correlation to the functional task of facilitating the exchange of information between language users. In this examination, language, the

language learner and the language learning process are necessarily objectified. That is, in the movement from the language learning experience of a particular learner in a particular place to objective data, the experience is abstracted in a specific direction.

Representative of a tradition in second language acquisition which isolates variables hypothesized to affect the learning of a second language, Gardner and MacIntyre (1992, 1993) have elaborated Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model of second language acquisition by providing a description of "how various characteristics of individuals influence second language learning" (1992, p. 211). The model is presented as one into which cognitive, affective and cultural variables can be incorporated.

The cognitive variables are arranged into three classes: language aptitude, intelligence and language learning strategies. All three classes are considered for their potential to "correlate significantly with indices of second language achievement" (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992, p. 219). Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) arrange affective variables into two classifications: language attitudes and motivation, and language anxiety and self-confidence. These variables are also examined for their potential to influence an individual in a language learning setting.

Oxford and Anderson (1995) provide an account of learning style variables correlated to specific cultural groups. They construct a taxonomy of crosscultural learning styles in an effort to better understand second language learners and to "help students recognize the power of understanding their language learning styles for making learning quicker, easier and more effective" (Oxford & Anderson, 1995, p. 210). In other words, they set themselves the

task of isolating cultural learning style variables with a view to improving the language teaching-learning process. In stressing the particular significance of culture in the language learning process, they point out that "activities and cultural influences cannot be separated from what is learned" (Oxford & Anderson, 1995, p. 202).

This approach to ESL research is based on the isolation of variables and rests on a functional model of mind. Within this framework, a non-native speaker's less than proficient use of standard English is identified with recourse to isolated variables in the language learning process and then remedied through ESL instruction. This characterization of a second language encounter tends to overlook the experience of studying in a non-native language and when it does, it does so for the express purpose of identifying correlations between individual particularities and successful language acquisition.

A relational model of language proposes an alternative to the view of language I have just described. In outlining this alternative, I will consider language first in a general sense and then in the area of ESL. With respect to the former, I will draw on Abram's idea of *perceptual and linguistic reciprocity* (1996, p. 90) and with respect to ESL, I will assess what implications this thinking might have for research in the field.

Language and Perception

In a previous section, I had pictured language as moving beyond representation and recognition toward a place where language plays an active role in emergent meaning making *in the present*. In the following section, I want to further this conceptualization by focusing

on language as part of the co-emergence of organism and ecology. This co-emergence is addressed in Abram's (1996) consideration of language as an aspect of the wider ecology and, as the very *enactment* of a world, echoes Varela et al.'s approach which speaks of "a history of structural coupling *that brings forth a world* [italics mine]" (1996, p. 206).

Abram's (1996) perspective is in the tradition of an embodied philosophy of language, a tradition perhaps most influentially represented by Merleau-Ponty. Within this view, language is seen as a lived experience, in an emotive, bodily, and wider ecological sense. On this point, Abram interprets Merleau-Ponty:[15]

> Communicative meaning is first incarnate in the gestures by which the body spontaneously expresses feelings and responds to changes in its affective environment. The gesture is spontaneous and immediate. It is not an arbitrary sign that we mentally attach to a particular emotion or feeling; rather, the gesture *is* that feeling of delight or of anguish in its tangible, visible aspect. (1996, p. 74)

The challenge to the arbitrary nature of the sign is a challenge to the idea of language as a system of symbolic representations. It also implies a challenge to the post-modern deconstructionist critique of Western rationality, which also sees meaning in language as an arbitrary process informed by power relations, and thus as a system of representations, however much these representations need to be deconstructed. On this point, Abram writes:

> While these theorists aim to effect a deconstruction of *all* philosophical foundations, Merleau-Ponty's work suggests that, underneath all those admittedly shaky foundations, there remains the actual ground that we stand on, the earthly ground of

rock and soil that we share with the other animals and the plants. . . . Unlike all the

human-made foundations we construct upon its surface, the silent and stony ground

itself can never be grasped in a purely human act of comprehension. For it has, from

the start, been constituted (or "constructed") by many organic entities besides

ourselves. (1996, p. 281)

Abram's critique of models of language which are exclusively representational, and this

includes deconstructionist models, is echoed in Varela et al.'s (1996) critique of

representationalism as a model of cognition. Interestingly, Varela et al. also respond to a

challenge to Western rationality, in this case Putnam's critique of objectivism wherein he

argues that "we cannot understand meaning if we suppose language refers to mind-

independent objects" (in Varela et al., 1996, p. 233). Varela et al. take this one step further

by pointing out that "despite this thorough critique of objectivism, the argument is never

turned the other way round. Mind-independent objects are challenged, but object-

independent minds never are" (1996, p. 233).

In the first instance, then, *mind-independent objects*, wherein meaning, as Mark

Johnson explains in reference to Anglo-American analytic philosophy, is " a fixed relation

between words and the world" (in Varela et al., 1996, p. 149), are challenged by Putnam's

critique of objectivism *and* by deconstructionist thinkers such as Derrida who would also

contest recourse to *a fixed relation between words and the world*, what Barbara Johnson calls

"an objective frame of reference" (1981, p. 225). In the second instance, however, *object-

independent minds*, disembodied minds for whom language is *solely* an arbitrary, "mental"

phenomenon, remain unaddressed in, for example, deconstructionist thought. It is left to an

embodied tradition, represented by Merleau-Ponty and taken up in the area of linguistics by

Abram (1996), to reconnect language to the emotions, the body, and the earth.[16]

Abram works toward this end by taking the notion of *communicative meaning as first*

incarnate in gestures as a starting point for his discussion. Here he is referring to oral

communication, what he also calls "active, living speech" (1996, p. 74). He then undertakes

to explain the metamorphosis that language experienced in moving from its oral beginnings

through successive stages of representation in script, from the physical to the abstract. In

specifying this move into the written form, he claims that the source of manual depictions,

what we would also call *script*, is in "the earthly terrain in which we find ourselves . . .

[which] is shot through with suggestive scrawls and traces" (1996, p. 95). In the early stages

of the evolution of written language, then, written images in the form of characters as

pictograms or ideograms still connected the reader back to the surrounding environment. As

Abram expresses it, "*the sensible phenomenon and its spoken name were, in a sense, still*

participant with one another--the name a sort of emanation of the sensible entity" (1996, p.

100). With the development of the Hebrew *aleph-beth*, however, a wedge was driven

between the written character and the surrounding earth. The written character then referred

only to a sound made by the human mouth. Abram explains that "*a direct association is*

established between the pictorial sign and the vocal gesture, for the first time completely

bypassing the thing pictured" (1996, pp. 100-101). This process of linguistic abstraction

reaches a threshold, argues Abram, with the transmission and transformation of the Hebrew

aleph-beth into the Greek alphabet. He describes the transition and its significance:

> While the Semitic names had older, nongrammatological meanings for those who
>
> spoke a Semitic tongue, the Greek versions of those names had no
>
> nongrammatological meaning whatsoever for the Greeks. That is, while the Semitic
>
> name for the letter was also the name of the sensorial entity commonly imaged by or
>
> associated with the letter, the Greek name had no sensorial reference at all. (1996, p.
>
> 102)

The referent had become a solely human one:

> Each letter was now associated purely with a gesture or sound of the human mouth.
>
> Such images could no longer function as windows opening on to a more-than-human
>
> field of powers, but solely as mirrors reflecting the human form back upon itself. The
>
> senses that engaged or participated with this new writing found themselves locked
>
> within a discourse that had become exclusively human. (1996, p. 138)

The fact that language had become *exclusively human*, visibly separated from the world of

earth and sky, is of particular importance for Abram in light of his discussion of perception.

Drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty once again, Abram proposes that perception is

"inherently participatory . . . perception always involves, at its most intimate level, the

experience of an active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which

it perceives" (1996, p. 56). Pursuing this train of thought, Abram suggests that our separate

senses operate in a "synaesthetic way. . . . modalities [which] necessarily intercommunicate

and overlap" (1996, pp. 60-61). He then proposes that this inclination of the human senses

to synaesthetically couple in the event of perception was reoriented with written language:

> The participatory proclivity of the senses was simply transferred from the depths of
> the surrounding life-world to the visible letters of the alphabet. Only by concentrating
> the synaesthetic magic of the senses upon the written letters could these letters begin
> to come alive and to speak. . . . our senses are now coupled, synaesthetically, to these
> printed shapes as profoundly as they were once wedded to cedar trees, ravens, and
> the moon. (1996, p. 138)

A consequence of this redirection of the senses is what Abram describes as "the profoundly detached view of 'nature' that was to prevail in the modern period" (1996, p. 138). Abram's response to this separation of language from nature is an uncompromising, persistent emphasis on the physical, bodily, gestural, emotive and ecological aspects of language. In the preceding passage, for instance, he regards written letters not as abstract representations pointing to a sound, object or concept, but as *physical* scratches, indentations or marks. In this way, he is able to talk about language as a form of perception which shares the reciprocal quality of perception vis à vis its ecology. In fact, he suggests that "perception, this ongoing reciprocity, is the very soil and support of that more conscious exchange we call language" (1996, p. 74). Reading script, then, is seen as an act of perception in the physical world.

However, the bodily, physical basis of language has, for the most part,[17] been silenced by a view of language as a system of abstract representations. Abram's reading of language as representation gives a clear outline of the position against which he is reacting:

> The more prevalent view of language, at least since the scientific revolution, and still

assumed in some manner by most linguists today, considers any language to be a set of arbitrary but conventionally agreed upon words, or 'signs,' linked by a purely formal system of syntactic and grammatical rules. Language, in this view, is rather like a *code*; it is a way of *representing* actual things and events in the perceived world, but it has no internal, nonarbitrary connections to that world, and hence is readily separable from it. (1996, p. 77)

This view reiterates the Cartesian separation of thinking and material being *and* the post-modern deconstructionist emphasis on the exclusively arbitrary quality of language as a human phenomenon. Once again, language, as a *code*, partakes of the disembodied quality of thinking being while *the perceived world*, as an entity separable from and represented, even if only problematically, by language, assumes the qualities of an external, independently existing material being.

Where, then, does all this leave us with respect to language? It seems that we are left with two perspectives on language, one based in abstract representation and the other in the physical world. Abram refers to these two attitudes respectively as "the denotative, conventional dimension of language" (1996, p. 79), what I have previously referred to as *language as common construal based on past linguistic activity*, and "the sensorial dimension of direct, affective meaning" (1996, p. 79), what I have previously referred to as *language as a creating act set in the present*. For his part, Abram assigns primacy to the sensorial dimension and maintains that the abstract dimension could not have been nor can it be possible without it. In this sense, Abram's position is truly heretical. Not only does he

provide an alternative basis for thinking about language, but he suggests that this physical alternative underlies and makes possible the abstract, more commonplace understanding of language.

Abram's (1996) view of perception and language can be seen as an act of embodying perception and language in the ecology which surrounds them. It can be seen as an effort to explain how language, which is commonly understood as a system of disembodied signs, can be viewed as a dimension of our ecological lives, a dimension which has been distorted through its severing from the physical earth in which it has its origins. In this view, perception is *completed* in the physical world, in the co-emergence of organism and ecology. As an aspect of perception, language too once completed itself in the physical world, though the connection between language and nature has since been clouded by successive stages of written language. The result of this masking of the connection between language and nature has been the predominance, often exclusive, of a view of language as a system of disembodied, abstract representations, or, more recently, as a system of power relations.

Abram's notion of *reciprocity* extracts language from representation, from a dualistic framework of inner mind and outer world and into a transformed space, the space of co-emergence. He does this by suggesting that language, like perception, begins and ends in the actually existing world. This is wholly intelligible within Abram's view that perception and language are not the self-contained activities of organisms but rather the very relationship between organism and ecology. Drawing once again on Merleau-Ponty, Abram writes:

Perception . . . is precisely this reciprocity, the ongoing interchange between my body

and the entities that surround it. It is a sort of silent conversation that I carry on with things, a continuous dialogue that unfolds far below my verbal awareness—and often, even, *independent* of my verbal awareness, as when my hand readily navigates the space between these scribed pages and the coffee cup across the table without my having to think about it. (1996, pp. 52-53)

Abram's reference to coffee is an auspicious one in that it prompts a revisiting of my spilling of coffee in previous examples. In those examples, I had suggested that these mishaps, both mine and those of my friend, were to be understood, within a relational model of mind, as part of being in the world at those particular instants, as episodes in our ongoing co-emergence with an ecology. Abram's reference to *a silent, continuous dialogue with things* is an opportunity to expand this understanding.

The *continuous dialogue* to which he refers is similar to the state of being I had proposed for understanding the *present* dimension of language. In that instance, I was drawing on *mindfulness awareness* practice wherein the purpose is "to become mindful, to experience what one's mind is doing as it does it, to be present with one's mind" (Varela et al., 1996, p. 23). Similarly, my understanding of a spilling episode can be seen as a mindful witnessing, an attentiveness to the episode as it happens, an awareness which is part of that *silent, continuous dialogue with things.* My understanding of the episode is attentiveness without thought. It is a pre-conceptual, non-evaluative, mindful awareness. In simple terms, it is a prolongation of the state which lies between the instant of spilling and a reaction such as, "Oh, I'm such an idiot for spilling the coffee."

Abram's (1996) *dialogue with things*, expressed also as *perceptual and linguistic reciprocity*, is crucial to a relational model of language in that it provides the impetus for language to be viewed not merely as a system of disembodied signs which represent objects in the material world--this would make perfect sense in a computational account of language, but rather as an aspect of our co-emergence--as total beings, with our ecology. It provides the conceptual space for language to be completed in the *present* by seeing it as inseparable from our ongoing co-emergence with the world. Language thus achieves significance not only by making meaning through representations of the world or by deconstructing those very representations, but rather by its constituent role in the very creation of a world. As was mentioned earlier, however, this creation, this ever-unfolding *present*, may be in silence or in utterance. In making reference to Abram's (1996) work, I am discussing the latter aspect of co-emergence, that is, co-emergence in utterance. Notwithstanding the distinction between silence and utterance, an understanding of co-emergence in either its silent or uttered aspects requires attentiveness to it as it unfolds, *as it happens*. It requires mindful awareness.

When language is thought about as embodied, as being part of the physical ecology and our co-emergence with it, it becomes an act of meaning making in the world. It retains its ability for common construal, but the vocalizing of a word or sound or, for that matter, the movement in a facial or manual gesture, becomes a creating act in that it literally *speaks* a world.[18] When I utter the word *tree*, it has a potentially common construal for people who speak English, but it is also the very bringing into being of the tree at that moment of awareness since it defines part of my co-emergence with the tree. Here once again we see

how language can self-organize past construal, past common histories of interacting with the world, into co-emergence in the present. More specifically, it is co-emergence situated between a silent but both absorbing and extending state of attentiveness and a representational interpretation of language. In other words, at the instant of my uttering *tree*, I have broken the silence using my past linguistic knowledge, but I have not yet cast off attentiveness to the utterance in the present and moved into the conceptual, categorical realm. The utterance *tree* is still a present vocalization unfolding from the past, but still in the moment. This is the dimension of language with which a relational model concerns itself. It is a dimension of language constituted not by its linguistic meaning *per se*, but by its simple utterance which is nothing less than the co-emergence of a speaker, a spoken to and an act of speaking. All this is to acknowledge the *aliveness*, the *bringing into being* quality of language not in its more common epistemological sense, that sense usually associated with representation and information transfer, but in a basic ontological sense, as a pre-conceptual state of being which is meaningful by virtue of its coming into being.

Thus far I have explained that language can exist simultaneously as non-representational and representational, as both an aspect of co-emergence in the present and as a system of referents for negotiating meaning based on past usage. For instance, when I utter the word *tree*, the utterance is both a pre-conceptual production of sound that co-emerges with a world and a drawing of attention to something. In drawing attention to *something*, however, it is clear that I am addressing a particular organism with leaves standing outside my window and not the furry black creature with four legs and a tail climbing up the

side of it. In this regard, I must acknowledge language as representation in the midst of language as non-representation. In other words, I begin to use language as representation in a conscious way. I draw on past linguistic knowledge, as in my use of the word *tree*, but I am also attentive to its non-representational dimension as a gestural and emotive production of sound.

The simultaneity or overlap of representation and non-representation does not seem to be the case for all utterances. Had I uttered *maple tree* or *Douglas fir*, there would be less likelihood of overlap between the utterance as pre-conceptual sound and the utterance as referent for a particular organism. This seems to be related to the length of time required to articulate the sound. It appears that the longer the duration of the utterance, the more time there is for the instant of co-emergence to fade and full referential, conceptual, categorical meaning to be established. For example, during the time required to utter the monosyllabic *tree*, the utterance accrues only a *very weak* element of representation, just enough representation to allow me to draw attention to the tree and not to the black squirrel. However, with the polysyllabic *maple tree* or *Douglas fir*, the time lapse between the beginning and end of the utterance is greater. This allows the utterance to fade as an instant of sound and to gain representational import. The fact that I would be unlikely to address these organisms by their more polysyllabic species specific names suggests that addressing something or someone is not a primarily representational or conceptual act, but rather an instantaneously somatic or gestural one.

From Concept to Methodology: Defining a Relational Approach to the ESL Study

This section is a bridge between my discussion of a relational model of language, and the relational model of mind which underlies it, and the consideration of a research experience. As was mentioned at the outset, this research was conducted around an ESL conversation exercise involving community college EAP and TESL students. The data consist of two primary sources: videotapes of weekly conversations between EAP and TESL students and subsequent audiotaped discussions of the videotapes between myself, as the researcher, and each of the research participants. A detailed description of the research design and its implementation will be given in Part Two of this paper.

My research framework takes its cue from a de-emphasis on representational models of language and, conversely, a pronounced emphasis on the *present* dimension of language as an aspect of the *co-emergent* coming into being of research participants, researcher and research activity. As a first step in defining a relational approach to the study, I will give a brief account of my initial efforts to locate an existing research methodology which might have provided an alternative to experimental methods. In this regard, I will explain how the two methods I considered at the time of conceptualizing the study fell short of the attitude I was moving toward, an attitude which had not yet been articulated but would eventually surface as a *relational* model of mind and language.

The introspective method.

My intention in the research had been to get as close as I could to the participants'

experience of the conversations.[19] In the research proposal for this study, I wrote:

> I will look at the second language experience as being the first person experience of
>
> sentient and sensorial beings in a given place in time. Toward that end, my research
>
> methodology will move as close as it can to presenting the first person lived
>
> experience of my research participants as they take part in these conversation
>
> activities.

This intention suggested a particular methodology. It pointed me in the direction of the

participants' experience of language and the language learning process *as it unfolded, as it*

was experienced. I qualified the suggestion in this way:

> While it would be untenable to suggest that I, as the researcher, will not in some way
>
> mediate this experience, my methodological choices will consciously seek to highlight
>
> the experience of the participants in their participation in this ESL activity.

At the time, I looked for an existing research methodology which might have informed and

expanded my plan to solicit *first person* accounts of the conversation activity. In this regard,

I initially considered the method referred to as *introspective* (Færch and Kasper, 1987). It

seemed to provide an alternative to experimental methods in second language research but,

as I soon discovered, it also served as an extension to those very same methods for the

reasons set out as follows.

Færch and Kasper explain that introspective methods "use as data, informants' own

statements about the ways they organize and process information" (1987, p. 9). Grotjahn

refers to these methods as including "self-report, self-observation, and self-revealment" (1987,

p. 55). Cohen sees them as including "learners' reports of their own intuitions and insights" (1987, p. 82) which include "insights about good and bad communicative strategies in the classroom [which] can be gained from empirical observation coupled with verification by the students themselves" (Cohen & Aphek, 1981, p. 221). Færch and Kasper propose that introspective methods be used "as an alternative or supplement to inferring their [second language learners] thoughts from behavioural events" (1987, p. 9). They also point out that "what makes it possible today to use introspective reports as rigorously as the so-called objective methods . . . is that the validity of the elicited statements can be assessed in terms of explicit models of information processing" (Færch & Kasper, 1987, p. 10).

Introspective methods seemed initially of interest to my study insofar as they solicit the impressions and recollections of the research participants themselves. However, two clear cautions need to be made. Firstly, as a reaction to the shortcomings of behaviourist approaches wherein "reconstructing unobservable phenomena from performance data will always entail situations where the ambiguity between product and process cannot be solved" (Færch & Kasper, 1987, p. 9), introspection thus construed commits itself to a central tenet of functionalism, namely that mental states equal computational states.[20] I treat this warily for two reasons. In the first instance, I do not believe that mental states equal computational states. Putnam, for instance, points out that there is no good reason for supposing that mental states are identical or even analogical to computational states (1997). In the second instance, a computer model of mind, a *functional* model of mind, gives rise to the *functional* approach to language from which I am working consciously away.

At this point, the question may be raised as to whether I see *any* place for a functional model of mind or language. In reply, I should first point out that thinking about cognition and language in functional terms is to characterize thought and communication as task driven acts of problem solving. Without a doubt, this view of cognition and language facilitates countless aspects of our lives. For instance, with respect to cognition, a functional understanding of the "cognitive task" of finding a cure for a debilitating disease or landing a probe on Mars is not only useful but absolutely necessary. It allows for a breakdown of the task, an orderly application of relevant technology, ongoing assessment of the process, and an ultimate solution to the problem.

Similarly, when language is viewed as problem solving, tasks such as translating texts or achieving academic competence in a foreign language are made possible. The emphasis in this view of language is on efficiency of linguistic skill and accuracy of linguistic product. (I know that most of the students in my college ESL classes would readily agree with this description of language.) A functional model of mind and language has its place. It is most useful and appropriate in those situations where thinking about cognition or language as goal oriented, as moving toward an imagined solution, expedites the completion of everyday tasks.

However, exclusive recourse to a functional model of mind or language can be distorting. For instance, in understanding my connection to my parents or, with regard to the matter closest at hand, my research participants, a functional understanding of cognition precludes an understanding of relationships as *co-emergence*, as *a mutual specification* of a world. This is to say that as problem solving, a functional model cannot account for cognition

as bare being, as an ontologically irreducible connection between beings. Since it is premised on problem solving, a functional model will set out to find a solution, even if the situation is not a problem in need of a solution. It will break down what it sees as a problem solving task and surmise causal relationships presumed to be at play. This is appropriate enough for finding medical cures and putting data gathering instruments on other planets, but awkwardly out of place for thinking about why I should get my parents an anniversary gift or why, as a researcher, I should be listening carefully, even empathetically, to what my research participants are telling me. (This assumes that I am not interested in deceiving, for my own purposes, either my parents or research participants.)

Language, too, is vulnerable to a misapplication of functional characterizations. For instance, would it make any sense to understand a mediaeval monastic chant in functional terms, with *functional* understood specifically as *information transfer*, as a case of the chanter's linguistic output making its way as symbolic representation into God's ear as linguistic input? To be sure, one could argue that the chant is in fact a sort of problem solving in that it allows the chanter to enter a focussed or trance-like state. However, this would be "problem solving" of a far more complex nature than the sort implied in more common functional views of language--included here would be those mentioned above, namely, text translation or academic competence.

As a non-representational use of language, a chant is closer to silent awareness than it is to information transfer. A chant is an *invocation*, an act of supplication which at the same time calls into being a world. How would we understand a chant within a

representational notion of language? How could we explain a chant in the context of information transfer? The incongruity between the non-representational use of language, as in a chant, and language as a system of abstract representations geared to information transfer, would reduce such an explanation to absurdity.[21]

Another related concern with introspective methods as advocated by Cohen (1987), Cohen & Aphek (1981), Færch & Kasper (1987) and Grotjahn (1987) is that they are seen to be complemented by approaches which isolate for linguistic variables and test for correlations between these variables and linguistic behaviour. In other words, the qualitative data gathered from introspective research participant reports is seen to be equally amenable to qualitative analysis, what Grotjahn refers to as the "exploratory-interpretative" (1987, p. 59) paradigm, as it is to quantitative analysis, what he calls the "analytical-nomological" (1987, p. 59) paradigm. In the latter case, qualitative data is subjected to quantitative analysis. Introspective methods are not, as I had first imagined, synonymous with descriptive studies which do not set out to test predictive hypotheses. This marks a significant point of divergence from a relational model of language which favours just this emphasis on description and the absence of hypothesis testing.

The naturalistic method.

In continuing my search for an existing methodology which might have guided my research framework, I turned to yet another set of research methods which appeared to offer an alternative to an experimental methodology. The method I considered is referred to as

naturalistic (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

With the caution that the term *naturalistic* may refer to numerous approaches, including "the postpositivistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, subjective, case study, qualitative, hermeneutic, humanistic" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 7), the general principles of a naturalistic approach are outlined in this way.

1. Realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic.

2. Knower and known are interactive, inseparable.

3. Only time- and context-bound working hypotheses are possible.

4. All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects.

5. Inquiry is value bound. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37)

These principles do move beyond the experimental approach commonly used in ESL studies. However, they also differ significantly from a relational approach. What I propose to do here is to interpret each of these naturalistic principles with a view to demonstrating how they would be found lacking in a relational consideration of language.

1. *Realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic.*

As we have seen, language is an ever-unfolding co-emergence of speaker, spoken to and act of speaking. The very possibility for language lies in the co-emergence of speaker and ecology, an ecology which can also include other speakers. When a naturalistic approach characterizes reality plurally, however, being assumes a personal, individualized, solipsistic demeanour. While in no way intending to diminish the value and complexity of individual

perspectives and the voices that those perspectives give rise to, a *relational* approach does take issue with the autonomous self implicit in a naturalistic approach, an autonomous self which seems to constitute one of many *multiple realities* which, presumably, it has *constructed* through some form of "mental" act.

Where a naturalistic approach proposes *multiple* and *constructed realities*, a relational model sees *one reality*, albeit infinitely complex, of which language is an *emergent* aspect.

2. *Knower and known are interactive, inseparable.*

A relational approach to language would concur with a naturalistic approach to the extent that knower and known are *inseparable*. However, in characterizing the relationship of *knower* and *known* as *interactive*, a naturalistic approach concedes the existence of two distinct entities as a starting point. The process that a naturalistic approach refers to as *interaction* is seen as *co-emergence* in a relational model of language. In a relational model of language, the speaker, the spoken to and the speaking are unthinkable apart from one other in that they co-emerge out of a pre-linguistic state of awareness or attentiveness in which they are not distinct from each other. A naturalistic approach does not address the pre-linguistic, silent state of awareness where knower, known and act of knowing, corresponding to speaker, spoken and act of speaking, have not yet been abstracted into being. To return to an earlier example, a naturalistic approach does not address the pre-linguistic state where *I* and *tree* have not yet been distinguished from each other through the utterance *tree*.

3. *Only time- and context-bound working hypotheses are possible.*

A relational model of language rejects any hypothesis, *working* or otherwise, as a

means for coming to understand language as a *present* act, an act simultaneous with being. Hypotheses are appropriate in functional models of language, where the concern is to achieve solutions to the problems posed by the task of information transfer. In contrast, relational accounts of language are stories of the *co-emergence* of speaker, spoken to and act of speaking. However, since these stories are talking about language at a pre-conceptual level, at the point where language is abstracting itself from silent awareness but before the point where it has accrued 'linguistic meaning,' they cannot capture language through detailed descriptions of particular linguistic encounters nor through *verbatim* transcripts of audiotaped recordings of the encounters. These stories can only point to the instant of abstraction, the instant where speaker, spoken to and act of speaking become distinguishable, and in so doing demonstrate their own inability to fully capture the instant.

4. *All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects.*

A relational approach to language would agree that *distinguishing causes from effects* is not possible. However, unlike a naturalistic approach, a relational approach to language would dismiss any concern with causes or effects outright. In a relational approach to language, causes and effects are a non-issue. The means by which a relational approach to language comes to understand the *mutual specification* of speaker, spoken to and speaking is found in the concept of *co-emergence*

5. *Inquiry is value bound.*

A naturalistic approach acknowledges that any methodology will reflect the

ontological, epistemological and ideological presuppositions of particular researchers. A relational approach to language also sees research frameworks, whether they be experimental, naturalistic or, for that matter, relational, as *value bound*. However, a relational approach to language does not hold that researchers are so *value bound* as to be unable to attune themselves to how they experience *co-emergence* with an ecology, to how they experience living. In other words, a relational approach to language asks researchers to extend their bounded selves to understand that *present, shared* dimension of language which is awareness of the co-emergence of research participants, researcher and research activity. Once again, the *mindfulness awareness* practice to which Varela et al. (1996, p. 23) refer makes this awareness of co-emergence possible. It does so by allowing practitioners, in this case researchers, to attune themselves to the research experience as it happens and, in interpreting data from past research, as it happened. All this is impossible when particular researchers attach such weight to their *value boundedness* as to deny their inseparable connection to their research participants and their constituent role in the research activity.

PART TWO

Situating the Study

I will now describe the personal and academic context for the ESL study I carried out earlier this year. The study, which received only general attention in Part One, is now at the center of our discussion.

A Personal Foreground

The research site for this study was a conversation exercise held between ESL students and student teachers as part of their instructional program which took place in the spring semester of 1997 at the community college where I once taught. The ESL students are enrolled in an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) program, a pre-college preparation program for students planning to apply to community college certificate or diploma programs, and the student teachers are enrolled in a TESL (Teachers of English as a Second Language) program which leads to certification as a Teacher of English as a Second or Foreign Language. This weekly activity was an important research site for me for two reasons. As a meeting point for EAP students and students in the teacher training program, it spanned a number of the positions I had once occupied, as a student in the teacher training program and later as an EAP instructor. Additionally, participating in the study allowed me to revisit the presence I had sensed with students in my classes, a presence that I had felt inhibited to fully explore and understand for fear of its incompatibility with the completion of a syllabus. This was regrettable since the simple act of sharing a classroom was a manifestation of that

presence without which a syllabus would have been inconceivable. This experience motivated the research for this paper. It also gave rise to the exploration on my part of a relational model of mind and language, and now informs the writing of the study.

Presence

This seemingly mysterious *presence* to which I am referring is the very reality of the moment we are *in*, the very pre-conceptual and pre-linguistic dimension of being which is the ecology out of which all that we think or articulate arises. I had sensed this dimension in my contact with students and it had tempered my relations with them. It was at once an acute attentiveness to the doing of commonplace activities, in my classroom this meant the instruction of ESL, and a knowing that these activities were part of an immense shared being of which the students and I were part. Its impact had been to tie me to the present, to the ordinary, while at the same time attuning me to the depths of that very present. I do not know whether my students sensed a shared present in this way, but I do know that I was able to develop meaningful and trusting relationships with many of them. I like to think that my awareness of that larger dimension of being made me more humble, more receptive, a better listener and a more committed instructor.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to capture a sense of what shared presence actually meant in a classroom, but perhaps I can point to it. Presence seemed most pronounced in silence, the type of silence one finds between a question and an answer or among students working quietly on individual assignments in class. These silences were infused with a

deafening sense of larger being. As I would make my way around the class to provide assistance to students working on assignments, a student would occasionally look up for no apparent reason other than to acknowledge my presence. With nothing that needed to be said, we would catch each other's glance and exchange a smile or even a stare. I consider such moments to have been among the most significant in my teaching experience for reasons that I am hard pressed to explain. I *can* say that the silent connection engendered in a shared glance, especially with those students whose proficiency in English was least developed, was powerful. It was as if we were cheating language, sharing a present in spite of the supposed barrier of less than optimal information transfer. The silent connection to which I am referring seems similar to the silent knowing that Heshusius describes wherein "the essence and starting point of the act of coming to know is not a subjectivity that one can explicitly account for, but is of a direct participatory nature one cannot account for" (1994, p. 17).

An awareness of presence, as attunement to the present, is commonly overlooked in discussions of pedagogy. If it is acknowledged at all, it is done so indirectly. The meaningful rapport it fosters between instructor and students is typically taken to be the result of personality or technique. This is understandable since it would be out of the ordinary to portray a way of being as an aid to pedagogy. I would have found it extremely difficult to even broach the subject with a program chair or department head, preferring to characterize issues of pedagogy in the terms more commonly used and accepted, terms such as motivational technique or classroom management. A shared awareness of presence was my best kept pedagogical secret, though I believe it was not such a secret to my students without

whom it would not have been.

I visited a former colleague's EAP class after having been away from a community college classroom for almost two years. It was reassuring to realize that an awareness of presence in a classroom had not deserted me. On leaving the class, I had been prompted to write:

> It seems to me that grammar and vocabulary lessons are quite beside the point [in terms of the shared presence of the students], the point being that these students are simply and completely present in that space at that moment. They are part of a process of interaction with everything and everyone in that classroom and that particular instant.

This was not to deny the functional importance of grammar or vocabulary lessons but to draw attention to the stratum of being underlying them.

Abram, too, alludes to *presence* in his *continuous dialogue with things* (1996, p. 52) and *perceptual and linguistic reciprocity* (1996, p. 90). Both notions point to the pre-conceptual, pre-linguistic relationship of co-emergence, expressed as *dialogue* or *reciprocity*, that we share with an ecology, an ecology which includes the cup of coffee I reach out to on the table, the people I pass on the street, the bird singing outside my window or the brilliantly hued sunset. This dimension of being subsumes the thoughts we experience and the language we take part in and is brought to awareness through silent attention, through the *mindfulness/awareness* practice to which Varela et al. (1991, p. 23) refer.

Relative Positions from Silence to Representation

A recognition of *presence* is crucial to my study in ESL since the study concerns itself with the pre-conceptual, non-representational, relational aspect of language. This is the aspect of language that cannot be explained with recourse to information transfer based on past usage, but rather through attentiveness to it as it unfolds, *as it happens*. This aspect of language plays a constituent role in the creation of a world through its co-emergence with that world.

The non-representational aspect of language is closer to silent awareness and further from representation. It may be helpful here to describe these relative terms, close and further, by elaborating the spectrum of thought and language I introduced earlier. At one end of the spectrum is the pre-conceptual, pre-linguistic dimension of being where one simply *is*, unreflectively but attentively. This is what I have been calling *co-emergence*. As one moves from this point on the spectrum, one initiates a process of abstraction. In other words, one begins to draw away from the unreflective but attentive dimension of being in an effort to understand or describe it. The movement away from co-emergence gives rise to a reflective *awareness* of co-emergence. Again, this is not the initial co-emergence itself, but the awareness of co-emergence. This is an important distinction in that within the co-emergence itself, the process of abstraction has not yet begun.

On this end of the spectrum, we find language in its non-representational aspect. This is language as a gestural, physical, emotive phenomenon in the lived, actual, somatic, ecological world. Here language is not primarily a system of information transfer but an act

of uttering, of bringing into being. Examples of language in this aspect would include the monastic chant to which I made reference earlier and my addressing a particular organism as *tree*. While the chant and my addressing the tree do use words which can have a similar construal within a particular linguistic group, their primary use is not to manipulate symbolic representations, but rather to invoke, to call into being. This use of language is closely connected to the body in that the visceral sensation engenders the spiritual experience. The repetition of specific words as sounds of a particular pitch and resonance induce particular states of being.[22]

Moving further from this end of the spectrum, we find language in its representational aspect. This is language as function. The focus here is on language as a system of arbitrary representations corresponding, even if problematically, to objects in the world. Significantly, although the focus of language shifts from non-representational to representational, language is never fully removed from the actual, lived world. Even as a system of disembodied representations, it is still clearly based on the physical production of audible sounds or discernable scrawls. A recognition of the physical, non-representational aspect of language in the midst of language as a system of abstract representations is a *conscious* use of language as representation: I may use language to transfer information, but I am also aware that my utterances and silences are themselves bringing a world into being, co-emerging with a world that would have been otherwise had they not been lived.

A conscious use of language as a system of abstract representations is distinguishable from a more extreme point on the representational end of the continuum. At this end of the

spectrum we find an *unconscious, habitual, unaware* use of language as representation. Here language is conceived of in exclusively representational terms, as nothing more nor less than a system of symbolic representations that function to get us through our everyday activities or to organize our thoughts and feelings. In this instance, the language user or, in my case, the researcher of language as well, fails to recognize that language can be seen from at least two radically different perspectives. One of these perspectives offers language as information transfer based on past usage while the other presents language as an act simultaneous with the emergence of a world. An exclusive focus on the former is a failure to acknowledge the other end of the spectrum, the end closer to language as a lived act, a creating act, an act nearer to silence.

A Paradox

In revisiting *presence* through my study in ESL, I am choosing to focus on the non-representational, relational aspect of language. In so doing, however, I am faced with a potentially paralysing challenge: How do I capture the pre-conceptual, pre-linguistic quality of the linguistic data recorded in my study? Is it not a paradox to represent through language the non-representational aspect of language? This challenge returns me full circle to a question I had pondered before beginning this study: How can I *talk* about language in a sense that approximates the co-emergence of language in the present? It may be that as I have narrowly defined the challenge, to *talk* about language in the sense of the co-emergence of language in the present, I am in fact destined to failure. Nonetheless, the paradox may

provide insight into a practice for understanding the non-representational, emergent aspect of language in the present.

I am reminded of a tale I once came across in a collection of *koans*, Buddhist tales of apparent contradiction meant to point to a form of understanding beyond the tale itself. In this tale, one person stands with his finger pointing to the moon and asks the other, 'What do you see?' The other replies, 'I see you pointing at the moon.' I find this anecdote analogous to the position I find myself in with respect to interpreting the linguistic data from my study. In interpreting the participants' taped reflections, I see myself as pointing to the moon, to particular sections of taped conversations with a view to describing their significance as creating acts, as aspects of co-emergence with the world which, at the moment of articulation, was the interview setting we shared. In inviting the reader to enter my discussion, I am asking, 'Can you see the emergent quality of this articulation at the moment that it was lived? Have I been able to make you aware of its constituent role in the very creation of a world at the moment of utterance?' The reader is understandably justified in replying, 'How on earth can I be aware of the *presence* of those utterances when I was not there? I can see nothing but you pointing to those moments.' This, I believe, is an inescapable condition with which a description of the non-representational, relational aspect of linguistic data must contend. It can never be where it was not, and in describing where it was not, it will necessarily be abstracting from the focus of description. However, such a description *can* lend a sense of the experience for someone who was there. That someone is me, the researcher. While I cannot *live* the co-emergence which was the research setting, I can *re-live* it in the form of

narrative. I can tell a story of the research experience based on the recorded discussion between me, as the researcher, and individual research participants. Of course, all this will be done in full recognition of a paradox: I am discussing the *present* aspect of linguistic data recorded in the past, *talking* about the co-emergence of language in the present, pointing, through narration, to what it is I cannot talk about without further abstracting from it.

A Pre-emptive Explanation: Accountability

A serious though not incurable concern needs to be addressed: is it unethical to suggest that the aim of this project is to highlight the perspective of the research participants through a perspective on the data which is not theirs? Is not this perspective, from which a selection and synthesis of the data take place, only my view, the view of the researcher? Moreover, would I not be disingenuous in presenting the recorded thoughts of my research participants in a particular fashion that deviates from the representational meaning of their words on the audiotape and then pointing to them as the intimate thoughts and feelings of the research participants? Is this not a clear case of my autonomous, privileged perspective making unauthorized pronouncements on behalf of the perspectives of others?

It is at this point that a relational model of mind proves essential. It does so by allowing a researcher's interpretation of the data to be seen as something other than a retreat into the subjectivism of a researcher's privileged perspective on the research project. This slide into solipsism is avoided by placing perception into a middle space, a space where perception is a mutual, simultaneous specification of inner observer on outer world and outer

world on inner observer. Since doing the research is the context through which a perspective on the research becomes possible, it makes no sense to imagine the self-sufficient, independent existence of a subject, the researcher; or its object, the research participants; or the relation between them, the research experience (Varela et al., 1991, p. 221). The focus here is not on the perspective of the researcher *per se*, but rather on *a perspective* which co-emerges with research participants and researcher in the research. In this way, it need not be irresponsible to highlight the experience of the research participants through what a functional model of mind would see as a particular vantage point on the interaction, but which a relational model of mind would understand as the description of a co-emergent perspective.

It needs to be stressed that the researcher accrues heightened ethical responsibilities as a writer assuming a "first person singular but plural perspective." Interestingly, these responsibilities are as much to oneself as they are to other parties to the co-emergence. The writer's perspective is, after all, the coming into being of a *mutually specified* view. Writing from this position demands nothing less than a decentering of the writer's sense of self. This is to say that the writer must allow herself or himself to imagine experiencing another person's perspective. This can be a transformative practice, and it is one which a researcher and writer's use of a "first person singular but plural" perspective necessitates.

A Pedagogical Background

In this section, I will describe the conversation exercise from which I drew the research participants for my study. This general description will describe who took part in

the exercise, where it took place, and what its goals were. I will then recount my efforts to solicit participants for my study.

The Conversation Exercise

The EAP and TESL students taking part in this conversation exercise attend a southern Ontario community college of applied arts and technology. The college has a reputation as a technical training institution. The student body is ethnically and linguistically diverse and consists of individuals from varying educational backgrounds. These backgrounds include students who have come to the college from Ontario high schools and visa students who have completed secondary school in other countries. Each of these backgrounds is represented in the EAP group while the TESL candidates tend to be Canadian educated native speakers of English with undergraduate degrees.

The conversation exercise was organized in response to EAP students wanting more practice with English conversational skills. In meeting this request, it also engaged the student teachers in one-to-one relationships with ESL students. Approximately fifty EAP and TESL students took part in this exercise. While the conversations were held outside of scheduled class time, they remained a required part of their respective programs. The conversations were scheduled for one hour and were guided over the semester by a list of suggested topics which had been compiled by the instructors with advice from the EAP students.

<u>Soliciting Participants for My Study</u>

The EAP and TESL conversation group partners met for the first time at a session organized by the instructors in February of 1997. The instructors, former colleagues with whom I had discussed my ideas about conducting research around the conversation activity, invited me to address the session. I did so and after describing my background and my connection to the college, I explained that I was interested in conducting research around the activity. The research would form part of an MEd thesis. I presented the research as my attempt to better understand the conversation exercise and in so doing deepen my understanding of the relationship between ESL students and teachers. This would, it was hoped, allow me to carry out meaningful research in the field of ESL and also make me a better ESL instructor. I concluded by making a request for volunteers and asked those who were interested to let their instructors know so that I could then contact them.

After two weeks had passed, I spoke to the instructors and asked if any volunteers had come forward. They explained that some interest had been shown as there had been questions raised about my research project. At this point, I thought it might be necessary to make another appearance as I felt some of the students might have forgotten about my call for volunteers, needed a reminder, or needed more information. This was to be expected, of course, since both groups of students were busy with their own programs and lives. Rather than addressing the EAP students, who were scattered over three or four classes at any given time, a TESL instructor suggested that I address the TESL class, provide a more detailed explanation of the research and then make another call for volunteers. It would then be the

responsibility of these TESL volunteers to approach their EAP partners and relay the explanation I had given them and ask if they were interested. Once their instructor explained that this would be an opportunity for them to reflect on and discuss their own practice, eight TESL students volunteered.

At the time, I was also aware that asking TESL students to solicit their EAP partners as volunteers might be seen as a little unfair to the EAP students since I would be drawing on the trust so far established in these EAP/TESL sets of partners, who I will refer to as the *EAP TESL groups*, to facilitate my own research ends. However, my feeling was that the EAP students would feel more comfortable being introduced to the research by the TESL partners they already knew. My reflections at the time give a sense of my efforts to think through the issue. These thoughts are drawn from a tape recorded diary I kept over the course of the study. I will refer to this as my *audio diary*:

> The TESL students are going to have to do a little bit of selling on this research . . . inevitably, any researcher has to sell the research. I don't think there's any way to get around this . . . and I'm sure there are all sorts of problems that could be raised with regard to the rights of participants and the nature of the research and who's benefitting from all this. But, ultimately, I think they can be answered.

I reminded the TESL volunteers that I expected them to explain the project as clearly as they could to their EAP partners and that, ultimately, the wishes of their EAP partners to participate or not to participate were to be completely respected.

As it turned out, five of the eight TESL volunteers had been able to secure approval

from their EAP partners for participation in the research. Three of the groups consisted of one EAP and one TESL student while two of the groups had two EAP students paired with one TESL student. In all, twelve participants took part in the study.

The Research Focus as Process

"Half a writer's work, though, is the discovery of his [sic] subject" (Naipaul, 1996, p. 303). Naipaul's thought is a fitting preamble to a discussion of my research focus in that the focus was not a fixed starting point from which I progressed through the rest of the project. Rather, the research focus was an evolving, shifting perspective extended over the course of the project. Varying research foci offered themselves as tentative resting places along the way, signposts situated well within the doing of the project itself. In this sense, the research was guided by pre-data collection conversations with EAP and TESL students, ongoing conversations with colleagues, consultations with my supervisory committee, and my own changing perspective as the project unfolded.

An Eight Month Evolving of Concept and Conduct

Perhaps the clearest way to explain the research process is to provide an account of my experience of the research from January to August, 1997. These months cover the entire range of the research study, from my preliminary moves to begin the project in earnest to the first draft of a write-up.

What follows, then, is first a summary of the guiding questions I (John1) asked myself

from the beginning of the study and the explorative, tentative responses with which I (John2)

replied. I will then provide a description for each month of the movement of the research

focus which occurred on two corresponding levels: one being on a conceptual level tracing

the movement of my methodological disposition to the research, and the other being on a

logistical level tracking the conduct of the research itself. In addition to providing a picture

of my experience of the research project both conceptually and logistically, it will

demonstrate how the two levels were reacting to each other, how my conceptual evolution

was informing the conduct of the research and how that very conduct was impacting my

conceptual orientation.

A Summary of Guiding Questions

John1. How can I move toward a meaningful, empathetic understanding of the relationship
between ESL students and instructors?

John2. Conduct a research study involving ESL students and instructors.

John1. What kind of research should I be conducting?

John2. You have some choices. If you decide to follow the more conventional approach in
ESL studies, you will undertake an experimental study. However, choosing this route
will already begin to define what you mean by *understanding*. In this context,
understanding will assume the quality of a solution to the problem of language
instruction. In so doing, you will also begin to define language itself as primarily
representational, as a system directed primarily to information transfer.

John1. What if I feel that this is not really getting at what I mean by *understanding*?

John2. In that case, you will have to find an alternative research approach and if you cannot find one, you will have to create one. After all, if you have a sense of this *understanding*, then you are the one who is best positioned to determine whether you have a research strategy which captures it.

John1. Where do I start?

John2. If you are going to explore an alternative research approach, you need to explain why this is necessary. Why are experimental approaches inappropriate to what you want to gesture toward? A thorough answer needs to address some very basic distinctions on which experimental approaches rest. In other words, the place to begin is not with language, but with the study of cognition. You need to make your way through the view of cognition which underlies the view of language which in turn underlies the approach to the research. You can then elaborate your alternative method for research in ESL by taking that same journey through cognition and language and, ultimately, to a research method which resonates with that *understanding* you sense.

John1. What happens if I carry out the research before I have had the chance to complete this process? What do I do if the research is being carried out *while* I am doing all this thinking and, as a consequence, the way I'm conducting the research is fluctuating with where I happen to be at that moment in my thinking on cognition, language and research approaches?

John2. This is a natural state of affairs. Concept and conduct will always push and pull at

each other. Account for this overlapping process of concept and conduct as clearly as you can, pointing out the dynamic between them at critical points in your study.

John1. When I reach the point at which I have completed all this preliminary work, how do I "face the data?" Am I to pretend that I have arrived conceptually complete, ready to interpret audiotaped recordings of the study with an alternative approach to the research?

John2. You have at least two choices. In the first case, you can view the data interpretation as a continuation of the process of the research, both conceptually and logistically. In this case, you will be taking tentative steps through the data and at the same time be looking at those steps, paying close attention to the way you are approaching the data in light of a relational model of mind, language and its attendant research approach.

Your second option is to acknowledge that the co-emergent dimension of the data existed at the moment of articulation, but that it is now beyond direct experience. In this instance, your interpretation of the recorded discussions would be the intimation of a present now in the past, a pointing to that which can never be *lived* again. Faced with this situation, you would then have recourse to forms of narrative as a means of *re-living* the data.

John1. Can I do this while still holding on to language as the focus of the study?

John2. Yes, but you will have to deal with language as a phenomenon very different from the one it would have been had you taken the experimental route. You will have to

consider language in much the same way that one deals with perception in a phenomenological approach, that is, as completing itself in that which is perceived or, in the case of language, that which is spoken or listened to.

What follows now is a month by month description of the research study which will take the reader through my movement from a dissatisfaction with experimental approaches in ESL to the attraction of a phenomenological approach which emphasizes the lived experience of the research participants. It will then trace the shift in my methodology as the participants' views on my approach encouraged me to reflect on my role as "researcher." It concludes with a brief account of my efforts to render a relational account of the research experience.

January: Dissatisfaction and a Disposition to Research in ESL

On a conceptual level, I spent the first month of 1997 articulating my dissatisfaction with the characterization of second language instruction served by experimental approaches to research in ESL. I wrote about this in various drafts of my research proposal and reflected on it in my audio diary. For instance, in my final research proposal I wrote:

> Experimental approaches to research in ESL do not address the lived experience of studying in a non-native language and overlook students as focal points of interaction with their environment.

I expanded on this unease in my audio diary:

When language looks at itself, it becomes something else because it is forced to abstract from itself. It is forced to step back, and when it steps back it becomes something different. A research setting for language, experimental or otherwise, is just such a place where language looks at itself. As a consequence, linguistic research can only abstract from language, can only *talk* about the co-emergence of language in the present. This distinction does not seem to be made explicitly in linguistic research.

I was also frustrated by a limitation in traditional approaches to linguistic research: Silence has no extra-linguistic significance. It is, in and of itself, meaningless. At the time, I pondered:

As a researcher, I would be in a really difficult situation if the research participant did not want to say anything or did not feel like saying anything and yet, within that silence, something important was going on. Well, its actually my problem because I'm looking for data and "data," in an academic research study, necessitates words. If a study were not so preoccupied with collecting data, perhaps it could appreciate those silences a little more.[23]

This discontent with the preoccupations of experimental approaches to ESL is further evident in the sort of questions I *was* interested in. My audio diary contains these early versions of a research question:

- How does the fact that students, teachers and researcher are in an ESL context affect what they expect of one another--and how they see one another? What changes, if

anything, when people are interacting in a context which has been specifically designated 'ESL'?

- Of what aspects of English are the ESL and TESL students taking part in this conversation exercise most conscious? Does their focus shift when the context of use varies emotionally, academically or socio-economically?

- What implications do varying and potentially conflicting perspectives on language have for relations between human beings in an 'ESL' setting? Can language act as a barrier between people in an 'ESL' setting relationally as well as functionally?

This desire to conduct a research study in ESL in an other than traditional way encouraged me to look for alternative research methodologies. In this regard, I considered the possibility of drawing on *introspective* and *naturalistic* methods; however, for the reasons outlined in a previous section, I found them lacking.

On the level of the research itself, it was in January that I became acquainted with the proposed conversation exercise and made inquiries into the feasibility of conducting research around it.

February: Phenomenology and Friends

In February, my approach to the research was influenced by course work and reading in phenomenology. Though still relatively new to the field of phenomenology, I was attracted to the possibility of using a phenomenological approach as a guide to my study in ESL. I was especially attracted to the possibility of looking at language as the conscious experience of

my research participants, and not the product of inferred mental processes.

On the logistical level, I continued my periodic visits to the college with a view to keeping in touch with friends and former colleagues who were organizing the conversation exercise. I listened to their plans, made suggestions and attempted to explain the intent of my research project. This last task was especially difficult since I had not yet settled on a definite approach to the study. The only point on which I was certain was that I did not want to conduct a traditional study in ESL, one that isolates variables presumed to affect linguistic behaviour. This difficulty was compounded by the fact that the former colleagues with whom I was working were most familiar with just this traditional approach to ESL research. At the time, I had made this written reflection:

> Of the two colleagues with whom I discussed my proposal, I found one more difficult to deal with. She was comfortable enough with my planned involvement in the conversation exercise, but seemed rather dissatisfied with my lack of a concrete focus for the project. By contrast, the other colleague, who is also in the process of completing an MEd program, was sympathetic to the difficulty of engaging in research which did not yet have a specific, demonstrable focus.

During these visits, I also met with students taking part in the conversation exercise. I wanted to be seen to be involved with the conversation exercise from the outset. I did not want to seem a stranger when I did finally make a call for volunteers for my study. Additionally, I wanted to share my thoughts and plans for the study with some of the potential research participants. Again, this proved especially difficult since the students seemed most

familiar with the testing procedures associated with experimental approaches to ESL research, and I was only just beginning to define an alternative. For instance, in responding to queries from TESL students regarding the research project, I was confronted with the question, "Do you have a hypothesis?" I found the question particularly challenging in that it involved not only the substantive issue of *what* I was planning to study, but also *how* I was planning to do it. My initial inclination was to say, 'I can't tell you what I'm going to be studying specifically because that would make no sense in light of how I plan to carry out the study.' I did not actually share this with them, but I did say that I was consciously working against having a hypothesis. I wanted my study to be primarily descriptive and to allow for a meaningful understanding of the conversation activity and, perhaps, a re-understanding of the relationship between ESL students and instructors as it co-emerges in the present. Toward that end, I planned to make *their* experience of the conversations the focus of the study. The research, I reiterated, was not evaluative.

In the end, I found the opportunity to discuss the research with potential participants helpful in that it pushed me to be conceptually clearer about the research. I also recognized that the assistance of former colleagues was invaluable. At the time, I noted:

Maria is really being so helpful, and so is Lynn. I do not think this [the research study] would have worked without them, but then again, how else does one conduct research within an institution? You have to have an 'in.' Someone has to let you into the place and once you are in there you have to have support, otherwise how does the research get carried out?

March: Lived Experience and Elaborating the Methodology

In March, I translated my consideration of a phenomenological approach into a workable methodology for the study. I settled on a general guide to the data collection: make deliberate efforts to solicit the first person lived experience of this conversation exercise from the point of view of the research participants. This would be my effort to listen to their conscious experience of language.

Toward this end, I made plans to use a two stage approach to the data collection. I would first videotape the weekly conversations of EAP/TESL groups who had volunteered for the study and then audiotape a discussion of the videotape with each of the research participants individually. As I explained to the research participants in a pre-data collection conversation, the video was not, strictly speaking, the focus of the research. The focus of the research was their perspective on that videotaped conversation. The video was intended as a memory prompt for what had transpired in their group conversations.

The data collection took place between March 30 and April 23.

April: Methodology in Motion

I videotaped five one hour conversations with each of the five EAP/TESL groups over a one week period. I met with each of the groups several days before taping to review the research project and their involvement in it. I explained that the videotaped conversation was meant to assist the ensuing audiotaped discussion of the original group conversation. The actual videotaping of the conversations was conducted in one of three private screening

rooms made available to me by the college. They were quiet and comfortable. In fact, several of the participants mentioned that they felt more at ease in these rooms than the usually noisy cafeterias and coffee shops where they normally met. With respect to the presence of a camera and the knowledge that they were being taped, most, if not all, of the participants said that they did not feel particularly anxious at the presence of the camera. Some mentioned that they had forgotten about the camera after ten or fifteen minutes. My part in these videotaping sessions was minimized. After conducting a pilot videotaping session with colleagues several weeks before my taping at the college, it had become clear that if I sat in on the conversations, I would have to define a role for myself. If I could not do that, there was no reason for me to be there. In fact, my presence might have become an added source of anxiety for the participants. All this considered, I decided to set up the equipment, let the participants know I would be back in an hour, and leave.[24] They seemed comfortable with this.

In retrospect, it is worth noting that my presence at those videotaping sessions would have changed the experience for both the research participants and me. It would, after all, have been a different present that would have come into being. Inevitably, my presence at the videotaping sessions would also have changed the experience of the subsequent audiotaped discussions.

Discussion of the videotaped conversations took place from one to three weeks after their taping. Rather than previewing the videotapes, as I had originally intended, my initial screening of them was with individual participants.[25] This change in plan was in response to

the suggestion that I would be more receptive to the participants' perspective on the videotaped conversations if I had not had the opportunity to view and then reflect on those conversations. I prefaced each of my discussions with the individual participants with remarks concerning my altered approach to the audiotaped discussion of the video. Taking one of the discussions as an example, I began this way:

John: I don't know if you remember, but originally I was going to look at the video, make some notes, and then as we were watching it I was going to ask you some questions or for points of clarification et cetera. I changed my mind (both laugh). I've seen the video once because I looked at it with Magda.

Sean: Yah, I know

John: Okay, so that's the only time I've seen it. The reason I didn't want to look at it is because--well, you know what it's like when you see something and wait for a week, you already begin to develop your own ideas about it. I wanted to get your ideas on it. Not my ideas on it, right? So I stayed away from the video. I want to view it with you because what I'm after here is your experience of this conversation.

At each of the sessions, the audiotaping began before the videotape playback. During this interval, I invited the participant to comment on anything related to the particular conversation we were going to be viewing, the conversation activity in general, or the research of which they were a part. Then, in preparation for viewing, I explained to the participant that I wanted them to talk about their experience of the original conversation or their experience as they viewed the video. For example, the exchange I made reference to

above continued:

John: So what do I want you to talk about? I want you to talk about any thoughts or feelings that you have to the conversation or the video. Anything that you think is important, that you want to talk about, is what I want to hear.

Sean: So, you don't ask anything to me?

John: It's up to you. Whatever you want to talk about--I'm looking for your perspective on this conversation.

Sean: Yah.

John: So, if I tell you, 'Sean, I want you to look for this and I want you to look for this,' that's my perspective. I don't want that. I want your perspective. I may ask questions if I'm not clear about what you're saying or if I want you to talk a little more about something, but I want you to have control of the conversation.

I then demonstrated the operation of the pause function and gave the participant the remote control, explaining that they were at complete liberty to pause the tape at any time and comment on any aspect of the conversation. I also encouraged the participant to talk over the videotape even at those points where they were not inclined to pause it. As was the case in the discussion I quoted above, I explained that my contributions to the discussion would be of the sort which ask for clarification of particular points or which inquire further into thoughts and feelings connected to particular instants in the conversation.

The protocol for these discussions was meant both to address the power imbalance which invariably exists in favour of the researcher and to enable a relaxed and conversational

discussion. In addition, it was a conscious effort to let the participant take the lead in the discussion. Since the discussion of the videotape was an effort to get the participant's perspective on the conversation, any point that the participant discussed was considered relevant to the research focus, that is, their experience of the original videotaped conversation. At this point, the objection may be raised that this is merely the participant's after the fact reflection on that experience. This is uncontestable, and it is one of the parameters of this study. In other words, the study necessarily concerns itself with distance, both the distance between the time of the videotaping sessions and the audiotaped discussions and the distance that separates me, as the researcher, from the videotaping sessions at which I was not present. In light of these restrictions, it seems that the participant's reflections on the videotaped conversations is as close as I will get to their lived experience.

By the completion of my individual discussion with the fourth research participant, however, it became evident that the participants were being taken by surprise by the fact that my instructions were so open-ended. It seems that my lack of expectations was difficult for them to understand. I recognized that this was making their task somewhat more difficult, but I was reluctant to influence the direction of the conversation by suggesting a focus at the outset of the discussion. As a compromise, I decided to keep my instructions open-ended at the beginning of the conversation and to ask the participants for their reactions to these instructions at the very end of the conversation. In this way, I thought I could prevent myself from unduly influencing the direction of the conversations and at the same time gain some sense of the impact of this strategy on the participants. As it turned out, these discussions on

my methodology played an important role in my movement toward relational thinking. The discussions pulled me into the research and, as a consequence, both sensitized me to the potential unease my methodology might be causing the participants and encouraged me to let the methodology evolve in response to what the participants were saying. It is worth transcribing the most relevant segments of these discussions with each of my five final research participants. I have edited the transcripts with a view to highlighting those parts of the discussion most pertinent to my approach to the audiotaped discussions and also to make them more readable. Beginning with Magda, they appear in the order in which they took place.

<u>Magda.</u>

Magda: You know, you said to me at the beginning, 'say something wherever you want to say anything.' I didn't really know what you mean, what you expect from me. If you said 'say something about participation,' then I would have a point of view, you know?

John: I know what you're saying.

Magda: So maybe next time you should tell people in a general way what you really expect.

John: So you think I should be telling them content or form or something.

Magda: Something like that, so they have the point to hook up to, you know? Because actually I didn't know if--because always if I'm doing something, I'm thinking that I'm doing it wrong, you know? And even if I talk about this, I thought maybe it's

not what you expect from me, you know? So maybe you can give some clear . . .

(inaudible)

John: So I should be clearer about my expectations.

Magda: Yah, but not clear like you give them exact questions. Because then people could

be, I don't know, maybe I don't have the ideas but . . .

John: But some kind of . . .

Magda: Some kind of, yah, you know.

John: Do you think, for example, if I had asked you, 'Okay, Magda, I want you to pay

special attention to the way you answer questions or respond to comments,' it would

have been easier for you?

Magda: Yah. It could be easier.

John: But having said that, it would have shaped your discussion of this. If I had said that,

your discussion of this would have been different than what it just was?

Magda: Yah. And actually maybe you are also looking for some, how to say, because if you

give people questions, they are not creative.

John: That's what I'm afraid of.

Magda: That's why I'm saying just give, like a general, just like one point so they can take,

so they can look at that point. I mean, not really just that one question, but in general

they have the main idea.

John: Give me an example.

Magda: Like you said to me, 'ask me some questions or whatever you want to say about the

video' and the first thing, like I said, it was my acting, my reactions, how I look or how I react. So actually you don't care about this. You want some answer about the dialogue and participation.

John: I could have said that, but I wouldn't be telling you the truth because I'm interested in that, but I'm also interested in your perceptions of yourself.

Magda: Yah, but after, when we finished, I'm thinking like I'm not helping you, that I'm not giving you what you want, what you expect from me, you know?

John: You see, that's where it gets really difficult because I'm forcing myself not to have expectations. I don't know if that's possible. You know what I mean? I know this is unusual research and it's becoming increasingly difficult. But I want to resist the temptation to tell people, 'just sort of keep in this area, or keep in that area.' Because if they keep in this area, they might not talk about this, and this might be interesting too.

Magda: That's what I'm talking about. You don't want to just, you know, close like in the one circle.

John: Exactly.

Magda: Like you said, maybe if I were talking about this subject, in this subject comes something else what you would like it about. So it could be helpful.

John: So generally you think I should be giving some very general directions.

Magda: Very very general.

John: Very general.

Magda: You know, like, just, just (laughs) five per cent.

John: Okay. I like that. About five per cent direction. I gave you about one per cent

direction. (Magda laughs)

Magda: Yah, I didn't really know what you wanted me to say.

Ali.

Ali: According to the discussion, I missed some points or I . . . ?

John: Well, that's just the point. I could have told you, for example, 'Ali, I want you to

talk about your pronunciation, or I want you to think about whether you were able

to say what you wanted to say, or I want you to think about Lianna's voice,' right?

I would have directed your conversation from the beginning.

Ali: Yah.

John: But I don't want to do that. I want you to react, right?

Ali: (laughs)

John: It's difficult, but I'm trying not to influence what you're thinking . . . Were you

confused about what you were supposed to do today? This morning when I gave

you your instructions, I said, 'pause it where you want to, talk about whatever you

want to.' How did you feel about that? Is that okay?

Ali: Yah, I think it's okay because since you are, since I am the one who is reacting, you

know . . . (inaudible) . . . it's much better if I control . . . (inaudible) . . . a little

comfortable.

John: Okay. So having control of when to stop and start gave you some comfort.

Ali: Yah, yah, yah.

John: So I'm asking everyone after the conversation, 'Do you think it was a good idea?'

Ali: Yah, I think it was a good idea. And because you are the one who is in the discussion and maybe you don't see all places, you don't find weakness, but . . . (inaudible)

John: When you say 'weakness' you mean?

Ali: I mean, in your point, in my point of view, I mean.

John: You mean, if I understand you correctly, you're listening to yourself on the video and there's something you want to clarify and that gives you a chance to stop it and clarify.

Ali: Yah, it gives you a chance.

Lianna.

John: As a final point, I just wanted to ask you about the instructions that I gave you at the beginning of this session?

Lianna: Yes.

John: If I've discovered anything, it's simply this, that the participants expect me to have expectations and I'm sort of trying to work consciously away from having expectations.

          And I find that some of the people find that a little bit difficult to deal with. I'm just curious, how did you feel approaching this video, the fact that I told you to simply discuss what was of relevance to you and pause it whenever you like?

Lianna: See, I understand the perspective that you're coming from especially when you look at experiential and also in terms of methodologically. I can appreciate what you're doing. So, it's not such an issue for me.

John: Okay.

Lianna: Though I would still love to know what's going on in your head, you know? I'm sure even though you don't have expectations, you still have some hypothesis?

John: Well, I wouldn't call them hypotheses.

Lianna: Or some, like, yah.

John: Well, at some point I'm going to have to tell a story about this research. And your absolutely right, at least half of this story is going to be about methodology. I come in here very naively asking a very simple question, 'What's the lived experience of these students in these exercises?' How do I find out? Well, ask them. Well, they can't remember. Well, show the video and then ask them.

Lianna: Yah.

John: Well, it would be nice if life were that simple, but it's not. It's becoming increasingly more complex. It's raising questions about perspective, it's raising questions about expectations, the participants' and my own. So, I'm certainly going to have to factor that whole thing into my methodology. I think there are certainly things that are coming out that are really, really interesting and I think what's coming out is certainly the fact that when I ask people for their perspective on the [videotaped] conversation, as many participants as there are, that's how many perspectives there are. It sounds obvious, but it's still revealing. Some people choose to focus on

pedagogical issues, some people choose to focus on postural issues, gestures, that sort of thing. It seems that everyone has a particular focus and that focus is being informed by their motivation and their expectations of themselves and of the [EAP/TESL] program.

Lianna: Have you ever asked that question? What was your expectation of this speaking tutorial?

John: What I've been doing is going through this debriefing session with everyone after we've looked at the video . . . If I had asked you to talk about, for example, body language in this conversation, your conversation would have been completely different.

Lianna: Yah, I know.

John: So, I'm consciously trying to stay away from that. It's like 'say as little as you can.'

Lianna: Yah, that's good actually. It's good. I like that because it limits a person's imagination. Or it limits it in the sense of you're not sure where it goes, what direction. If you gave some leads, then you would focus on that.

John: I think it would be a trade off. If I gave people a lead, as one participant said, "not a lot, just five per cent," I think I would get more, but at the expense of knowing that I've already shaped the discussion before it's begun.

Lianna: Have you found any patterns between the tutors versus the students?

John: Generally, the perspective of the tutors is at least partially informed by the fact that they're tutors. They tend to look at the pedagogical issues involved, which is obvious enough, but it's still really interesting because it's complicating my simplistic

notion of perspective.

Lianna: Well, I think that's also influenced by the fact that this is not just a voluntary exercise in that there is marks involved and so you consciously make an effort to have some pedagogical aspects to it. And the students also have expectations because their teachers want them to give a write-up. So, it's not totally a conversational without a stake in it.

Sean.

John: Were those instructions confusing to you?

Sean: Yes, a little.

John: What would have been more helpful to you?

Sean: When you say that I have to say something, why I was thinking that . . . (inaudible)

John: For example, would it have been easier for you if I had said, 'Okay, Sean, I want you to focus on your pronunciation,' for example, or 'Sean, I want you to focus on how many turns you take as compared to Magda.' Would that have made it easier for you?

Sean: Yah.

John: If I did give you more explicit instructions, you would probably find it easier to talk about one particular thing. However, I'm very cautious because if I suggest something to you, you wouldn't have talked about what is was you talked about here I want the participants to be able to talk easily about the conversation, but I don't want to give them a direction.

Sean: But I didn't exactly know what you want me to do, which answer do you want from me.

John: Okay. You didn't know what my expectations were.

Sean: (laughs)

John: Is that true?

Sean: I know right now.

John: You know now. Okay.

Sean: My answers is helpful to you? [in the context of the audiotaped discussion of the video]

John: Absolutely. You see, but that's just the point. I didn't have any expectations of you. I wanted you to talk about what was important to you. I think you expected me to expect something of you.

Sean: Yah.

David.

John: When I asked you to take the lead in the conversation and discuss whatever it is you wanted, thoughts or feelings, et cetera, how did those instructions come across to you? This is the question I'm posing to all the participants after we've gone through the discussion. Were they confusing, were they helpful, did they get in the way?

David: No.

John: Okay. It wasn't a particular problem for you?

David: No. You tell me what you want, I try to give it to you. That's it. (laughs)

John: Okay. I sensed some tension with some of the participants. I think they expected me to have expectations of them and what I'm trying to do is not have expectations. It's their perspective, your perspective, that I'm after. And I think if I were to give you directives at the beginning of the conversation, I would be imposing my agenda.

David: Yah, kind of, you know. And while watching the film [videotaped conversation], if you were to tell me specifically what you wanted then I'd probably have to make a mental note of each little thing and then go back to that, while this way is a lot easier because I can talk over what's going on. I can stop. It's better.

John: So would you agree that you would have talked about other things if I had given you more explicit directions?

David: Depending on what your directions were.

John: Okay, because I'm trying to be very, very careful about not leading the conversations, not asking leading questions. It's actually becoming a major concern in the research.

David: I think maybe a lot of it might have to do that some people might unconsciously feel, not really threatened, but, I don't know, on the spot or something, right? And I don't. This is your research and I'm totally fine with it. Anyway, what are you going to do with this information? What could you do with it that could be potentially harmful? Not really anything.

John: Well, I'm glad you feel that way.

David: Yah, I don't feel threatened in any way or insecure. If you're going to ask me to have a conversation with them about a particular topic, like, for example, sex, then

I'd be concerned because then it would be like I have to watch what I want to say because maybe he's going to think something, you know?[26]

The "Researcher"

These discussions took place between the ninth and twenty-first of April. This is worth noting since the movement through these five conversations also traced my increasing sense of unease at my method for soliciting first person recollections from the participants. Near the middle of April, I felt compelled to take a more active role but was held back for fear of introducing my slant on what was supposed to be their experience of the conversations. My audio diary attests to this struggle:

> There's a real tension here between my wish not to direct the conversations and their expectations of expectations on my part. I guess it gets down to this: Giving the participants some direction may prompt more discussion, but I think it will probably prompt more discussion of a certain sort, on a particular topic. Do I want to achieve that at the expense of setting an agenda for the discussions before the participants have begun? My temptation at the moment is to resist that felt need to define, even in a general way, my expectations for the discussion of the videotapes.

In retrospect, this was a pivotal moment in that the conduct of the research on the logistical level was prodding the methodological orientation to the research on the conceptual level. It was also a crucial point in the study's evolution from an intended focus on ESL to methodology to a tracing and documentation of a relational understanding of language.

While I did not alter the method for soliciting first person accounts in an obvious

way, I did begin to place greater emphasis on the post-discussion conversations about their reactions to my research method. By asking the participants to comment on the research process, I was inviting them to do the research with me. I was expressing a felt need to share the experience of the research with the participants, an experience which included methodological choices and the reasons for those choices, as well as the emotional experience of the research. In short, I wanted to redress the seclusion I had felt as "the researcher." My feelings were pulling me away from the position of self-isolated researcher documenting isolated first person participant perspectives and toward the realization that a co-perspective, a perspective arising from our shared viewing of the videotaped conversations, was far more livable and meaningful.

Initially, I thought I would be best able to listen to the participants if I stepped back from the discussions so as not to influence their first person perspectives. However, the opposite turned out to be the case: It was impossible for me to listen to those voices without being closer to the participants, without wanting to be more involved in the discussion sessions. As a researcher, I could not *bracket* myself out of the research. This sentiment was captured in my audio diary: "How long can I keep myself absent from this conversation exercise, from this research? I think that's the question that's haunting me this afternoon."

My methodological decision to remain a *passive* observer who was, nonetheless, listening with a purpose, prevented me from fully listening to the participants. In this sense, *passive* cannot mean *inactive* since listening *is* activity and engagement. This point is consonant with the *enactivist* claim that "perception consists in perceptually guided action" (Varela et al., 1996, p. 173). Similarly, in the case of listening, it could be said that 'listening

consists in listening guided action,' listening which selects and reaches out to what it listens

to. As such, I was selecting and reaching out to what I wanted to listen to for the purposes

of the research, even if those purposes were not specifically defined. The type of listening I

was doing was preventing me from carrying out the sort of listening that Heshusius describes

as "listening without a specific purpose, that is, listening *without wanting anything from it*

. . . [which], paradoxically, opens up fuller access to the totality of the other" (1995, p. 121).

My initial withholding of self from *other*, the research participants, was an act of control by

the self as researcher as, conversely, my move away from isolation and toward collaboration

was a lessening of control by the self as researcher. The movement I am describing in my

relation to the participants and to the research can also be seen as the movement from a

passive but controlling listening toward "a very active, vigilant, absorbing passivity, which is

not related to being in charge of one's subjectivity: Rather, it involves letting go of the idea

of being-separate-and-in-charge altogether" (Heshusius, 1994, p. 18).

Moving toward collaboration and trust made me less anxious about the

unpredictability which is at the core of this kind of study, a study where the research

participants, the researcher and the unfolding research experience are *continuously and

mutually reshaping* the study. The following excerpt from my audio diary records an

important reflection on my experience and recognition of this *reshaping*. It came at the end

of a particularly disappointing week in which a number of participants had failed to meet me

for their scheduled audiotaped discussions. As a consequence, I had begun to doubt their

interest in the project and had questioned the worth of the study itself:

At this point I can get frustrated with the process and bemoan the fact that things are

just not working out the way I want them to or I can look at the situation differently, and this different way of looking at the situation is one wherein I place myself in the middle of the research, not on the outskirts--managing it. In this alternate scenario, the frustration with the way the research unfolds, which is not according to my plan, *is* the research itself and I am part of that. I am part of that tumult. I am not outside of it. The frustration no longer sits there simply as a comment on the progress or lack of progress in the research. It becomes the research itself. I should be able to look at that and learn from that.

This episode altered my view of the research study and my connection to it. I saw, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, that it had been a mistake to imagine myself apart from the research in that I had always *been* the research itself. In retrospect, I understand that at a very basic level I recognized that as the researcher, I was being shaped by the research participants and research activity at least as much as I had thought I would be shaping them.

At the time, the experiences of the research at logistical, conceptual and emotional levels was moving me toward relational thinking. It was moving me toward a place where, as Harré and Gillett explain, "it no longer makes sense to talk of observers and subjects at all. There are only coparticipants in the project of making sense of the world and our experience of it" (1994, p. 21). This struggle with the identity of "researcher" raises fundamental questions about the notion of *perspective*. If, as a researcher, I cannot move closer to understanding the first person perspective of individual research participants by isolating them from the influence of my thoughts and questions, what, then, does it mean to understand a participant's first person perspective? Is all this to suggest that an understanding of first

person perspectives is an implicitly plural act?[27] Even further, could it be that a first person

perspective is itself implicitly plural, completing itself in that which is both perceived and, in

turn, influences the perception?[28] I will return to this issue in a following section as it will be

central to the interpretation of the data.

May, June and July: Reflecting and Writing

On April 23, I conducted my last audiotaped discussion of the videotaped

conversations and put the data aside. I then turned my attention to defining a conceptual

orientation for interpreting the data. That conceptual effort took place over the months of

May, June and July and its product is the explication of a relational model of mind and

language found in Part One. As is evident in the elaboration of relational thinking in Part

One, my understanding of a first person perspective was transformed by the research

experience. It was taken up, pluralised and enfolded into the notion of a co-emergent

perspective, an intimate union of research participants, researcher and research activity.

August: A Relational Understanding of the Research

It is now August as I venture a relational understanding of the data. As will be clear

by now, this endeavour benefits from hindsight, from the retrospective knowledge of an eight

month interplay of concept and conduct. This interplay was also the movement toward

relational thinking. However, since I had not yet articulated a relational approach when I

started the research, my account of the research must acknowledge that the study was not the

collection and interpretation of data from a pre-formed point of view, but a process which brought me and the research into a relational approach. A relational approach to the research did not come into being until I had progressed through the conceptual work of the study as elaborated in Part One of this paper. As a consequence, the data is both a record of actual discussions held between myself, as the researcher, and the research participants, and an evolving disposition to the research.

The Selection of Participants for More Detailed Consideration

As was mentioned, five EAP/TESL groups consisting of a total of twelve participants took part in the study. My interactions with each of these groups was instructive and an important part of the total research experience. However, a detailed analysis of my interactions with each of the twelve participants will not take place for the reasons outlined below. While I will draw on observations and reflections from my interaction with all the research participants, I will focus on two of the five groups for a more detailed consideration of the research findings.

What follows is an explanation of why I chose these two particular research groups for more detailed consideration and, conversely, why I did not choose the remaining three groups. For clarity, I will refer to the groups as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, with 1 and 2 being the groups I chose.

Group 1 consisted of three members, Magda, Sean and David. Their videotaped conversation was the longest among the groups, lasting approximately 75 minutes, and was

a dynamic mix of personalities, topics and moods. The participants were keen on their contributions to the conversation and this enthusiasm made itself felt in the subsequent audiotaped discussions of the video. Their perceptions of themselves, their partners and me, as the researcher, were complex and thought provoking. Of additional importance were the insightful comments offered by members of this group when, at the end of our discussion of the video, I invited them to voice their thoughts on the open-ended instructions I had given them at the beginning of our session. I have provided segments of these conversations on my methodology in a previous section.

Group 2 included Ali and Lianna. This pair were very different from each other in a number of important respects, foremost of which were their attitudes toward the topic for discussion that week which focussed on "The family and the role of women in society." These differences made for an intense discussion and exchange of views. Once again, this enthusiasm was carried over into our audiotaped discussion of the video. A number of other factors made this group of particular interest to the study. Lianna, for instance, has herself conducted research in the social sciences and was able to provide critical yet empathetic feedback for my conduct of the research project. Further, while she was nothing less than passionate about expressing her views in the conversation with her EAP partner, she also felt that, as the TESL student, she was pedagogically responsible for making the exercise a linguistically positive experience for her partner. For his part, Ali welcomed the opportunity to discuss this conversation with me. It was his chance both to further elaborate the opinions he had been trying to express in his conversation with Lianna and to talk about the linguistic

challenges facing him in that conversation.[29] As with group 1, I have provided segments of our conversations on my methodology in a previous section.

The videotaped conversations of groups 3, 4 and 5 were no less interesting than the previous two, and my audiotaped discussions of those conversations no less substantial. Each of the participants responded to my open-ended invitation to comment on the videos with thoughtful, perceptive and informative reflections. My reasons for not choosing these three groups for more detailed consideration were primarily technical or logistical. Group 3, consisting of Hae-Young and Tracy, were not chosen for the simple reason that their videotaped conversation had no sound. As the first of my videotaped sessions, I had set up the microphone incorrectly and was left with a video with no sound. Our discussion of the video was hindered by this obvious shortcoming. Group 4, consisting of Charan, Omar and Nadia, was not chosen for two reasons. Charan, a soft-spoken woman who was recovering from a sore throat, is barely audible on the audiotape and Omar, who was also committed to taking part in the research, could only spare 15 minutes from a hectic schedule which included school, part-time work, and full-time father of two children who had doctor's appointments on the day of our discussion. Finally, group 5, consisting of Cynthia and Kathy, was also excluded from more detailed consideration because the EAP student's contributions on the audiotape are barely audible.[30]

PART THREE

Efforts at Relational Renderings of an Audiotaped Discussion with Magda

The audiotaped discussion I am considering here was held between Magda, one of the five final research participants, and me, the researcher. As was mentioned earlier, this discussion took the videotaped conversation of Magda's EAP/TESL group as a point of departure. I had two main reasons for choosing Magda from among the five final research participants. In the first case, I wanted the participant taking part in the audiotaped discussion on which I focused to be an ESL student. My concern was to provide a balance or at least a counterpart to my own use of English as a native speaker. Secondly, of the three final ESL participants, Magda's proficiency and competency in English were strongest and, as a consequence, the discussion I had with her was the most complex and involved of the final three ESL students. This complexity and level of involvement became especially important for the direction that the study took, that is, from an intended focus on ESL to methodology to a tracing and documentation of the changes I needed to make to remain faithful to a relational understanding of language. If the project had remained exclusively within the realm of ESL, my criteria for choosing a final participant for the last part of the paper would have been different.

My attempts at relational renderings of this audiotaped discussion are accounts of an episode in an ever-unfolding *present*, a *present* which, for my purposes, concerns the *co-emergence* of a research participant, Magda, a research study in ESL, and a researcher, me. They are accounts of the relational dimension of an audiotaped discussion, the pre-conceptual

and pre-linguistic (in the sense of pre-representational) dimension of a discussion as it unfolded, at that point in the past when it was still in a present. The account is a *re-living* of a *present* which, at the time of writing, is in the past. Simply put, the account uses audiotaped data which can only point back to its instant of utterance.

I will now provide two attempts at a relational rendering of a segment of the transcript of the audiotaped discussion held between Magda and me. I would like to remind the reader that I have not been able to locate any publication in the literature that does what I am attempting to do here. Therefore, I am proceeding directly from my theoretical understanding and experience as outlined in this study. I hope the reader will read these attempts for what they are: my best effort, at this point, to describe the unfolding of a present in its silences and utterances.

The first attempt I will refer to as *narrated transcript* and the second as *transposition*. I will discuss these approaches below. However, before explaining how these approaches differ, I want to explain a way in which they are importantly similar: their use of a narrator who is neither the entity who took part in the audiotaped discussion nor the entity providing a representational account of it.

The Narrator

Since both approaches are attempts to render a co-emergent present, a present which came into being through research participant, researcher and research activity in unison, the account is narrated from a "first person singular but plural perspective." As I tried to explain

in a previous section where I called the researcher to accountability for writing the perspective of others, a "first person singular but plural perspective" is the coming into being of a mutually specified, co-emergent view.

Thus, while it is clear that I, as the researcher and writer, am penning this account, the "first person singular but plural perspective" is meant to emphasize not "the researcher's" perspective in any sense of a neutral or objective perspective, but rather *a perspective* which co-emerged, which was mutually specified by Magda and me in the research in a particular present. As I also mentioned earlier, a "first person singular but plural perspective" does not refer to *multiple realities* as understood in a naturalistic approach. A "first person singular but plural perspective" is not premised on the notion of isolated selves as individuals who construct various and individual realities, but rather moves away from perception as the act of detached selves and toward a view of perception as inherently participatory.

As a further attempt to explain my assumption of a "first person singular but plural perspective," I will specify, for the purposes of this description, that very same researcher, myself, in greater detail by distinguishing between my experience of at least three senses of *self.* As will become apparent, these three researcher *selves* are manifest in varying roles I, as the researcher, played at different points in the research:

The Being Self

In the first instance, when I look back to the experience of the audiotaped discussion as it took place, I find the self who was part of that co-emergent discussion *as it happened.*

This is the self who was attentive to the unfolding present, both its silent and spoken moments, and experienced the pre-conceptual and pre-linguistic (in the sense of pre-representational) dimension of the discussion as it happened. To be as explicit as I can, I am referring here to the self who is attuned to the silent end of the spectrum of thought and language I had elaborated in a previous section.[31] At this end of the spectrum, the being self is one with an unfolding present, it is undifferentiated from silence or pre-representational utterance.

The Researcher/Thinker Self

Now, at the moment of writing, however, the present of the audiotaped discussion is long passed and so too is the self attuned to the co-emergence of the discussion. I am now the second self, the researcher/thinker who is constrained to *talking* about the co-emergence of language in the present of the audiotaped discussion. The researcher/thinker attempts to *describe* the experience of self in co-emergence with the research participants in the research activity. In offering a description of the audiotaped discussion, the second self describes the experience of the first self from a distance. However, in order to provide a sense of the co-emergence in the audiotaped discussion, the constrained self as researcher/thinker must re-create itself in a manner that imaginatively yet authentically renders a sense of the co-emergence of Magda and the researcher in the present of the audiotaped discussion. I have called that recreated self the *narrator*.

The Narrator Self

This is my third self. As the researcher/thinker's creation, this third self is necessary

since the researcher/thinker cannot assume a "first person singular but plural perspective."

This is the case because thinking about the research is very different from *being* in the

research, as different as fully representational language is from silent awareness. As the self

that thinks about the research experience, the researcher/thinker concedes its distance from

that research. In contrast, the narrator, as the third self, is at liberty to embody a "first person

singular but plural perspective" since a narrator crosses boundaries of time, place and identity

that a temporally, spatially and epistemologically constrained researcher/thinker cannot. The

narrator's revisiting of the research experience relays a sense of the experience of the first self,

the being self, that experienced the audiotaped discussion as it took place.

Interestingly, while I do not remember experiencing three distinct selves at various

points in the research (as the research unfolded; as I deliberated on what was transpiring in

the research; and as I tried to retell the story of the research), in retrospect I realize that very

different selves were being manifest in those three situations: a being self, a

researching/thinking self, and a narrating self. This realization seems to echo Varela et al.'s

point that "when we subject this continuity [stream of experience] to analysis, we seem able

to find only discontinuous moments of feeling, perception, motivation, and awareness" (1996,

p. 72). In reflecting on "three" selves, I too am gesturing to the absence of a distinct, stable

self and acknowledging a markedly different *fluid* self.

It should be pointed out that as one of these various selves, the narrator is not

omniscient. The narrator is still "me," and I am not pretending to know what Magda knew or to imply that Magda would have offered these same renderings. Nonetheless, the narrator is more than and different from the being me and the autonomous, researching and thinking me. It is the relational me, the self which is aware that the audiotaped discussion is pointing to something beyond itself, that is, to a present which co-emerged in what is a past at the time of writing. While it is clear that the researcher/thinker and narrator are the same biological person, it should also be clear that they are in different epistemological and ontological contexts at the time they so engage themselves. This difference also explains the tension experienced when, in my attempts to embody the narrator of a co-emergent perspective, I am grounded by the body recognized by the research participants as that of the researcher/thinker.

As I explained in a previous section, highlighting the perspective of the research participants through a perspective on the research experience which is not, strictly speaking, "theirs," might be seen within a functional model of mind, which is predicated on a representational notion of truth derived from the self/other separation, as an abuse of the researcher's privileged perspective. However, by allowing a researcher's experience of the research to be seen as something other than a retreat into solipsism, the notion of *co-emergence* places perspective into what Varela et al. call a *middle* space, a space where the mutual, simultaneous specification and emergence of "inner" observer with "outer" world and "outer" world with "inner" observer occurs. This is the space, I believe, of the narrator assuming a "first person singular but plural perspective." It is a space of radical empathy, a

transformative practice where researcher/thinker extends herself or himself in an effort to connect to the attentive self who experienced the research as it happened in the co-emergence of research participant, researcher and research activity. In fact, one might even go further by suggesting that a "first person singular but plural perspective" requires nothing less than a merging of identities, a dissolving of the barrier between imagined autonomous subjects to the research. This would be the recognition that the research participants and researcher were not autonomous subjects in the first place.

The narrator's account of this segment of audiotaped discussion between Magda and me is not a perfect rendering of the discussion as it happened, nor is it meant to be. I am working without a guide for this relational rendering of audiotaped research interviews. My two approaches, *narrated transcription* and *transposition*, are only two possibilities out of a potentially infinite number of possibilities. The question this raises, however, is an open and exciting one: what other options are there for rendering a present as it co-emerged in the past, approaches which tread a middle ground between non-representation and representation? The two approaches I am using here are attempts to honour that middle ground. In so doing, however, they tread a paradox by creating a retrospective picture of a present moment in the past, speaking plurally with a voice which is, within the more commonly accepted functional model of mind and language, my very own. These two approaches are my best attempts to date at absorbing the discussions relationally.

At this point, I should reiterate that my consideration of this audiotaped discussion is simply my attempt to give a rendering of language from a perspective which is neither

exclusively first nor third person. It is a consideration of the relational aspect of language in my research study. However, this is not to say that a more strictly functional interpretation of this audiotaped discussion would serve no useful purpose. Quite the contrary: this discussion would lend itself to other and diverse research purposes, including analyses of gender, race or, for that matter, power relations between researchers and research participants.

Narrated Transcript

For the purposes of this study, then, the *narrated transcript* is an account of a segment of the audiotaped discussion between Magda and my first self, the being self. It was put together in three stages. The first stage was the *verbatim* transcribing, by the researcher/thinker self, of a segment of the discussion. In the second stage, the researcher/thinker self listened once again to the audiotape and, by attending closely to its recollection of unspoken thoughts and feelings that had been connected to the words uttered and heard by the being self at the time of the discussion, transformed itself into the second self, the narrator. The narrator added these thoughts to the *verbatim* transcript where the being self was speaking. The final stage involved a further re-listening of the discussion, this time with a view to focussing on Magda's words. As the researcher/thinker did so, it payed special attention to Magda's voice, its intonation, volume and silences. Transforming itself once again into the narrator through the act of imagining what she was feeling, but did not give voice to as the discussion unfolded, the narrator then layered the *verbatim* transcript

where Magda is speaking with these imaginings as it had done for the thoughts and feelings of the being self. It should be stressed that the work of the narrator is not intended as a *post facto* editorializing or fictionalizing of the *verbatim* transcript. It is, rather, an acute attentiveness to the audiotaped recording that attempts to relay a sense of what happened at the moment of co-emergence.

The *verbatim* transcript, the work of the researcher/thinker, is provided in regular script while the researcher/thinker's recollections of the unspoken thoughts of the being self and those imagined thoughts of Magda's are in italics, as the work of the narrator.

The *narrated transcript*, then, is my first attempt to render a sense of the discussion as it unfolded, as it co-emerged in the context of research participant, researcher and research activity. As a transcript that makes some effort to acknowledge what is inevitably lost or, at best, only partially captured in an audiotaped recording, it is the narrator's first attempt to *talk* about language in a sense that approximates the co-emergence of language in the past. As a further attempt to render a sense of language at its moment of utterance, those silences which were ten seconds or longer in duration have been indicated.

What follows is one possible exploration of language as the conscious experience of co-emergence. To remind the reader of its context, the discussion took place as the research participant, Magda, an ESL community college student, and the researcher, me, viewed a videotaped recording of Magda's EAP/TESL group conversation which had taken place one week earlier. Magda and I talked in a quiet and comfortable screening room in the community college where Magda is a student and I was once an instructor.

The Narrated Discussion

John: I 'll just ask you very generally, is there anything you want to say now about the

[videotaped] conversation, thoughts or feelings, anything like that before we start

it [the tape recorder]?

Okay? I think so. I bet you feel anxious.

Magda: No . . . (inaudible)

John: You just want to start it.

No problem.

Magda: Yah.

What could he want me to say? Do I look anxious?

John: Okay. So, what we're going to do is I'm going to start it and then you can hold this

[the remote control]. If you want to stop the video and talk about something, just

push the pause button, this one here.

Magda: Pause button, that pause button.

I understand. Keeping busy will keep me from feeling anxious.

John: And then pause again to get it started again.

See, you don't have to feel anxious.

Magda: Okay.

Yes, I'm beginning to feel less anxious.

John: If you want to talk about something but you don't want to pause it, that's okay too,

just talk right over the tape. Okay, so, let's see if the volume is there. There, it's all

yours.

I hope this puts her at ease. Is she at ease? Am I at ease?

You know, originally I wanted this [the audiotape] to be able to pick up that [the sound from the videotape] as well, but I don't think it's going to work.

I know this is unnecessary, but it makes conversation. Maybe it will make her feel like I'm letting her in to the research.

Magda: Yah.

Of course. I can make conversation too.

John: It's just not clear enough and this microphone is too small, I think.

Magda: (laughs slightly)

Was that supposed to be funny? Are you trying to be conversational? I hope this discussion doesn't confuse me.

John: But then again, the important part is what we say now, right? This [the videotape] is just supposed to help us remember. (laughs)

I think you think I might be trying to be funny? I'll laugh to confirm that suspicion. Are you smiling? Is methodology supposed to be funny? I don't feel so sure I should be joking about my own method. I am serious about this, really!

Magda: *Was that supposed to be funny? I'll have to wait and see.*

John: When did I leave [referring to the video]? Okay, I was out of the room there.

I may have left the videotaping session, but I really did know what I was doing. Everything is under control, really. I have no reason to worry, do I?

{20 seconds of silence}

This silence is making me uneasy. Where's the data?

I 'm just curious, is this usual, do three of you show up for the conversations?

Magda: Yah.

Of course.

John: So this was sort of a normal conversation?

Magda: Yah, yah.

Of course, of course.

John: Do you think the video [camera] made you nervous? Were you-

That rising intonation in my voice is really an invitation to say something. Did you

get that?

Magda: No, I'm usually a nervous person.

Does that help you understand?

John: (laughs) You're usually nervous?

What are you saying? Am I understanding you here? I don't know whether to feel

surprised or confused?

Magda: Yah.

Why do you sound so surprised? Did I say something wrong? This is enough to

make me feel uneasy.

John: So the video-

I want to clarify this for both of us. Otherwise, I wouldn't have spoken so soon.

Magda: I mean at the beginning, I have in mind that there's some camera.

Understand? I hope you do. Don't make me feel uncomfortable.

John: Right.

But if you want to take the initiative to clarify it, you'll find me very

accommodating.

Magda: But then in some moments I completely forgot.

Does that clarify it? If you understand, I'll feel better.

John: Okay, okay.

You see how receptive I am to your explanation?

I don't think you meant that to be funny.

{22 seconds of silence}

Can I ease us out of this silence? I don't want to interrupt, but I feel compelled to.

It would be so much easier if I knew you better. Perhaps a conversational

approach will be less emotionally intrusive. Is a researcher allowed to be

conversational?

What was your topic, divorce?

Magda: Yah. [almost absentmindedly]

John: Okay.

Feel free to continue. Please. Should I expect you to pay attention to me? Should

I expect to feel left out?

Magda: I mean not really divorce, that divorce is harmful for kids, for children.

I don't feel like saying anymore right now.

{17 seconds of silence}

John: *Well, what do I say now? Let me see if I can make this thing a little more conversational.*

What's your partner's [Sean] name?

Am I annoying her?

(Magda struggles to pronounce her partner's name. John helps. They succeed.)

There, wasn't that satisfying? We worked on something together and succeeded. Isn't that satisfying? Even if it is, I don't want my motives to be too obvious, though.

Okay. I get her mixed up with another girl.

Magda: *You must be interested in this. I'll say some more about it. It seems to put us both at ease.*

And actually she was absent on the date [of the divorce discussion], so actually she didn't have any questions about it [at the videotaped conversation] because she didn't know what was going on in class.

Let's get things straight. I was there and you weren't. I draw certainty, and some safety, from that.

John: Okay, so this was a debate that you had in class about divorce that you're talking about now.

Clarifying for the audiotape, clarifying for myself. Well done. I always feel better

when I'm doing something. Would you like to say anything more to clarify that?

Magda: And it was my topic.

How is that? Does it contribute to our emotional détente?

John: Okay.

I'm not going to say anything. I think I've chattered enough. I don't want her to think this is just chatter. How do you feel about chatter? How do you feel about my unease with chattering about divorce?

{28 seconds of silence)

(Magda laughs and then John laughs)

But if you laugh, so will I.

Magda: You know sometimes I feel like I'm interrupting someone's conversation or when someone's talking.

Just to let you know that I know what I do. It makes me uncomfortable to think I'm interrupting, but it's especially difficult when I really want to make a point but may not recognize an appropriate opportunity in English.

John: Mmhmm.

This seems emotionally important to you. I would feel the same way if I were in your position. I'm listening very carefully.

Magda: Sometimes I interrupt. I started to talk in the middle of someone's conversation.

I don't really mean to interrupt. Thinking about it makes me feel uneasy, like I'm doing something wrong.

John: *Don't be so hard on yourself.*

But you didn't interrupt there.

You shouldn't accuse yourself of interrupting.

I didn't see what . . . (inaudible)

Magda: I mean, I was trying, like say something. 'I'm here,' you know?

Can you identify with that? Do you understand how I feel?

John: *Yes, and I admire that strength of presence, but I don't want to make it too serious*

an issue. That might make us, or maybe just me, uncomfortable.

(laughs) Were you trying to attract attention, or-?

[Magda seems somewhat confused]

I think I said something you didn't understand. Do I explain or let it go?

Magda: *What does he mean?*

Yah--something like that I think.

I don't like not understanding in English.

John: *You didn't understand me. I don't think it's worth pursuing.*

If we wait long enough, the discomfort of miscommunication gets absorbed in

silence. We'll feel better in a few seconds.

{27 seconds of silence}

Magda: *Should I be saying something about myself in the video? I think that's what he*

wants, isn't it?

I didn't know I'm so serious. (both laugh)

I don't mind sharing that with you. This feels okay. I'll even say more.

I mean people always ask me if I smile sometimes, why I am so serious, especially in the workplace. Actually, I never had the chance to see my expression before [in a video].

This is all quite new to me. Can you empathize with that?

John: *Yes. I think I understand you better. I can laugh easier.*

(laughs) Did you feel serious at the time?

Magda: No!

Of course not! That's what I'm trying to say!

John: Okay, but you think you look serious now (laughingly referring to the video).

This is conversational enough to laugh, like losing oneself in the discussion.

Magda: Yah, yah. But people are right, because I have the same face like my mother. She was always serious and looked like she's always upset.

John: Yes.

No laughing about her mother. I don't know her.

Magda: The same expression on my face.

Do you understand now? What I look like and how I feel can be very different?

John: Okay.

I understand.

{41 seconds of silence}

Your group's [videotaped] conversation seems pretty intense. Should I be

watching this? Of course, I'm the researcher! But I wasn't there and I'm not part of your group. I feel like an outsider, an intruder. Dare I enter your conversation? I guess all this is about taking chances. Well, I'll take a chance on David's [Magda's TESL partner] impassioned contributions.

Oh goodness, David looks more serious than you do.

Was that inappropriate?

(both laugh)

Magda: Yah, I know.

John: *I'm glad you didn't think so. Taking chances is risky.*

Magda: *I don't think I want to pursue that exactly. I'm not sure how I feel about confiding to you about my group partner. It's risky.*

{10 seconds of silence}

Let me think about this.

David told me that Sean, she said once to him that he's talking too much.

John: Mmhmm.

Please continue. I appreciate your willingness to talk about this. Do you trust me?

Magda: But actually she always asks questions and he's trying to explain it to her.

John: Okay.

I'll take your word for it. I trust you.

Magda: And then when he gets into it, you know, he cannot stop. (both laugh)

You understand? That's how things happen in my group. I really can't say too

much more. It's sort of confidential, you know?

John: Yah. He's very emotional when he speaks.

Yes, I understand. We understand each other. Understanding doesn't always mean having to say everything.

Magda: Yah, yah.

Quite true. I'm glad you see that. It makes me feel easier.

John: *Good. We understand each other, right?*

{51 seconds of silence}

Now that we understand each other, these silences seem so much less tense. It's like we feel something in common, a silent rapport.

However, I will take up opportunities to get you talking. I'm the researcher, right?

There, Sean is asking questions.

Just like you said. Do you feel vindicated?

Magda: Yah.

John: Which encourage David to-

Will you finish that for me?

Magda: -keep talking. (both laugh)

You see what I mean?

Because for Sean there is a lot of new things she never met in her life because she was going to girls' school or something like that-

John: Okay, but-

Magda: *I'm going to finish.*

-in her country. This is, here at _____ College is the first time when she studied with the boys.

John: Okay, okay.

See, I'm a good listener, but just a little to eager to talk sometimes. I'm not sure why. Maybe it's because I feel compelled to be the "researcher."

Magda: So, if she has always . . . (inaudible).

John: So this is a new experience for her.

See, I do understand and I do want you to take the lead in the discussion. I'm a good "researcher," right?

Magda: Yah.

Exactly.

John: Okay.

It's always easier to be silent with someone you feel you know.

{23 seconds of silence}

Sean is actually quite a good communicator [in the video]. I don't think she's said this much since the video began. I bet you'll say something about that.

Magda: *Sean is talking, but he wants me to talk about myself, right? I can do that.* (laughs) You see, if you compare Sean and me.

John: Mmhmm.

I'm listening.

Magda: You know she is just relaxed, you know, sitting, and I cannot sit without any movement, you know?

I assume that's the kind of observation you expect.

John: *You laugh. I laugh. It's okay.*

Without moving, okay. (laughs) But at the time you felt relaxed?

Clarify that for me. Talk some more.

Magda: Yah, it's not because of the camera. I'm always like this. I'm always doing something with my nails, or with my legs, or something.

Do you understand this time?

John: *Be tactful. I do understand, but I feel awkward responding to how you feel about your appearance or your body. I probably shouldn't be, but I am. How is it that you don't feel uncomfortable? Are you being spared the liabilities of my male sensibilities?*

(laughs slightly)

The discomfort of miscommunication is absorbed in silence.

{25 seconds of silence}

I can feel compelled to say something again.

So in these types of conversations, you feel generally quite comfortable?

Why did I say that? Am I grasping? Perhaps the miscommunication didn't get absorbed.

Magda: Yah.

Why did you ask that? I'm not sure I always follow you.

John: At ease?

Magda: *Is that what you want to know? Do you want an explanation?*

Maybe because it's two of us [with the TESL student], I mean, two students.

John: Mmhmm.

Sure. I'm listening.

Magda: Because if it's one on one [with the TESL student] I think it's a little bit more, not

confusing but, because if I don't know something, I'm thinking that maybe Sean will

say something, you know?

John: Okay, okay.

Sure. No problem.

Magda: It's more relaxed when I know that it's someone else.

There. Is that it?

John: Okay. So, if it were one on one, you and the TESL student, you and David, you

think it would be more difficult for you?

I understood you. I asked an understandable question. Understanding. Good.

Magda: Yah. Because I think me and Sean are the only ones [EAP students] where there are

two people [EAP students] at the meetings [EAP/TESL group conversation

sessions].

This is what interests you, right?

John: Umm.

Your observation isn't quite right, but I don't want to be too blunt.

Magda: I mean the other groups have just one [EAP student].

Just to finish my point.

John: No, I think some have two.

I've committed myself to this point. I have to finish. I hope you don't feel threatened.

Magda: Yah?

I didn't know that, but I can take it conversationally. I'm okay.

John: Yah, I have one other group that's taking part in this study that has two people [EAP students].

Share inside information about the research. We're practically doing this research together, right?

I think originally it was supposed to be one on one.

Magda: One on one.

Right.

John: But they didn't have enough TESL students.

There, we've done it.

Magda: Oh.

I guess we have. We disagreed and were able to resolve it. That's good. Is this supposed to change our relationship? I'll think about it as I watch the video, but you'll never know that.

{48 seconds of silence}

I still feel like the "researched." I guess it's time for me to say something about

myself again. How about what happens to me in English?

(laughs at herself in the video) Sometimes I'm stuck in one moment.

John: *Language difficulty. Is this a serious topic? How should I react?*

Mmhmm.

Magda: And just like I cannot find a word to say something.

Doesn't that sound sort of humourous?

John: *She doesn't want this to be too serious.*

(laughs) And yet you keep going.

Magda: I'm sorry.

What?

John: And yet you keep going.

That's supposed to be a compliment.

Magda: *What does he mean?*

Yah.

John: *I don't think you understood me. How did the communication break down,*

anyway?

I think it might be awkward to pursue this.

{10 seconds of silence}

Magda: See like me and David is talking and Sean, she is just listening.

Just like I was telling you earlier.

John: Usually, does she do most of the listening?

Was that a relevant question? I don't want you to think I'm not following your train of thought.

Magda: Yah.

Of course.

John: *That's impressive [referring to the video]. You're taking the initiative to bring Sean [Magda's EAP partner] into the conversation.*

{15 seconds of silence}

You asked her a question. Why did you ask her the question?

As a former instructor, I'm asking you for your pedagogical view. I respect your opinion.

Magda: (laughs) Because I want to her to say something.

Couldn't you tell why? What are you getting at?

John: Okay, okay. So you're trying to bring her into the conversation.

Sure, I understand.

Magda: Yah, because I know she needs more practice with conversation than I did. She has more vocabulary, but she's not using it.

She should use it, right? And by the way, if you feel we can discuss points of pedagogy as equals, we should be able to watch the video in silence. You don't have to lead the discussion with questions.

{70 seconds of silence}

John: *That's fine with me. I can focus on the video.*

Sean is using some of that vocabulary right now. Actually a pretty good

conversation involving all three of you [Magda, Sean, David].

I'm okay watching this [video] in silence now. We're equals. Much better. Good.

Magda: *Don't misunderstand what I'm saying in the video.*

It maybe looks like I want to be so smart, you know, (laughs) but I don't really want

to be. (both laugh) I know everything (self-mockingly).

It's not the way it looks. I don't want you to think I'm arrogant.

John: But did you feel that way when you were saying it?

Just to understand you completely.

Magda: No!

Of course not!

John: (laughs)

Laughing without thinking. This is comfortable.

It just looks that way now.

Magda: I know. Yah, it is my feeling about it.

I'm glad you understand. We have nothing to fear from silences now.

{41 seconds of silence}

I'll let you understand some more.

I think I was saying something in the classroom at the break and there are some

Korean people who just came to Canada. I'm here eight years, so even if the teacher

asks something-

John: Mmhmm.

Sure. I understand. Don't struggle. No problem.

Magda: -and I know the answer, so they go like 'Wow,' you know?

Do you understand?

John: They're surprised that you know the answer.

I understand.

Magda: They're so surprised because, maybe not so surprised but their expression, I mean,

their talk, they are so surprised like they never heard about something before, and

because you know something, you want to, you know, show them that you really

know something.

This is sort of confidential.

John: Yes.

I can hear a punch line coming.

Magda: And the true is you don't really know everything. (both laugh)

See?

{Total time: 16:27}

Transposition

As was the case with the *narrated transcript*, *transposition*, as I introduce it with this

thesis, is not simply a record of the functional transfer of information between Magda and my first self, the being self, but primarily a pointing to the present in which our discussion took place, a gesturing toward the co-emergence of research participant, researcher and research activity.

The segment of audiotaped discussion being considered here is the same one used in the previous section. However, in this second attempt at rendering the co-emergence of the discussion as it took place, the narrator uses the *narrated transcript* rather than the *verbatim* transcript as a starting point. As the term *transposition* suggests, aspects of the *narrated transcript* are being lifted and moved from their original position. These aspects include words and phrases from the *verbatim* transcript, some of the researcher/thinker's recollections of the being self's unspoken thoughts and feelings as the discussion unfolded, and some of what the narrator imagined Magda was thinking and feeling, but did not give voice to, as the discussion unfolded.

The significant difference between the *narrated transcript* and the *transposition* is that the *transposition* does *not* make a distinction between what was actually spoken and what was thought, felt or imagined. This blurring of word, thought, feeling and imagination is a conscious attempt to gesture toward the co-emergence of research participant, researcher and research activity. In this sense, it is not a *post facto* editorializing of the co-emergence of a moment in the past, but rather an attempt to capture an echo of the totality of the discussion in its incipient, co-emergent state. This segment of the *narrated transcript*, taken as a unity, is being transposed, blurred and refracted in an attempt to recreate the flavour of

a whole moment, a complex, unbroken, uninterrupted episode of co-emergent reality in the past.

Transposition, as I am using it, is enabled by a relational model of mind and language. Taking the co-emergence of a speaker, a spoken to and an act of speaking as a guide for gesturing toward the coming into being of moments in the past, it weakens the conceptual autonomy of particular words, thoughts, feelings or identities. In so doing, it points to the pre-conceptual unity of speaker, spoken to and act of speaking. In a paradoxical way, *transposition* clarifies through obfuscation. That is, *transposition* clarifies through what, from a representational model of language, would appear as obfuscation, in that it renders the present of the audiotaped discussion, which is in the past at the time of writing, by *undifferentiating* and *compressing* the *verbatim* transcript. Within a representational model of language, this would obfuscate the 'truth,' but within a relational model of language, it gestures toward the wholeness of the moment.

By *undifferentiating*, I am referring to the blurring of word, thought, feeling and imagination I had outlined earlier, and by *compressing* I am referring to the fact that the *transposition* is shorter and denser than the original *verbatim* transcript. But why, one might ask, should *transposition* move in such a way? Why muddy the still waters of a *verbatim* transcript in an effort to render it relationally? The reason is this: *Transposition* is more than a *verbatim* description of the co-emergence of a moment in the past for there can be no such thing. Rather, *transposition* is a gesturing toward the wholeness of a moment in the past and, as such, it is a characterization of itself. This is to say that *transposition* recognizes that it is

a transformation of that present, that episode of co-emergence that is now in the past.

As a final suggestion to the reader, the *transposition* comes closer to echoing the present it is trying to recreate when it is read aloud. Reading the *transposition* aloud accentuates the verbal, physical and affective aspects of the original discussion and minimizes the functional aspect of the mediating activity, reading, as the deciphering of symbolic representations.

As was mentioned in the case of the *narrated transcript*, transposing the audiotaped discussion is done in recognition of the fact that for other, equally useful considerations of the audiotaped discussion, for example, analyses of linguistic strategies, gender, race or power relations, the distinctions that *transposition* blurs would have to be restored. In other words, for these other purposes it would be essential to know who said what and who was responsible for thinking what with respect to whom.

The Transposed Discussion

John: Very generally, anything you want to say, think or feel?

Magda: What do you want me to say? What do you want me to feel?

John: Talk about something, just push the button and talk about something. Talk right over the tape. I hope this puts you at ease. How do you feel about this? Hmmm. I guess I want this and I want that, but I don't think it's going to work. I know this is unnecessary.

Magda: Of course. It's just not clear enough. Are you trying to be conversational? Are

you trying to put me at ease?

John: Well, the important part is what *you* say, right? Are you smiling? Is this supposed to be funny? I *am* serious about the research.

Magda: I'll have to wait and see. I'm not sure *what* to think or feel at the moment.

John: Don't worry. Everything's under control, really. We're fine. Where's the data?

Magda: Of course, of course, of course. I know what to feel now.

John: Were you nervous? Say something. Did you get that?

Magda: No. I'm usually a nervous person. Why do you sound so surprised?

John: I just wanted to clarify this for both of us. Otherwise, I wouldn't have spoken so soon.

Magda: I completely forgot and I don't feel threatened. Does that clarify it?

John: I don't think you meant that to be funny. Can I ask what your topic was and what your partner's [Sean] name is? Is this annoying?

Magda: Not really. Divorce is harmful for kids and Sean. You must be interested in this.

John: Yah, but I don't want my motives to be too obviously emotional.

Magda: That's okay. Actually she was absent on the date of the divorce discussion and actually she didn't have any questions about it because she didn't know what was going on in class. Let's get things straight! I was there and you weren't. How is that?

John: Well done. Would you like to say anything more. I'm not going to say anything. (Magda laughs and then John laughs)

Magda: You know, sometimes I feel like I'm interrupting just to let you know that I know. I don't really mean to interrupt. It makes me uncomfortable.

John: Don't be so hard on yourself. You didn't interrupt.

Magda: I was just trying to say something. Can you identify with that?

John: Yes. I admire your strength of presence. Were you trying to attract attention or maybe just make us uncomfortable?

Magda: What do you mean by something like that? I don't think it's worth pursuing. Should I be saying something about myself in the video instead? I don't mind sharing that with you. Why I am so serious? This is all quite new to me. Empathize with me.

John: I think I understand you better.

Magda: People are right, I have the same face like my mother. The same expression on my face. Do you understand now?

John: I understand. At least I think I understand. By the way, your group's conversation seems pretty intense. Should I be watching this? I wasn't there and I'm not part of your group. I feel like an outsider. Was that inappropriate?

Magda: Let me think about this. She said once that he's talking too much but actually she always asks questions and he's trying to explain it to her and then when he gets into it he cannot stop.

John: I'll take your word for it. We understand each other. We trust each other. Now these silences seem so much less tense. Will you finish that for me?

Magda: Keep talking. (both laugh) You see what I mean?

For Sean, there is a lot of new things she never met in her life because she was going to girls' school or something like that-

John: But-

Magda: I'm going to finish. -in her country. This is the first time.

John: Okay. I *am* a good listener, but just a little too eager to talk sometimes. I'm the "researcher."

Magda: You are, I guess.

John: Sean is actually quite a good communicator. I bet you have something to say about that.

Magda: You see, if you compare Sean and me, she is just relaxed and I'm always doing something with my nails, or with my legs, or something, and it's not because of the camera. Do you understand this time?

John: Yes, but I feel awkward talking about it. (laughs slightly) But I do still feel compelled to say something. Do you feel generally quite comfortable?

Magda: Why did you ask that? Is that what you want to know? Maybe because it's two of us, two students, because if it's one on one, I think it's a little bit more confusing because if I don't know something, I'm thinking that maybe you will say something, you know? It's more relaxed when I know that it's someone else.

John: So, if it were one on one, you think it would be more difficult for you?

Magda: Yah. Because I think we are the only ones where there are two people.

John: No, that's not quite right. Some other groups taking part in this study have two

people. I'm not being blunt and we're practically doing this research together.

Magda: One on one.

John: There, we've done it.

Magda: Oh. I guess we have, and I guess it's time for me to say something about myself

again. How about what happens to me when I cannot find a word to say something.

John: Language difficulty. Hmmm, is this a serious topic?

Magda: Well, it's sort of humourous, isn't it?

John: What?

Magda: I'm sorry?

John: Is that supposed to be a compliment?

Magda: What do you mean?

John: I don't think we understood each other. Let's just stop here and move on.

Magda: Fine. See like me and David is talking and Sean, she is just listening.

John: Usually, does she do most of the listening?

Magda: Of course.

John: Pedagogically, you asked her a question. Why did you ask her the question?

Magda: Because I want to her to say something because I know she needs more practice

with conversation because she has more vocabulary that she's not using. Couldn't

you tell why I asked her the question?

John: Okay, okay. Sure, I understand. I'm okay watching this video now. Much

better. Good. Actually a pretty good conversation involving all three of you [Magda, Sean, David].

Magda: Don't misunderstand what I'm saying in the video. It maybe looks like I want to be so smart, but I don't really want to be. I know everything (self-mockingly). It's not the way it looks. I'm not arrogant.

John: But did you feel that way when you were saying it?

Magda: No, of course not!

John: (laughs) Laughing without thinking. This is comfortable.

Magda: I know. It is my feeling about it too. I'm glad you understand. I'll let you understand some more. I'm here eight years, so even if the teacher asks something, I know the answer. Some classmates who just came to Canada are surprised that I know the answer and so they go like 'wow,' you know?.

John: Sure. I understand. Don't struggle. No problem.

Magda: They're so surprised with their expression, their talk, like they never heard about something before, and because you know something, you want to show them that you really know something. But, confidentially-

John: I can hear a punch line coming.

Magda: -the true is you don't really know everything.

(both laugh)

"{Total time}"

Summary and Afterthoughts

My intent in the study that served as the starting point for this thesis was to consider an ESL conversation exercise from the perspective of its participants. My discussions with each of the research participants was an effort to appreciate their view on the conversation exercise. In this regard, I made a conscious attempt to minimize my role in the research by leaving the discussions open-ended and inviting the research participants to comment on any aspect of their EAP/TESL group conversation they found relevant or meaningful. I wanted to avoid influencing their reflections on the exercise and believed that I could capture their perspective by simply giving them voice and then documenting that voice. However, it soon became clear that they could only fully engage the discussions if I too were fully engaged. In making myself absent, and in the videotaping sessions this meant literally 'not in physical attendance,' I was less than fully *present* to our relationship and, as a consequence, many of the participants were not entirely at ease in discussing their EAP/TESL group conversation.

This development was the catalyst for my recognition that attempts to 'understand' a research participant's perspective require more than passive observation on the part of the researcher, even if that observation is attentive and sympathetic listening. In my study, 'understanding' involved the recognition that the belief that a researcher can 'understand' a research participant had to be revisited. It was at this pivotal point in the research that the direction of the study shifted from a focus on ESL to a contemplation on methodology. I want to reflect further on this 'pivotal point' by responding to a question put to me by my thesis supervisor: "What allowed you to be affected by the research participants' unease and

to then do something about it?"

My lack of a clear focus, defined expectations or a guiding research question as I began the study was significant in responding to this question. In not pre-forming a specific direction for the study, I was predisposed to being attuned to my relationship with the participants, to making the quality of our relationship central to the research. This made the study difficult to justify as 'research,' but did leave me receptive to the presence I could potentially share with each of the research participants. This attunement and receptivity allowed me to be affected by the research participants' unease and to then do something about it.

Of course, not having a specifically defined research focus begs the further question of *why* I did not have a specifically defined research focus. My response to this question returns to the motivation for my study, that is, recollections of my relationship with students when I was an instructor at the college. As I recounted earlier, I considered the most significant aspect of my experience with students to have been our shared *presence* in the very reality of each moment. This motivation replaced the need for a research focus and explains why I did not have such a focus.

Nonetheless, while I was aware of the importance of the relationship to my students and, I now hoped, to my research participants, on arriving at the threshold of the 'research,' I felt compelled to methodologize the study which, in my case, meant an attempt to minimize my role in the research. This move was a withdrawal from *presence*. I was, unwittingly, being lead by a metaphor of research as a series of steps, from ignorance to control to

knowledge, and in so doing detracting from a focus on *presence* and, perhaps, a move to a new metaphor. When I did realize that my methodologizing the research was misguided, that the participants wanted me to assume a fuller, active role in the research, it was as if I were returning to something familiar. In retrospect, I can say that I was returning to the dimension I valued most highly in my experience with students, that is, our shared *presence* in the very reality of each moment. Methodologizing the research jarred the authenticity of that *presence*.

Notwithstanding my own compulsion to methodologize the study, it should also be pointed out that the demand to methodologize research is overwhelming. One could argue, in fact, that 'research' is implicitly construed as the creation of a distance between researcher and researched, what I am referring to as 'methodologizing.' This may be part of the legacy of an empirically driven experimental research tradition. In either case, my experience of this research study has shown me that my phenomenologically informed attempts to secure the research participants' first person, subjective, lived experience were equally susceptible to methodologizing and the 'step-by-step' metaphor of research as 'inquiry.'

Curiously, it is here at the end of a year-long process of researching and writing that I have come to see that I was not motivated to 'inquire' into anything. My motivation was to experience a shared *presence* with these research participants as I had with my students. An approach that took its bearing from phenomenology, that is, the first person, subjective, lived experience of the research participants, seemed closest to a methodology that would bridge the distance between researcher and researched, what Berman describes as "the

methodological principle of psychic distance" (1989, p. 273). In other words, I took the

decisions that I thought would allow me to 'understand' the research participants, but forced

myself to overlook my own participation in this 'understanding' as well as the participants'

need for my fuller involvement in the research. In the study itself, I responded to this

shortcoming by shifting emphasis on to what the research participants were telling me about

their experience of my methodology. In this way, I was asking for their 'understanding' of

my attempts to 'understand' them.

My concern with the research methodology was intertwined with my conceptual

efforts at explicating a *relational* notion of mind and language. This alternative model of

mind and language was developed from two ideas: the concept of *embodied action* (Varela,

Thompson & Rosch, 1996, p. 172) and the notion of *perceptual and linguistic reciprocity*

(Abram, 1996, p. 90).

In the first instance, the concept of *embodied action* provides an alternative to 'input-

output' formulations of cognition. By suggesting a middle ground between objectivism and

subjectivism, *embodied action* makes the point that object and subject, world and perceiver,

specify each other. In so doing, *embodied action* offers a way out of *representation*, since

representation is the guiding concept for objectivism, as the recovery of a pre-existing 'outer

world,' and for subjectivism, as the projection of a pregiven 'inner world.' *Embodied action*,

then, proposes an understanding within which thinking being and material being mutually

specify each other. For the purposes of my discussion, I termed the simultaneous coming into

being of thinking and material being *co-emergence* in the present. I then extended the idea

of a co-emergence of organism and ecology to language by looking to the notion of *perceptual and linguistic reciprocity* (Abram, 1996, p. 90).

Abram considers language to be fundamentally similar to perception, and, as such, to begin and end in the actually existing world. In contrast to exclusively representational models of language, Abram highlights the gestural and somatic aspect of language. His notion of *reciprocity* extracts language from representation, from a dualistic framework of inner mind and outer world and into a transformed space of *co-emergence*. Following this thinking, then, my research framework evolved as a de-emphasis on representational models of language and, conversely, a pronounced emphasis on the *present* dimension of language as an aspect of the *co-emergent* coming into being of research participants, researcher and research activity.

However, a focus on the *present* dimension of cognition or, as specifically concerns my work in ESL, language, provides its own seeming limitation. For instance, in bringing this focus to bear on my study, I was faced with the task of *re-presenting* the *present* of audiotaped discussions whose moment of utterance was in the past. I was confronted with the challenge of *representing* the *unrepresentable*. My relational renderings of an audiotaped discussion with Magda were tentative attempts at responding to the challenge. They were, in a sense, working paradoxes since they ventured to render a co-emergent present in what was a past at the time of writing.

The *present* to which *narrated transcription* and *transposition* gestures concerns a coming into being of research participant, researcher and research activity. As such, both

renderings are given from a "first person singular but plural perspective" which, while clearly authored by me, intimates toward a mutually specified, co-emergent view premised not on the notion of isolated or fixed selves, but on a view of mind as inherently participatory. *Narrated transcription* and *transposition* are my first attempts to respond to the question, 'What is a research participant's perspective and how does a researcher come to understand it?' My exploratory responses are not providing definitive answers, but they are revisiting the question by asking, 'What *is* a perspective in research involving research participants and a researcher, and how is it to be understood and expressed?'

This new question is suggestive for a participatory methodology attuned to the relatedness of research participants and researcher. I can think of at least three dimensions for research:

1.   Research studies need to be conceptualized, conducted and appreciated from a point that is, paradoxically, singular yet plural. This plurality acknowledges the co-emergence of research participants and researcher in the research. In so doing, it closes the gap between research participants and researcher and precludes control of the research by any one party to the research. This type of research would be facilitated by longer relationships of greater trust between fewer research participants and the researcher. (By 'fewer,' I am thinking specifically of my study which began with twelve research participants, but eventually focussed on only one.)

2.   Research questions or guiding foci need to be secondary to the quality of the relationship between research participants and researcher. In this way, the research is

centrally concerned with a mutually beneficial relationship between them.

3.   The guiding metaphor for research methodology in the social sciences, which would include educational research and any other research involving research participants, as 'step-by-step inquiry' needs to be replaced, perhaps by a metaphor such as the *co-emergence* of research participants, researcher and research activity. Having said this, I should add that research in the social sciences would benefit from a review of *any* guiding metaphor, be it representation or *co-emergence*, since this would provide insight into the metaphors to which metaphors such as representation and *co-emergence* are linked. For instance, a review of representation would lead to a consideration of the metaphor of 'the individual' while a review of *co-emergence* would lead to a consideration of the metaphor of 'relationality.' In addition to awakening a more conscious use of research methodologies, such a review would make visible the complex relationship between these two distinct yet intertwined orientations to research, that is, one based on the notion of autonomous entities to the research and the other resting on the connection between them.

It is the latter of these orientations that I have striven to articulate in this thesis. I have done so in an effort to draw attention to its advantages as a metaphor for research and to appreciate more fully its potential value to my own future research. Conceptually, *co-emergence* provides a more complete bringing together of aspects of the research experience. As a metaphor for research in the social sciences, it also encourages me to pursue radically collaborative research, the sort of research which presupposes the mutual and continuous specification of research participants, researcher and research activity.

As a final reflection on my move to adopting co-emergence as a conceptual metaphor, it seems that I was encouraged to move to co-emergence as a consequence of attempting to capture a present, in the past at the time that I reflected on it, in writing. This is to say that the process of crafting written renderings, namely *narrated transcription* and *transposition*, drew my attention both to their own exploratory nature, their own incompleteness as renderings of a past, and the totality, the complex wholeness of that moment they were attempting to describe in writing. My less than complete renderings of the present of the discussion with Magda pointed beyond themselves, to something that I am calling *co-emergence*.

In taking these implications and this research experience to heart, I can see that a participatory methodology implies that my future research with ESL students must be *a research relationship* whose primary concern is attentiveness to the relationship and how it is shaping *all* the parties to the research. For example, perhaps the first issue this future research needs to address is my relationship with Magda as rendered in the *narrated transcription* and *transposition*. Do these relational renderings bring Magda and me closer to 'a first person singular but plural perspective?' How does this affect our research relationship? Can we imagine this relationship as *co-emergence*? Working through these matters would enable a study guided by a participatory 'methodology' attuned to the conscious experience of co-emergence in its concept and conduct.

Appendix

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

●This research is being conducted by John Ippolito who is a graduate student in Education at York University. The data from this research will form part of a Master of Education thesis. The thesis is an attempt to better understand ESL (English as a Second Language) conversation activities through discussions between EAP (English for Academic Purposes) students, TESL (Teachers of English as a Second Language) candidates and the researcher.

●Data collection will involve videotaping a one hour EAP/TESL conversation; audio taping and transcribing a discussion of the videotape held between individual research participants and the researcher; inviting further written reflections from the research participants; and the researcher's own written observations. **The videotapes, audiotapes, research participants' written contributions and researcher's observations will remain completely confidential. All participants will be given pseudonyms. In addition, the videotapes and audiotapes will be erased and written reflections destroyed or returned to the participants once the research is completed.**

●The participants are being invited to take part in this project after having been given a description of the project by one of their instructors and the researcher. Participation in this project is voluntary and the participant may discontinue participation in the project at any time. The participant may contact the York University Graduate Programme in Education at (416) 736-5002 for questions about the field work and about the rights of participants.

●I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above

and the possible risks from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge

that I have received a copy of this consent statement.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

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Footnotes

1.   Collins cites a number of criticisms of the purported link between proficiency in a

standard language and social mobility. Among them are the existence of discriminatory job

ceilings and the primary significance of class background in determining adult social position

(1991, p. 235). (see also footnote on p. 249)

2.   Included in this informal survey are Applied Linguistics, The Canadian Modern

Language Review, Language Learning, Language Teaching, The Modern Language Journal,

TESL Canada Journal, and TESOL Quarterly.

3.   I am using the terms *mind* and *cognition* synonymously to refer to the ever-shifting

focal position we occupy within the set of relations called *existence*. Seen in this way, mind

is a process. Thus, I am not suggesting an essentialist notion of mind in a material sense, nor

in an immaterial sense. That is, I do not hold that *mind* is constituted by an underlying form

or idea.

4.   Admittedly, I have selected only two of Angeles' (1981, p. 172) eight definitions of

mind; however, the distinction between the mental and physical aspects of *mind* represented

by those two definitions is not violated by any of his remaining definitions of *mind*.

5.   Angeles defines Descartes' soul/body dualism in this way:

Descartes held that the human being is a union of two separable and distinct substances:

body and soul. The body is part of the physical universe and mechanical in operation. . . .

The soul is connected to all parts of the body, but it performs most of its functions at the

pineal gland in the brain. By acting upon the pineal gland, the soul produces such mental

events as thinking, perceiving, willing, emoting, sensing" (1981, p. 66).

6.   In contrast to a view of "the cognitive system as primarily an inference system: an

inference is the generation of a new representation from those previously contemplated,"

Bechtel describes a connectionist network as "a model of a dynamical system in which

physical components are conceived to be causally interacting with each other" (1997, p. 193).

7.   Placing cognition at a distance begs the rather obvious but no less troubling question,

What, exactly, am I placing cognition at a distance from?

8.   *Symbols* would be the unit of meaning in a cognitivist or more traditionally

computational, that is, functional model, whereas *global subsymbolic states* are the preferred

unit of meaning in connectionist models.

9.   The terms *co-emerge* and *co-emergence* were suggested to me by my thesis

supervisor. After assuring her that I could not locate either term in the literature I have

thus far consulted, she agreed that I should use them to connote Varela et al.'s notion of

"mutual specification" (1996, p. 172). If either *co-emerge* or *co-emergence* appears in a

source I have not cited, the responsibility for this oversight is entirely mine.

10.   In contrast, Abram (1996) points to a oneness of cognition and ecology in his

discussion of indigenous ways of being wherein language, as an aspect of cognition, is

inseparable from the physical, geographical location for language, an ecology. On this point

he explains:

>   One of the strong claims of this book is that the synaesthetic association of visible
>
>   topology with auditory recall--the intertwining of earthly place with linguistic memory

--is common to almost all indigenous, oral cultures. It is, we may suspect, a spontaneous propensity of the human organism--one that is radically transformed, yet not eradicated, by alphabetic writing. (1996, p. 176)

11. Having justified my abbreviation of the discussion in this way, I should, in all honesty, also point out that I am just beginning to come to terms with the range of implications of proposing that cognition and ecology are inseparable.

12. While the discussion here is primarily concerned with oral language, I am also reminded of Jill Bell's experience as a native English speaker being introduced to Chinese characters and the emphasis her tutor had placed on "total concentration and . . . suitable working conditions" (1997, p. 138). The concern here also seems to be very much with the manifestation of language in the *present*, in this case not as an utterance but as an act of drawing.

13. The feminine pronoun is used here to draw attention to the "non-masculinity" of proposing a oneness of cognizing agent and ecology. I am thinking here specifically of Bordo's (1986) discussion of the "masculinization of thought" (Stern as quoted in Bordo, 1986, p. 441) in Descartes' *Meditations*.

14. For a discussion of the absence of the human body in Western thought see Berman (1989); for the place of emotion in epistemology see Jaggar (1989); and for the place of somatic and emotive knowing in educational and social research see Heshusius (1996a, 1996b, 1994) and Heshusius and Ballard (1996).

15. Abram is drawing here specifically on Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of perception*.

16.   The move to reconnect language to the physical is also taken up in the tradition of

Cognitive semantics in, for instance, Johnson (1987), Lakoff (1987, 1988) and Lakoff and

Johnson (1980). However, the position assumed by *Cognitive semantics* differs from both

the disembodied deconstructionist response to *mind-independent objects* and Abram's

embodied reply.   In the first case, where *Cognitive semantics* argues against *mind-independent objects*, what Lakoff calls "mind-free reality" (1988, p. 150), by looking to the

bodily basis of meaning, to "innate sensory-motor mechanisms [which] provide a structuring

of experience" (Lakoff, 1988, p. 150), the deconstructionist response to *mind-independent objects* is to embrace the other extreme, that is, to see language as an exclusively *mind-dependent*, arbitrary system of meaning.

In the second case, the emphasis in *Cognitive semantics* differs from Abram's sense

of embodiment in that Abram finds language primarily in the body of nature, the ecology of

which the human body is only one dimension.

17.   In the minority, it seems, are thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty whom Abram refers to

as "the heir of a long-standing, if somewhat heretical lineage" of an embodied philosophy of

language. Within this tradition, Abram includes Giambattista Vico, Jean-Jacques Rousseau,

and Johann Gottfried Herder (1996, p. 76).

To this list I would add Gregory Bateson. It is worth quoting a passage from *Steps*

to an ecology of mind to get a sense of Bateson's part in this *heresy*. Bateson is in

conversation with his young daughter:

F: Anyhow, it is all nonsense. I mean, the notion that language is made of words is all

nonsense--and when I said that gestures could not be translated into 'mere words,' I was talking nonsense, because there is no such thing as 'mere words.' And all the syntax and grammar and all that stuff is nonsense. It's all based on the idea that 'mere' words exist--and there are none.

D: But, Daddy . . .

F: I tell you--we have to start all over again from the beginning and assume that language is first and foremost a system of gestures. Animals after all have *only* gestures and tones of voice--and words were invented later. Much later. And after that they invented school-masters.

D: Daddy?

F: Yes.

D   Would it be a good thing if people gave up words and went back to only using gestures?

F: Hmm. I don't know. Of course we would not be able to have any conversations like this. We could only bark, or mew, and wave our arms about, and laugh and grunt and weep. But it might be fun--it would make life a sort of ballet--with dancers making their own music. (1974, p. 13)

18.   In this regard, it would make no sense at all to suggest that a language learner's *speaking* of a world in a *grammar error* is any less meaningful or creating than the *speaking* of a world in *correct usage*.

19.   In response to my drawn out attempts to explain this to one of the research

participants, she offered this succinct paraphrase, "so you want to know *what it's like* to be in these conversations?" I was elated, "Yes, that's it exactly!"

20.   This is an effort to provide more rigorous explanations for the *unobservable behaviour* which behaviourism was only able to infer.

21.   I am reminded of Lakoff's suggestion that "our ideas about how human minds should be employed depend on our ideas of what a human mind is" (1987, xvi). It appears that the converse is equally true, that is, our ideas of what a human mind is depend on our ideas about how human minds should be employed. In this sense, the solving of problems is most appropriately left to mind as problem solver.

22.   I can think of two further examples of this use of language which are culturally diverse yet similar in that their repetition of monosyllabic utterances of a particular pitch and resonance induce particular states of being. The first example is that of the mantras of Hindu and Buddhist spiritual practice and the second, drawn from my own cultural experience, is the lamentation refrains of older Sicilian women at funerals. In both cases, language induces states of being altered from those typically associated with rational beings engaged in linguistic transfers of information.

23.   I find it ironic that even though language as representation would be impossible without silences, the meaning contained in those silences cannot be captured representationally. This was one of the limitations of a representational or functional view of language which encouraged me to look for an alternative view that might acknowledge the silences of language.

24.   Informed consent forms were reviewed and completed before the taping began. The

form is provided in the Appendix.

25.   For members of the same group, I would have already viewed the videotape with

one member of the group before viewing it with the remaining members. So, strictly

speaking, I was contradicting myself when informing the research participants that I had

not viewed the video, but that I had viewed it with one or more of their EAP/TESL group

partners. This outcome was a shortcoming in the research design since my methodology

did not allow me to deliver what I was promising.

26.   I find it interesting that David and Ali, the participants who were most explicit

about *not* feeling anxious or confused, were males. If the present research had been a

study of gender, the audiotaped conversations would have revealed some clear patterns in

the responses of female and male participants in this particular research setting.

27.   On first consideration, this reference to the *plural* may appear similar to the *plural*

found in a naturalistic method's notion of *multiple realities*. They are, in fact, antithetical.

In the naturalistic scheme, *multiple realities*, as plural, reinforce the status of insular selves

in the form of a number of individuals who are presumably *constructing* various and

individual realities. By contrast, the idea of plurality I am considering here moves in the

opposite direction. By pluralizing the first person perspective of an individual, I am

moving away from perception as the act of detached selves and toward a view of perception

as inherently participatory.

28.   This conclusion I am drawing for myself is informed by the field of phenomenology,

which characterizes the experience of perspective as being completed in that which is perceived. In explaining the early work of Edmund Husserl, the initiator of phenomenology, Ihde writes:

> In traditional philosophies, a distinction is usually made between object and the subject that knows the object. Husserl transformed this distinction into a correlation of what is experienced with its mode of being experienced. He termed the correlation itself *intentionality*. He held that such a correlation was, in fact, invariant to experience and that this correlation could be thought of as directed. All experience is experience of ____ . This is to say, all experiencing implies something that is experienced. . . . *every experiencing has its reference or direction towards what is experienced, and, contrarily, every experienced phenomenon refers to or reflects a mode of experiencing to which it is present.* This is the intentional or correlation apriori of experience taken phenomenologically. (1986, pp. 42-43)

The point I am making is that both the participants' and my own first person perspectives were being completed in each other, their perspective in me and my perspective in them. This being the case, their experience of perspective was an experience of, among other things, me, while my experience of perspective was an experience of, among other things, them. This is what I mean by suggesting that a first person perspective is implicitly plural.
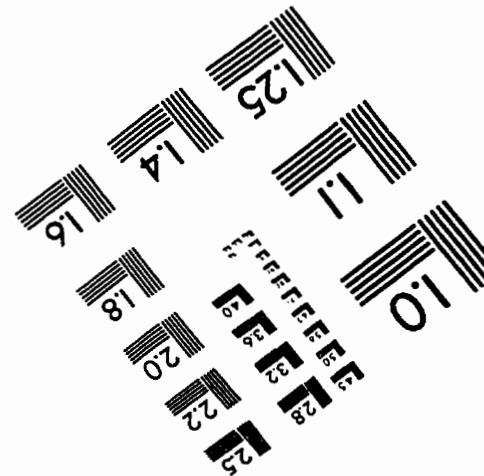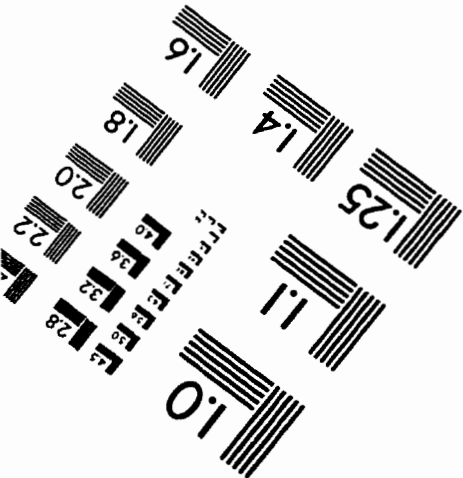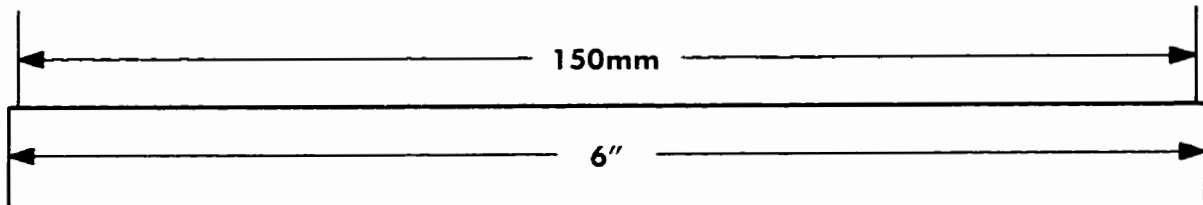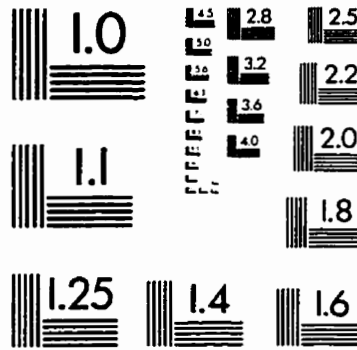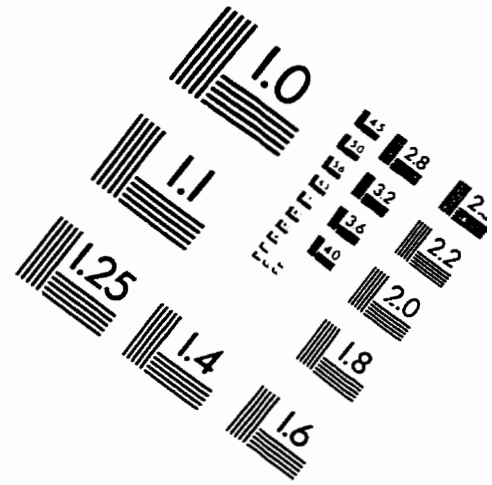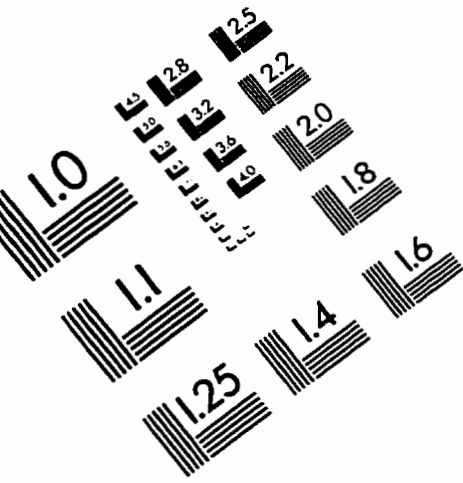
29.   I was especially pleased to have been able to reciprocate Ali's participation in my study by taking part in an interview exercise he was conducting for one of his own classes. In the very room where we had conducted our discussion of his videotaped conversation, Ali,

with tape recorder in hand, interviewed me.

30.   Part of this difficulty with the quality of our audiotaped discussions was caused by my effort to capture the sound from the video onto the audio recording. This was done so that I could note which point in the videotaped conversations participants were referring to in the audiotaped discussions. However, what this did was to make the more soft-spoken contributions to the audiotaped discussion barely audible.

31.   As the reader may recall, I made reference to two points on the silent end of the spectrum. The end point is the pre-conceptual dimension of being where one simply *is* as an unreflective aspect of *co-emergence*, and the second point is *awareness* of co-emergence, an abstraction from unreflectiveness which may occur in silence or utterance.

IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

1.0

1.1

1.25   1.4   1.6

1.0   2.8   2.5
3.2   2.2
3.6
4.0   2.0

1.1   1.8

1.25   1.4   1.6

150mm

6"